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Wishing you a Chag Kasher v'Sameach!



Introduction from the Director

Dearest Community Members,

This issue of The Journal of the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington represents a milestone: for the first time, we have produced 1,000 printed copies to distribute throughout our community. For the first six years, the Vaad printed and distributed 500 copies of The Journal — formerly called the Vaad Bulletin. Each year, we gradually expanded the number of printed copies, from 600 to 700, and finally to 800. The printed Journal then remained at 800 copies for three years — until we recognized one year ago that the Journal was quickly flying off the shelves and more copies were needed. Moving forward, in addition to providing The Journal online, we will publish 1,000 copies to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy and benefit from the uplifting *divrei* Torah and engaging communal content included therein.

Current and archived Vaad Journals may be found on the Vaad's website:

www.vaadgw.org/publications--events.html

We thank each of you for your interest, comments, and support of the bi-annual Vaad Journal, which has become a staple of Yamim Noraim and Pesach reading across our wonderful community. The Journal strives to include Torah literature of the highest quality, contemporary articles of communal interest, and glimpses of the rich Jewish history of Greater Washington. We hope that you benefit from this issue as much as you have in the past.

Thank you to Mrs. Mindy Tolchinsky, with whom I have the great honor and pleasure to regularly interact in preparation of The Journal. Mrs. Tolchinsky's editorial genius ensures that The Journal's content is transmitted clearly and is of the highest professional quality. Thank you to Mrs. Wendy Guberman for her outstanding typesetting, layout, and design which give The Journal the final polish and aesthetics we all enjoy.

As we prepare to usher in Pesach 5785, we hope and pray that, just as we were redeemed in the month of *Nissan*, it be the will of Hashem that we are once again delivered during *Chodesh Nissan*. May all who are sick be healed; may all those being held in captivity be freed; may all who have been displaced return to their homes soon; may all soldiers on the front lines be brought back to safety and shelter; may all those looking for their significant other merit to find their *zivug hagun*; and may all in need of any form of salvation merit to see it come to fruition. May we witness the coming of *Moshiach* speedily in our days and may the month of *Nissan* be full of *Nissim*!

With warmest wishes for a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*, filled with *berachah* and *nachas*!

Rabbi Moshe Walter

Message from the President: Mr. Rogers Revisited

Years ago, I had the opportunity to watch a ceremony honoring Fred Rogers with a lifetime achievement award for his work on the well-known PBS children's TV show, Mr. Rogers. He proceeded to turn his acceptance speech into a teaching moment: asking the audience, consisting of stage, screen, and television stars, to join him in a minute of silence. Each person was to privately pay homage to those who had made a major impact on their lives and had contributed significantly to their success.

If we were to engage in such an exercise of humility and *hakaros hatov*, we would undoubtedly think of those individuals who gave us our critical opportunities. However, we must also recognize our mentors — parents, *rebbeim*, teachers, spouses, and friends — who saw in us capabilities and strengths that we didn't even know we had, who encouraged us to pursue our chosen paths, and who gave us the courage to face and negotiate life's challenges. In addition to engendering profound feelings of gratitude, these moments of reflection would also inspire us to give the gift of self-esteem and confidence to others — to help them appreciate their own strengths, capabilities, and spiritual prowess.

Realizing our hidden spiritual and emotional potential is, of course, at the core of our *avodas Hashem*, our relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The very nature and purpose of a *nisayon* (a divinely directed challenge) is to take a spiritual capability from the realm of *koach*, potential, to *po'al*, actualization.

As we transition from Purim to Pesach, from *geulah* to *geulah* (from redemption to redemption), it is perhaps appropriate to set our sights on the steps leading to our final redemption: in particular, the nature and mission of Moshiach.

Based upon sources drawn from the Ramchal, the Ramban, and the Rambam, Rav Shlomo Wolbe *zt"l* writes (AleI Shur, Volume 2, Amud 76-79):

הַמְּשִׁיחַ יִתְקַן אֶת הָרַע בְּעוֹלָם, וְעַל יָדוֹ יִתְגַּלֶּה יְחִידוֹ בְּעוֹלָם. תִּתְגַּלֶּה בּוֹ
גְּדֻלּוֹתוֹ הָאַחֲרוֹנָה שֶׁל אָדָם, וּבּוֹ יִפְרֹוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם אֶת עַצְמָם, שֶׁהֵם גְּדוּלִים
לְאִין עֲרוֹךְ יוֹתֵר מִמָּה שֶׁדִּימוּ בְּקִטְנוֹת מוֹשְׁגִיָּהֶם. בְּאָדָם אֲמִיתִי זֶה אֵין
עוֹד מְקוֹם לְרַע, וּבִדְעָתוֹ כִּי רַבָּה יִפְרֹו יְחִידוֹ יְתִי הַפְּרָה בְּרוּרָה. בְּזֶה יִגִּיעַ
הָאָדָם לְתַכְלִיתוֹ.

The Moshiach will rectify all evil in the world. Through him, the Oneness of Hashem will be revealed in the world. Through him the fundamental greatness of mankind will be revealed, and people will see that they are great people beyond measure with a clarity no longer constrained by limited spiritual capabilities. In such a state of truth, there will be no room for evil in a human being, for his level of consciousness will be so elevated that he will recognize the Oneness of Hashem, Blessed be He, with perfect clarity and, as such, mankind will have fulfilled its ultimate purpose.

In other words, Moshiach will have the ability to sense *ruchnius* — the spiritual greatness in his fellow Jews — and, in so doing, reveal that greatness to them and make them aware of who they really are. This lofty vision gives us all something very positive to which we can look forward and speaks to the redemptive power of helping people realize their hitherto hidden strengths and capabilities.

In his commentary *Ruach Chaim* on *Pirkei Avos*, Rav Chaim of Volozhin *zt"l* provides many beautiful insights into *Tehillim* 23 — ה' רוֹעִי (*Hashem is my Shepherd*) — particularly verse 4:

שֶׁבֶטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ, הַמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי.

Your rod and your staff comfort me.

*) הגה"ה [אי"ה הכוונה כי יש שני מקלות מקל נועם ומקל חובלים. מקל נועם אשר הוא לאדם למשענת להתהלך בחוץ ונקרא משענת, ומקל חובלים אשר בו מיסרים ומכים לאיש נקרא שבט נוגש. וזהו שאמר הן "שבטך" הוא מדת הדין. והן "משענתך" הוא מדת הרחמים, שניהם כאחד ינחמוני, בידעי כי הכל לטובה].

Loosely translated:

There are two kinds of staffs: the staff of pleasantness ("the staff") and the staff of affliction ("the rod"). The staff is a source of support when venturing forth in life and is a manifestation of the Attribute of Mercy; the rod, on the other hand, represents the Attribute of Justice. The two together comfort me because I know that it is all for the good.

Dovid HaMelech is telling us that, in every person's life, there are times of light and times of darkness. In times of light, when Hashem reveals Himself, there is clarity and purpose to our daily lives. Disruptions are minimal and we can draw upon our repertoire of wisdom and skills to successfully address the myriad of life's issues which we face. Life is under control.

In times of darkness, on the other hand, we lack clarity and challenges become overwhelming. Our repertoire of wisdom and capabilities appears incapable of managing these new, acute crises. It is at that moment of great *nisayon* that Hashem is asking us to actualize unrealized capabilities and develop new understanding. This is why both the rod and the staff together comforted Dovid HaMelech. We need times of challenge to develop new skills, and we need *menuchas hanefesh* (peace of mind), support, and love to integrate those skills and build confidence.

In *Ahavas Chesed*, the Chofetz Chaim cites the *Tanna d'Vei Eliyahu Rabbah*: When Bnei Yisrael were in Mitzrayim, they gathered in a close-knit group and made a covenant of *chesed* and support with one another. Such *chesed* was responsible, says the Chofetz Chaim, not only for sustaining the spirits of their fellow Jews — but for the redemption itself.

Perhaps we, in our own modest way, can follow the example of Moshiach, realize the great spiritual potential in ourselves and in each other, and, in so doing, hasten the final redemption.

With heartfelt wishes for a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*,

Rabbi Yosef Singer

In the Sea, On Dry Land

Rabbi Meir Bulman

Southeast Hebrew Congregation – Knesses Yehoshua

While the entire experience of *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim* (the Exodus from Egypt) was incredibly wondrous, its final moments were spent in the most fantastic of environments. As we recount in *Dayeinu*, witnessing the *makkos* (plagues) firsthand would have been an adequate experience of wonder and awe. Yet, the *makkos* were “nothing” compared to Bnei Yisrael’s experience in the *Yam Suf* (Red Sea).

The *Midrashim* describe the extraordinary care Bnei Yisrael received in the *Yam Suf*: while miraculously walking on the dry sea bed, their every wish and desire for food and drink was fulfilled. Without having to utter a word, trees heavy with fruit grew out of the walls of water; with only a thought, glasses of water appeared for the taking.

The Torah’s actual description of this environment is limited, yet awesome:

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם, בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה...

And the Children of Israel came within the sea, on the dry land... (Shemos 14:22)

This contradictory wording conveys to us the extra-miraculous nature of this environment. It was clear to Bnei Yisrael that they were “in the sea” — yet, at the same time, they were also “on dry land.” Bnei Yisrael were living in what would typically be two distinct worlds, in the sea and on dry land, at once. And, all the while, *הַמַּיִם לְהֵם חֹמָה* — the water formed a wall for them. (14:29) Walls do not merely protect us from outside elements; they also protect us from the view of those outside. The *choma*, a “protective wall of water,” actually created an intimately private environment for the new Jewish nation.

As Bnei Yisrael’s journey out of *Mitzrayim* was winding down, Hashem placed them in this incredible, self-contained, other-worldly environment. HaKadosh Baruch Hu determined that, instead of weaning Bnei Yisrael off miracles, their parting experience would be the ultimate miraculous experience of *B’soch HaYam BaYabasha* (in the sea, yet on dry land). Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary on *Parshas Vayechi*, enables us to understand why *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim* had to end specifically in this way.

When Yaakov Avinu is conferring *berachos* at the end of his life, he blesses his grandchildren, Efraim and Menashe, using the words *וַיַּדְּגוּ לָרֹב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ*. The simple translation of this phrase is, “They shall multiply to be many in the midst of the land.” Rav Hirsch explains that the word *v’yidgu* is rooted in the word *דג* — fish. Yaakov was blessing his offspring to be “like fish” because this describes what it means to live as a Jew (Rav Hirsch, *Bereishis* 48:16):

In their own separate element, in depths imperceptible to the human eye, fish live their quiet lives. People standing on the shore

are unaware, have no idea, of the carefree, vibrant, contented life going on below in rich abundance, from generation to generation. Similarly, the family of Yaakov shall lead their own independent, quiet, and fulfilling lives; they shall live *B’Kerev Ha’aretz*, in their own separate element, in an element impenetrable and unfathomable to the world around them:

וְכִנְוִי יַמָּא יְסָגוּן בְּגוֹ בְּנֵי אֲנָשָׁא עַל אֲרֶעָא

*They shall live like fish in water
in the midst of human beings on earth (Targum Onkelos).*

As Jews, we must constantly keep in mind that, while perhaps it may appear that we are living “on dry land” together with the rest of humanity, in reality we are not. We are a people who *seem* to occupy the same world as everyone else, but we really and truly exist in a very different element. Torah and *mitzvos* are the essential elements that make up our world. They are our food and air. We live a life that is miraculous, both as a people and as individuals — a life that is characterized by an intense connection to Hashem.

The last leg of our journey from *Mitzrayim*, the final act of the Exodus, quite practically prepared us for the true meaning of being a Jew. This was Hashem’s way of showing us, “Physically, you will be walking on dry land — but, at the same time, you will be in the midst of the sea, immersed in a different medium, living private lives of deep closeness to Me. Realize that you will always remain ‘like fish in water, in the midst of human beings on earth.’ You will be a different kind of nation, which lives in a separate and extraordinary atmosphere that is all its own.”

How appropriate it is that the merit of the bones of Yosef caused the sea to split; Yosef was a person who lived the epitome of a *B’soch HaYam BaYabasha* life. He was so much a part of Egypt — and yet, at the same time, he was totally immersed in his relationship with Hashem. That was his true identity. Moreover, how perfectly fitting it is that the children of Yosef were the ones to whom Yaakov gave the blessing of *V’yidgu Larov B’kerev Ha’aretz*.

This Pesach, and always, let us feel a sense of gratitude for the other-worldly life Hashem has gifted to us, and commit to live wholeheartedly in that “other element.” Let us focus on being like fish in the sea while at the same time walking on land — by immersing ourselves in the sea of Torah and *mitzvos*, with the understanding that they are the essential elements of our lives.

So, When is the Moshiach Coming?

Rabbi Zvi Teitelbaum

*Rebbe, Yeshiva of Greater Washington – Tiferes Gedaliah
Founder and Executive Director, Mesorah DC*

So, when is the *Moshiach* coming?

This question has been on the lips of Jews throughout history.

Yaakov Avinu had attempted to reveal the answer to his children on his deathbed, but our Sages teach that he was thwarted by Hashem from doing so.

Why does the Torah need to tell us about this incident, if Yaakov Avinu's attempt was aborted and nothing came of it anyway?

There is a well-known teaching of the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) that the word Pesach can also be understood as *peh sach* — the mouth that talks. In Egypt, Bnei Yisrael's ability to speak and/or pray was also in exile. What does this actually mean? Who was preventing them from speaking?

The *Zohar* describes a fascinating scene in which G-d tells His heavenly angels that they need to go down and observe how beautifully the Jewish people lead the Seder. Why the Seder — more than any other mitzvah that Jews perform?

We have four cups of wine at the Seder that commemorate the four expressions of redemption in the Torah. We have those four expressions because there were actually four layers of exile from which Bnei Yisrael had to be released:

- They were physically oppressed.
- They were spiritually suppressed.
- As slaves, they were robbed of their own identity and the link to their past.
- Their hopes and aspirations for the future were squashed.

Prayer is an expression of and a connection to a FUTURE vision for one's self. It allows one to step into the world of the beyond. One needs to feel that they have access to such a world before they can pray.

There is in fact a basic question about how prayer can “work” and be effective. After all, how can we urge G-d to do something He has not been willing to do until now? How can we change His mind? Rather, if we show G-d that we can sense, have faith in, and long for a world beyond our current status, then G-d will grant us “beyond” what we deserve!

The Torah describes our servitude in Egypt as *בְּפָרֶךְ*, which means extreme hardship. Yet our Sages also teach that it can mean *בְּרַחֲמֵי* — with soft talk: that the Egyptians “sweet-talked us” into becoming their slaves. Which approach was it: hardship or soft talk?

In truth, these are not mutually exclusive; they are two parallel approaches the Egyptians used. The Egyptians tried to coax Bnei Yisrael into labor: slowly at first, and almost imperceptibly, so that they slipped into the role and became accustomed to it. They didn't fully appreciate how terrible it was, accepting it as their lot in life. Alternatively, the Egyptians worked Bnei Yisrael so hard, for so long, that they didn't have time to catch their breath and think about their situation.

Bnei Yisrael either didn't have time to dream and hope, or were sadly oblivious to their own spiritual plight. And so their prayers were "in exile" as well — they couldn't realize or express a vision beyond their current status.

They were stuck.

This is precisely what Moshe protested to Hashem: "The Jews won't believe that I will lead them out of Egypt because they feel they are undeserving. They have no merits. They are running on empty."

G-d responded, telling Moshe, "Tell them my name is 'I will be what I will be.'"

A strange name for sure, and also a perplexing response. How would this satisfy the Jewish people?

Unlike a car, that certainly cannot run on an empty tank even if fuel lies up ahead, G-d was sharing with Moshe that the Jewish people's situation was different.

Tapping into G-d's promise of a better future can become the current fuel for perseverance — even if we feel our "spiritual tank" is on empty. We can draw on our faith in our future to propel us through challenging times. But if hope is snuffed out, then so is the prayer that allows us to connect to the beyond.

G-d tells Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael that His name is: "I WILL be what I WILL be." Let the Jews know that, despite the feeling that their spiritual energy has been depleted, they can draw on their guaranteed future!

Even though Yaakov Avinu was unsuccessful in revealing exactly how and when the exile would end, it wasn't a total failure — because he was able to transmit the hope and the faith that there would, in fact, be an end to the seemingly endless exile.

I had the privilege of hearing the Bluzhever Rebbetzin recount that, in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp, the Rebbe led a Seder where they managed to actually bake a single matzah. She insisted to the Rebbe that the children should take precedence and receive a piece of matzah — because they had to be taught the lesson of the matzah of hope: that they would outlive the Nazis, for they were indeed a nation of destiny!

The *Bnei Yissachar* explains the scene in the *Zohar*: What Hashem is marveling about to the angels is how the Jews conduct their Seder...IN EXILE!!

And so, on *peh sach*, we experienced the freedom to feel and express hope, even in exile. We are able to express our faith in the beyond — and then tap into that beyond to propel us toward our greater future and destiny.

Maror: The Bitter Herbs of Freedom

Rabbi Sholom Tendler
Kashrus Administrator, Star-K

One of the highlights of the Pesach Seder is the mitzvah to eat *maror* (bitter herbs). However, *maror* stands out from the other Seder highlights in a unique way. While we do have *mitzvos* that are designed to make us feel somewhat less comfortable, like fasting on *Yom Kippur* or *Tisha B'av*, those *mitzvos* are still very much in sync with the theme of those days and times of year during which they occur. Pesach, on the other hand, is an extremely joyous time, when we celebrate *z'man cheiruseinu* — that we were freed from our slavery in Egypt and became Hashem's nation. Seemingly, a *mitzvah* that requires eating something bitter and designed to specifically make us feel uncomfortable would be out of place during such a time.

On a simplistic level, the idea and theme of the Pesach Seder is to relive the experience of what we went through in Egypt, from bondage to freedom. As we say in the Hagaddah:

בְּכַל־דֹּר וְדֹר חֵיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

In every generation, we are obligated to view ourselves [and feel] as if we ourselves had actually experienced *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim*. If we want to truly experience the joy of that freedom, it is only through first remembering and reliving the experience of the suffering and slavery that was endured. The *maror* is designed to enable us to experience that suffering as part of this process.

However, if *maror* were simply to enable us to experience the bitter feelings of slavery and suffering which we endured in Egypt, it would seem that the more bitter the vegetable, the better and more well-suited it would be to fulfill the *mitzvah*. But that does not seem to be the case.

The *Mishnah* (*Pesachim* 39a) records five vegetables which can be used for *maror*: *chazeres*/lettuce; *tamcha*/horseradish; *olashin*/endives; *charchavina*; and *maror*. The last two are not clearly defined, but the Rema¹ writes that they may include any type of bitter vegetable.

The *Gemara* states that the most preferred variety is *chazeres*/lettuce — because it starts out sweet at the beginning of its growth and only becomes bitter the longer it stays in the ground. This mirrors our collective experience in *Mitzrayim*, in which the Jews (as Yosef's family) started as aristocrats of the Egyptian society and progressively became downgraded to slaves over time. Furthermore, the name by which lettuce is called — *chasa* — also means to have mercy, which refers to when Hashem had mercy on us, ended our slavery, and took us out of *Mitzrayim* to become His chosen people.

However, if the point of *maror* is to relive the experience and the bitterness of our slavery, why is it ideal to choose a vegetable that is hardly bitter at all when eaten? Romaine lettuce when harvested is a delicious and enjoyable vegetable to eat. It seems clear that *maror* is not just about

¹ O"C 473:5. See M"B 34.

eating something bitter: we are supposed to experience bitterness on some level while feeling a sense of divine mercy at the same time, both of which are represented in the *maror*.

Experiencing these two seemingly contradictory expressions is by design. The *Mishnah* (*Berachos* 54a) states:

חַיִּיב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ עַל הַרְעָה כְּשֵׁם שְׂמֵבְרָךְ עַל הַטּוֹבָה...

*One is obligated to recite a blessing for the bad (that befalls him)
just as he recites a blessing for the good (that befalls him)...*

The Orchos Tzadikim explains the choice of the word כְּשֵׁם (*just as*): that the obligation is exactly the same. With the same emotions, understanding, and appreciation that one has when blessing Hashem for a positive situation, one must also express the same emotions and understanding for, ר"ל, a situation that is not seemingly positive. If you can understand that everything is controlled by Hashem, then it is truly all the same experience.

This dichotomy allows for a deeper understanding of why Raban Gamliel famously states:

כָּל שֶׁלֹא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים אֵלוּ בְּפֶסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יְדֵי חוּבָתוֹ,
וְאֵלוּ הֵן: פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמְרוֹר.

*Anyone who does not say these three things on Pesach
has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are they:
PESACH, MATZOH, and MAROR.*

Maror is one of the three obligations necessary in order to fulfil the Seder requirements properly. This begs the question: What is so important about this rabbinically instituted *mitzvah* when compared to the *Korban Pesach* and eating *Matzoh*? *Maror's* prominence and importance would seem to pale in comparison to the Biblical commandments to eat the *Korban Pesach* and *Matzoh*, which are explicitly mentioned in the Torah.

The answer is that the entire experience of eating *maror* — which is or represents something bitter, while having a name that also signifies and defines Hashem's mercy — demonstrates our understanding of Hashem's providential guidance of everything in the world and that nothing is truly bitter at its core. Everything that happens is for a reason and is guided by Hashem. This value is one that is indeed on par with the lofty ideals of the *Korban Pesach* and *Matzoh*. *Maror* therefore certainly occupies a deserving place amongst the most primary parts of the Seder and one should certainly ponder these values while eating *maror*.

WHICH VEGETABLES MAY BE USED?

While any of the five varieties mentioned earlier may be used for the mitzvah of *maror*, romaine lettuce is certainly the most popular and also the most ideal according to the *Gemara*. Horseradish root is seemingly the next most popular and widely available.

However, it is worth noting that there is a halachah² that when consuming vegetables that are not typically considered edible raw without specific preparation, if eaten fully raw (which is required for *maror*³) the *berachah* is *shehakol*. Barring any specific family custom otherwise, it would seem most appropriate to ensure that the horseradish root is finely ground before eating it⁴. Everyone should follow their family custom and, in cases of doubt, consult your Rav.

HOW MUCH MUST ONE EAT?

The obligation is to eat one *k'zayis*/olive-sized portion of *maror* in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* properly. This equals about 1 fluid oz. of ground horseradish and an area of 8"x10" of romaine leaves.⁵ If using the [more dense] stalks of romaine lettuce, 2 full stalks should be used. This would also apply to *Korech*, where a *k'zayis* of *maror* is also needed. For children, elderly or those who are ill or otherwise unable to consume these amounts, a Rav should be consulted. Many have the custom of combining different varieties of *maror* together to equal a *k'zayis*⁶.

HYDROPONIC VEGETABLES

Hydroponically grown vegetables have been gaining popularity over the last few years. The process of hydroponics means that the vegetables are grown in water and not soil. There are a number of different methods within this category, such as Aeroponics and Vertical Farming, with each method utilizing varying amounts of water and possibly some soil. The common denominator is that the process consists of utilizing a climate-controlled environment where water is the primary medium used to supply nutrients to the vegetables. In some cases, a small amount of soil core may be used, but only as a measure to hold the vegetable and its roots in place, not to offer any nutritional benefit.

While currently still financially more costly to produce per head than open field produce, growers are hopeful that eventually the lower water needs, reduced labor costs, locally-grown freshness, and consistent flavor profile of hydroponics will factor in to make these products competitive with their open-field counterparts.

STAR-K has reviewed many of these farms over the last number of years. While certainly less infestation-prone than open field farming, hydroponic methods still have their fair share of infestation challenges. Water bugs, fungus gnats, flies, and other larvae can present challenges to ensuring these products are kosher/insect-free. Without specific kashrus protocols in place, these technologies are still far from the ideal kosher standard and would still need to be checked and/or certified by a reliable *hashgachah* as being insect-free.

Another consideration is what *berachah* would be made on such vegetables. Are they considered real vegetables 'of the ground' and therefore a *Borei Pri HaAdamah* would be made? Or, since they are not connected to the ground at all and never were, would the appropriate *berachah* be

² See O"C 102:16.

³ *Maror* used for the *mitzvah* cannot be pickled, brined, or have any additives. See O"C 473:5.

⁴ See O"C 475:1 *Biur Halacha B'tivul*. Even though the *berachah* of *HaAdamah* was already made on *Karpas*, it is still not ideal to use a vegetable that may not be considered fully edible according to *halachah* in its current state.

⁵ Based on the *shiurim* of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l*.

⁶ O"C 473:5. See M"B 40.

Shehakol?⁷ Rav Moshe Heinemann *shlit"l* feels that the correct *berachah* is *Shehakol* and, as such, these are not ideal to be used for the Seder. Others feel that, since the species is still one that originates from the ground, even if this particular leaf or leaves did not, the proper *berachah* is still *Borei Pri HaAdamah* ⁸ and it may be used for the Seder. There are yet others who feel that, even if it is an accepted argument to say the *berachah* of *Borei Pri HaAdamah*, it is still not proper to be used for the Seder where a *yerek*/vegetable is what is prescribed by *Chaza"l* — which would seem to indicate a classically farmed vegetable and not something grown hydroponically or vertically farmed.⁹ This would also include *Karpas*, where a vegetable is used and the same opinions would apply.¹⁰

INSECT PROBLEMS

It is well known that many types of leafy greens require careful inspection prior to being consumed to ensure that they are free from insects. The Torah lists up to six prohibitions for even a single insect ingested — certainly not a price worth paying when trying to perform a *mitzvah*! If using horseradish, no checking is required. If using endives, a simple thorough external rinsing is all that is necessary to properly prepare them for use; no checking is necessary beyond that.

Romaine lettuce, though, can be a challenging vegetable to clean and check properly. Today, however, there are numerous companies in most communities that produce pre-checked romaine leaves for Pesach, precluding the need to check them yourself. Kashrus agencies expend tremendous effort to oversee the special production of these vegetables to ensure that they can be certified free from any insect concerns.

Those who wish to check romaine lettuce themselves, or live in communities where pre-checked products are not available, can wash and check romaine (or iceberg) lettuce using the following instructions.¹¹ Note that all checking for insects should ideally be done before Yom Tov, as checking for insects on Yom Tov may be halachically complex.¹² If one is using stalks of romaine, which do not have folds or crevices like leaves, one need only wash them well, followed by a visual inspection, without the more extensive process outlined below.

Lettuce Checking Instructions:

- 1) Wash all the lettuce in a detergent¹³ solution.

⁷ *Chayei Adam* 51:17.

⁸ See *Iglei Tal (Mileches Dosh 8)*.

⁹ In the name of Rav Dovid Feinstein *zt"l*.

¹⁰ While hydroponic potatoes do not currently exist, many do have the custom of using parsley or celery for *Karpas*, which have hydroponic varieties available.

¹¹ More details as well as video tutorials can be found on the STAR-K website or using this direct link:

www.checkforinsects.com

¹² *Borer* that separates good from bad AND was not possible to be done before Yom Tov (because it would otherwise have a negative effect on taste) may be allowed. Typically, checking can be done before Yom Tov without any taste or quality considerations and therefore it is not allowed to be done on Yom Tov. See *O"l* 495:1. Also, use of a strainer is not allowed. See *O"l* 510:2.

¹³ It has been found that detergent solutions are more effective at removing infestation than commercially available vegetable washes. We recommend using a natural, non-toxic detergent (e.g. Seventh Generation brand) which is available in many national stores or on Amazon.

- 2) Check the product using the thrip cloth method:
 - a. Prepare a basin with a (non-bleach and non-toxic) dishwasher¹⁴ liquid solution.
 - b. Agitate product in the solution.
 - c. Pour the water through a thrip cloth.¹⁵
 - d. Check the thrip cloth using a light box or other source of good light.
- 3) If any insects are found, repeat steps 1–2. This can be done up to three times. If insects are still found on the third try, the produce should not be used.

May our Seder experience indeed deepen our understanding and appreciation of Hashem's presence and divine guidance in our lives, as well as His love for *Klal Yisroel*. Wishing everyone a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*.

¹⁴ Detergents designed for use in dishwashers (as opposed to regular dish soap) do not cause any suds or bubbles, which can otherwise make checking difficult

¹⁵ Available for purchase at many local kosher stores or online at www.star-k.org or www.judaicaspot.com.

From the USSR to Silver Spring: My Personal *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim*

Gregory Shmunis

IN THE USSR

For a Jew living in the Soviet Union between the 1960s and the 1980s, life was a strange combination of fear of being Jewish and, at the same time, complete ignorance of what it meant to be a Jew. The fear, along with the obliviousness to our faith and our history, were our *Mitzrayim*.

My grandparents lived through the pogroms before the Revolution of 1917, during the Russian Civil War, and through the destruction of the Holocaust. My parents remembered the post-war antisemitism that culminated in the Doctors' Plot in 1953. Jewish doctors were accused of poisoning Communist party leaders and, under that pretext, Stalin planned to deport the entire Jewish population to Siberia. That holocaust was miraculously prevented when Stalin suffered a stroke on Purim Day, 1953 — and died a few days later.

Although my generation had it much easier than our grandparents and parents, the sense of physical danger was always present in our lives.

Even more suffocating than the feeling of physical danger was the fear of being an alien — different from everyone else, deficient in some mysterious way. You grew up with it almost unconsciously: first, with neighbors' children mocking you in the streets. Then, with your parents and grandparents growing visibly upset and switching to Yiddish so you wouldn't understand what they spoke about. You could catch only a few words — among them, the word *Yidden* that was repeated most heatedly. And you would learn from a very early age: what is spoken about at home must never be repeated outside. You grew up with the sense of some mystery — and not a good kind of mystery.

By the 1960s, being Jewish in the Soviet Union had become something shameful, almost inappropriate. It was a defect that one did not speak about in public. As kids, we grew up constantly ashamed: of our last names, of our looks, and of our grandparents' heavy, Yiddish-accented Russian. We rarely spoke about Jews even with other Jews, let alone with gentiles. My best gentile friends would grow visibly uncomfortable at the mere mention of the word "Jew."

I remember that when I was about seven, I went to register at the local children's library. A librarian helped me with the registration card. After quickly filling in the first and last names and address, she reached the infamous 'nationality' line. (In the Soviet Union, Jewishness was considered more of an ethnicity, rather than a religion. It was called *nationality*. There were Russians, Ukrainians, and Jews. This nationality was recorded in almost every official document.)

The librarian looked at me with pity and asked helpfully, "Do you know your nationality?" She knew very well who I was, as my facial features left little doubt in a place where most people

looked very Slavic. I felt we had touched on something dangerous and answered, “No.” She sighed and wrote: “Russian.”

Later, in high school, when we already understood what cards had been dealt to us, some teachers trying to calm down a Jewish student would offer us practical advice: “Either sit quietly or get out to Israel!” In retrospect, it was not such bad advice — but, at that time, all I felt was overwhelming horror.

And so, mostly through the painful experiences of childhood, we learned that we were Jews; we just did not know what that meant. We knew that, because of our Jewishness, we would face problems with college, with jobs, and in our daily lives — but we did not know exactly why.

While generations before us had known that being Jewish meant being of different faith — and that was the reason for the hatred — by my generation, any memory of Judaism was so thoroughly wiped out that our second-class status was inexplicable to us. We simply carried that defect, and that was all. We were Jews without Judaism.

A few synagogues remained, mostly in large cities like Moscow, Leningrad, or Kiev — all under thorough surveillance by the authorities. But in hundreds and hundreds of shtetls and larger towns, synagogues had either been destroyed or turned into warehouses or gyms. Without bricks and hard labor, in a few more generations there would have been no Jews left in the Soviet Union. This was our *Mitzrayim*.

But it had not always been that way.

KNOWING NOTHING

I was born and raised in the city of Khmel'nitsky (known as Proskurov until 1954) in Ukraine, USSR. Because Bohdan Khmel'nitsky's pogroms had occurred centuries earlier — and because the truth about them was carefully concealed by the Soviet authorities — we did not, at that time, understand what that name meant to Jews. Pogroms, however, were only part of the history.

Khmel'nitsky lies in the heart of Podolia, the region within the historical Pale of Settlement where *Chassidut* was born and from which it spread throughout the world. About twenty miles from Khmel'nitsky is the town of Medzhybizh, where the **Baal Shem Tov** lived and where he is buried, alongside his grandson and a Chassidic *gadol*, **Rav Boruch from Medzhybizh**. Between their generations, the **Maggid of Mezherich** lived and taught in Medzhybizh before later moving to Mezherich.

The nearby town of Slavuta (Slavita) was famous for its publishing house, *Slavita drukera*, which, in the early 19th century, published the *Slavita Shas*, the most famous edition of the Talmud in Russia until the Vilna edition came out at the end of the 19th century. The press was founded by **Rav Moshe Shapiro**, son of **Rav Pinchas of Koretz**. The **Koritzer** is buried in another nearby town, *Shepetivka*.

About 40 miles west of Khmel'nitsky lies the small town of *Volochisk* — the birthplace of the **Malbim** (and of my wife). Other nearby places are familiar in the Jewish, and especially the

Chassidic, world: Polonne, Ostropol, Satanov, and Buzhany — great places of *Chassidut* and *Mussar*, great places of Jewish learning.

The echoes of the past could still be heard in the last names of my friends — Koretz, Berdichevsky, or Satanovski — but that was as far as it went. We grew up completely ignorant of who we were, who our ancestors had been, and where we Jews had lived. It was like when Yaakov Avinu woke up from his dream in Beth-el: Hashem was there, and we did not know.

MATZAH

There was no source from which we could learn. Religion was officially permitted, but practicing it could cost you your job or worse. Teaching — or, as they called it, *spreading* — religion was outright forbidden. There were no books on Jewish history; they were considered nationalistic and contrary to the ideology of communism and internationalism. The Soviet Union was virulently anti-Israel; engaging in anti-Zionist propaganda was the favorite pastime for those few newspapers and television channels that existed in the country.

What remained of our Jewishness were our looks, our last names (the first names had been Russified), a *fluden* (layered pastry) still baked for a Jewish wedding, a few Yiddish songs at that wedding, some Jewish jokes, and the Yiddish-accented Russian language of our grandparents. Still, almost instinctively — like a drowning man grasping at anything — Jews clung to these bits and pieces of their identity. Inter-marriage was becoming more common in larger cities but, in smaller towns like mine, it was still frowned upon when I was growing up.

I recall one thing from my childhood especially vividly. At that time, it seemed just a strange ritual to me, but it took on a lot of meaning much later in life.

Every spring, my father — who had access to a work car to travel the region — would leave for a day and come back very late at night. He and his friend would then carry carefully wrapped boxes and pillowcases, filled with something, into the apartment. For a few days afterward, people would show up at our door — always deep into the night — pick up a few boxes or pillowcases, and disappear.

I later learned that my father was travelling to Slavuta, to the only matzah bakery remaining in the region, to obtain matzah and distribute it among the Jews of Khmel'nitsky. I ate the matzah — not particularly liking the taste, not knowing what it was or why it mattered — and my father would risk bringing it every spring, without knowing anything about *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim*. And yet he did it. Perhaps I remain a Jew because of that.

COMING HOME

After high school, I attended college in Leningrad — one of the few known for accepting Jews beyond the unofficial, yet strictly enforced, quota.

Leningrad had an openly functioning synagogue that was still allowed by the authorities to exist, mostly as a showcase of religious tolerance. It was there all right, but everything was designed to make going there dangerous. The KGB kept plainclothes agents stationed around the shul who

would watch and report anyone entering there. A visit could lead to expulsion from the university and automatic conscription into the brutal Soviet army.

I went to the synagogue for the first time only a couple of years after graduating, mostly out of curiosity. By then, it was already the mid-1980s, Gorbachev had come to power, and the authorities were trying hard to sense which way the wind was blowing. People were a bit less afraid.

It was Simchat Torah — probably the best-known holiday to Jews in cities that still had a synagogue. As I stood in the shul's yard with friends, a tall, bearded man approached us and asked if we wanted to come to his place to celebrate. I still do not know why I said yes, or what my life would have been like if I had not...

The man was Izya (Itzhak) Kogan, known in Chabad as the Tzaddik of Leningrad. I agreed to go because, for me, at that time, it was just another cultural adventure. I might just as easily have said yes if someone had invited me to a Russian church ceremony. You see, at that time, culture mattered to me more than anything else...

Everything from that moment on felt like a dream.

Leningrad is a very large city, and it was a very long walk, almost a run. The famous Leningrad bridges are raised at night, and we had to make it to the other bank of the Neva River in time. Izya led us to an old building; we climbed to the third or fourth floor and entered his apartment.

Despite the late hour — well beyond midnight — the apartment was brightly lit. People were rushing around, carrying food and setting tables. In the center of the main room, at a table among other guests, sat two strange-looking men: bearded, dressed in long black *lapersdaks* — the kind I had only seen before in paintings. They were singing and pounding their fists on the table. And, although at that time I did not know Hebrew or have the traditional background to understand what they were singing, I will remember the sound of the words and the tune forever. They were singing ***Rachomono d'anei la'aniyei aneina*** (Oh, Merciful One who answers the poor, answer us) — a Rebbe's *niggun*.

Something strange happened to me. I had come there to have a new cultural experience. But what I felt in that moment, when I saw the table full of people and those two men from a painting in the middle singing the *niggun*, had nothing to do with culture or anything I could analyze.

I do not know how to explain it better, but suddenly I just felt at home: so much more at home than I had ever felt before in my life. I do not know if it was the faint coals of Jewish life that were barely glowing through my childhood that prepared me for this, or if a Jewish soul refused to be bent all the time and just snapped back.

Whatever it was, at that very moment I realized with absolute certainty: I have arrived.

MIRACLES

This started the long road of *chazarah b'teshuvah* — and my personal *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim*.

Every *ba'al teshuvah* knows the difference in their lives before and after: the elation, the sense of purpose, the sense of belonging. For me there was one more thing: the constant fear that had been my companion in life started moving away. It did not disappear; I was still as fearful of the authorities as before. But a stronger feeling began to overtake it: the joy of belonging to the Jewish people and the fear of not being part of the several-thousand-year-old journey.

Like all *ba'alei teshuvah*, I saw a miracle and *hashgacha pratit* (Divine providence) in every event in my life. A rainy summer — but never rain on Shabbos, so I could walk to the house where a few other *ba'alei teshuvah* had gathered. Working on restoring and preserving the Baal Shem Tov's *kever* in Medzhybizh (where only one Jew was left in the town when we arrived) and the *kevorim* in other places. A trip with Belzer Chassidim to Belz — probably the first time they had visited since World War Two. My first pair of *tefillin*, my first *siddur*, and my first Hebrew textbooks — called *Elef Milim* — sneaked in to the USSR by American Jews visiting more and more often. Even the little towns around us, choked with dust in the summer and soaked in mud for the rest of the year, were no longer drab little Soviet towns anymore. They had miraculously become great places of past Jewish life and learning. Rotting old *sefarim* and *tefillin* that we found in abandoned attics and cellars suddenly transformed into hidden diamonds.

In retrospect, I wish I had been more sensitive to the people around me who saw the changes in my life as a form of insanity, at best, and a sure road to jail, at worst.

I remember building our first *sukkah*. It might well have been the first *sukkah* in that region for the last fifty years. An old Jewish neighbor, who had survived Stalin's camps and knew very well where all this could lead, trembled with fear when he saw us putting up walls and *s'chach*. "You are going to rot in jail, and your parents too," he said.

Then, perhaps realizing that times were changing, he decided to use logic to dissuade us. He gave a short definition of Judaism that he thought would turn us away from Yiddishkeit for good: "You know what Yiddishkeit is? Nah, do not tell me — you do not know what Yiddishkeit is. Everything that is allowed in *normal* life is forbidden in Yiddishkeit. And everything that is forbidden in normal life..." he paused meaningfully and finished triumphantly, "...in Yiddishkeit is forbidden *at all!*" It did not work on us....

Among all the miracles, there was, and still is, a very special one: my wife.

MY WIFE

If I received any reward for what I was doing, it was meeting my wife. We met in Khmel'nitsky and, a few months after we met, decided to marry.

For Marina, knowing who I was and still marrying me meant tying her life to someone whose kind were still persecuted in the Soviet Union, while the prospect of getting out of the country was still far from certain. She had grown up with the same ignorance of Judaism as I had. Marina came from a deeply scarred family: during the Second World War, her father went through Nazi concentration camps and, after the war, through Stalin's camps. In the eyes of the authorities, those were irredeemable crimes. It would take too long to describe my father-in-law's life and

the impact it had on the family. If any Jewish family lived in fear, my wife's family lived in it many times over.

And that was not to be the end of it. Our *chuppah* was a religious activity forbidden in the USSR, and going through with it would mean direct danger to us and to our families. Marina went ahead with it anyway. No parents were invited from either side for their own sake. The only relatives at the *chuppah* were my wife's sister and her husband. Our parents were told about the *chuppah* sometime later. At that time, it was not happy news to them: they knew all too well where this path could lead us.

Our *chuppah* took place "underground" in Moscow, in the apartment of a Chabad family, the Lukatskys. It was January, and Marina had to wait for the water in the *mikvah* to warm just above freezing to make it usable. I do not know what I felt more during the *chuppah*: the joy or the fear. Probably both. At the entrance to the apartment building, two inconspicuous-looking (or so they thought) young men were stationed — a KGB "guard of honor." We were lucky, though, and the *chuppah* went off without any incident. The times were changing, and all Soviet institutions were doing what they always excelled at: watching where the wind was blowing and trying to read between the lines.

Our son was born in late 1987, and his bris was performed by the same medical student — *mekareved* by Chabad — who had done mine a bit more than a year earlier. By the time of Misha's bris, the local portion of the Southern Buh River had completely frozen, and the *mohel* had to negotiate with the winter fishermen to drill a hole of sufficient size to use as a *mikvah* before the bris...

Around that time, I started teaching — despite barely having learned anything myself. The rule among *ba'alei teshuvah* was very simple: if you knew *alef* and *beis*, you should start teaching *alef*. Teaching would add more danger and uncertainty to our lives. If practicing religion was unofficially forbidden, teaching it was a criminal activity by law. That, combined with the dawning *perestroika* (political and economic reform) and the slowly opening "exit door," made our decision to leave the Soviet Union a no-brainer.

I do not know how my family's life would have turned out if not for Marina — a Jewish woman who did what Jewish women have done since Egypt and throughout our history: keep their families together and make them believe that there is a future.

SILVER SPRING

We came to the US in 1989. After a short stay in the Boston area, we moved to Frederick, Maryland — the location of my first US job. Our daughter, Esther, was born there.

The miracles that had been showered upon us in our last two years in the Soviet Union continued in the US. In Frederick, that miracle was Rabbi Kosman and his family.

When we had left the USSR, we were just beginning our path as *ba'alei teshuvah*. Coming here was such a shock; it brought so many worries and so much confusion to our worldview that continuing on the path of *teshuvah* was far from a foregone conclusion. We could have easily gone back to where we had been years before; in many ways, it would have made our lives and

our adjustment to American life easier. For Hashem sending us Rabbi Kosman and his wife Carol, at just the right time to strengthen us — we will always say one of the greatest *dayeinus*. For us, he will always be the Fredericker Rebbi...

When our son reached elementary school age, Rabbi Kosman said: “You need to leave here.” We knew our son needed to be in a Jewish school. We went to different places to see where to settle. One day when we were driving around Silver Spring, my wife saw kids in *kippot* and *tzitzit* running in the playground of the Silver Spring Jewish Center. She watched them for a few minutes, and then said: “This is where we will live” — and that was it.

Settling in Silver Spring brought another readjustment and another miracle for us: a miracle that started with Rabbi Anemer and that continues to this day. There is not enough room here to mention all the people in our community who have made and continue to make our life here exactly what we always dreamed it would be. Shomrai Emunah, the Yeshiva, the Hebrew Academy, our neighbors, moments of happiness and sadness together, Rav Anemer’s little office in the Yeshiva...

As Rabbi Kosman said to me after we had moved to Silver Spring, “You are living in the lap of Jewish luxury.”

My personal *Yetzi’at Mitzrayim* began before we physically left the Soviet Union. It might have started with the matzah my father brought home in the spring or that Simchat Torah night, when the “*Rachomono*” *niggun* made me feel free for the first time in my life.

It continues now. I think it is the longest road in the world. The life we have chosen has not provided us with all the answers, but it has given us the only road on which it is worth looking for them. I felt it then, and I still feel it now.

Musings on Being an Observant Jew in the Workplace

Richard Weiss

At the start of my legal career, I was a local prosecutor. One Friday afternoon, I found myself in the middle of a trial. Insecure in my new position and unsure of how the judge would react to my concerns about being in trial so close to Shabbos, I kept my mouth shut and proceeded with the case, hoping it would finish quickly.

As the trial dragged on, I realized that I could not complete the trial before Shabbos. The courthouse was at least 30 minutes from my house — and Shabbos started in 20 minutes. With profuse apologies, I interrupted the witness and explained to the judge that I needed to leave because Shabbos was quickly approaching.

The judge not only understood entirely: he told me that I should have brought it up earlier. He ordered me to leave that minute and paused the trial until Monday. Several police officers even offered to escort me home with lights and sirens. Despite everyone's efforts, I didn't make it home in time. I had to park my car on the side of the road and walk several miles home. On that long walk home, I realized that my fears had been unfounded; standing strong and clear for my religious values would be respected. After that experience, I never again agreed to start a trial on a Friday afternoon. Every judge I encountered was considerate and no one gave me a hard time.

As a visibly observant Jew in the courthouse, my presence alone often impacted those around me. In one jury trial, a prominent criminal defense attorney, a secular Jew, was representing the defendant. During closing arguments, the defense attorney took a white satin yarmulke out of his coat pocket and put it on his head. He told the jury that he was trying to “even the playing field” and that “it wasn't fair that the prosecution had G-d on his side.” During a different trial, another Jewish defense attorney told me that he had donned *tefillin* that morning because he knew that I had wrapped my *tefillin* — and he didn't want me to have a competitive advantage.

These are just a few of the hundreds of experiences I have had resulting from being a visibly observant Jew in the workplace. I once had a conversation with a stranger on the Metro that turned into a lifelong *chavrusa*. I have received unsolicited commitments from Jewish coworkers not to curse or eat non-kosher food when I am around. My most recent boss always went out of her way to ensure that the cookies and snacks at the agency-wide morning meetings were kosher, and that an entire federal agency never scheduled an executive meeting on Yom Tov.

I have been fortunate that I spent most of my professional career during a time in which I never felt any fear or concern for being visibly identifiable as a Jew. Since October 7th, that has changed. Many Metro cars have anti-Israel and anti-Semitic flyers or graffiti. And it frequently feels like people are staring at me as I walk through the Metro station and along the streets of DC.

Just the other day, I was learning *Daf Yomi* on the Metro on my way home from work when a man walked straight toward me, Bible in hand, and asked in a loud voice, “Are you a Jew?” When I responded affirmatively, he asked me what I thought about the war in Gaza. Not knowing his motivations, I reacted quickly, “It's just terrible, and I pray that we have peace soon” — hoping he would move on.

However, he sat down next to me and, in the loudest voice possible, aggressively asked me to explain the Jewish view on various Bible verses that he had tabbed in a weathered King James Bible. I tried to answer each question respectfully and to the best of my ability — as an entire silent Metro car of commuters looked on with a sense of fear in their eyes. I was put on the spot, trying to answer everything from *Moshiach* to matrilineal descent, and I felt that my answers were woefully inadequate. As the experience continued, I began davening that he would just leave me alone. He then abruptly stood up, announced to the entire train in a thunderous voice that G-d should bless this Jew, and got off the train. While this was certainly not an enjoyable experience, I walked away with a sense of gratitude to Hashem that I was safe, and with some additional resolve that being visibly Jewish isn't always easy — but that I could do hard things.

Just this past weekend, my family was out on a Sunday day trip. My children were walking about 20 feet ahead, and a mother and daughter were walking between my kids and me. I overheard the mother explain to her daughter: “Do you see those children with the tiny hats on their heads, strings on their clothing, and the girls wearing long skirts? That is because they believe in a book called the *Torah*.”

“Exactly!” I thought. It might be challenging, and even a bit nerve-racking in the current climate, yet we can send a message about what we stand for and believe just by going about our daily lives.

The *Midrash* famously explains that, during *Galus Mitzrayim*, the Jewish people did not change their manner of dress — which is one of the reasons they merited redemption from *Mitzrayim*.

I draw strength from thinking about the continuity of the Jewish people and the strong *mesorah* (heritage) upon which we rely. All these experiences have taught me the inherent power we have to make a *Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify G-d's name, just by simply being who we are — publicly and unapologetically.

Formerly an Assistant State's Attorney for Montgomery County, MD, Richard Weiss is currently employed as an attorney for the Federal Election Commission. He lives with his wife and children in Kemp Mill and is a founding member of Kehillas Ohr HaTorah.

A Wanderer in a Land of Opportunity

Dr. Allen Schick

Allen and Miriam Schick resided in Silver Spring from 1968 to 2024, before making Aliyah. A Brooklyn College graduate with a PhD from Yale University, Allen specialized in public finance and international development. A noted professor and lecturer, he is the author of a dozen books and hundreds of articles.

My chaverim warned me. It was August 1957, my last Shabbos at the Zeirei Agudas Yisroel in Boro Park, New York, in the shul where I davened, before departing for Yale University graduate school. The Zeirei was more than a shul. It was a close group of friends — “a chevra” of about 30–40 yeshiva students with shared values and inspired by Mike Tress z”l¹ — a group who devoted their spare time and abundant talents to strengthening Yiddishkeit in post-World War Two America. My twin brother, Marvin z”l, had introduced me to the Zeirei chevra when we were fifteen years old. He and many of the chaverim became leaders within Klal Yisroel. Marvin secured legal rights for Shabbos observers, assisting hundreds of yeshivos, day schools, and thousands of individuals while refusing to accept payment from any of them. The values that Marvin personally lived and his selfless service to Klal Yisroel led to his extraordinary association with Harav Aharon Kotler zt”l and Rav Shneur Kotler zt”l.

I was not the first to leave the Zeirei fold — but most who did moved to Lakewood or Israel and had successful careers in Yeshiva education or Jewish organizations, including Rav Meir Stern, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedolah of Passaic, and Rav Moshe Hillel Hirsch, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Slabodka in Bnei Brak and the recognized leader of the Charedi yeshiva movement in Israel.

The chevra celebrated my departure at *Seudah Shelishis* with a lively rendition of *Kah Ribon* to which they added words indicating their puzzlement and ambivalence about my decision:

*Lo Ye'ol Gevurtaich:
Don't Go to Yale!*

I ignored this tuneful advice and continued davening with my chaverim the many times I was in Boro Park on Shabbos and Yomim Tovim throughout the decades. By the time I retired 62 years after I had left, I had worked in 45 of the 50 states and in more than 60 countries, had delivered more than 3,000 off-campus lectures, and had taught on-campus courses at the University of Maryland and other schools.

When I started down this path, I did not know what I would encounter as an observant Jew in a country and a world where an Orthodox Jew is a minority within a minority. This essay recounts some of the challenges I faced in a career where opportunity has a 24/7 clock, is nurtured by dining and drinking with colleagues who have never been in a kosher restaurant,

¹ “Mike” Tress (July 9, 1909–July 9, 1967) worked tirelessly on behalf of Zeirei Agudath Israel to save Jews trapped in Europe during World War Two. He was the national president of Agudath Israel of America from the 1940s until his death. Many articles have been written about this incredible figure, who died tragically young.

and sometimes requires ongoing interactions with people whose views of religious Jews are expressed behind your back.

SHABBOS PLANS: MADE AND DISRUPTED

Each year, I entered all Jewish holidays and the days immediately preceding them in my calendar to ensure that they would have absolute precedence over work. I flew to Asian countries no later than Wednesday for activities that were scheduled to begin the next Monday and arranged with hotel staff to open or close the door to my room at specified times on Shabbos. Often my plans included walking to or from shuls on Shabbos without carrying any identification or money, worrying about what would happen if I was apprehended by police or accosted by hoodlums, or if the hotel staff did not enable me to enter my room. A Shabbos belt wouldn't have helped because foreign hotels switched to electronic keys long before American hotels.

The adage *Mann Tracht un Gott Lacht* (Man plans and G-d laughs) describes my situation when plans went awry. However, I am skeptical that the Almighty laughs about human fallibility.

My first experience with the failure of Shabbos plans occurred in 1967. Scheduled to give a talk Friday afternoon in Manhattan, I was not certain that I could make it to Brooklyn before the onset of Shabbos. The organization sponsoring my presentation had made a prepaid reservation for me at a nearby hotel, so I decided to remain in Manhattan that night and walk to Brooklyn Shabbos morning. The only things I took with me were the clothes I wore, food for Kiddush, and a modest meal. I had no money and no identification. My plans went off the rails when the hotel adamantly refused to give me a room and, despite my desperate pleas, threatened to have me arrested.

My only option was to trek to lower Manhattan and cross one of the bridges into an unfamiliar section of Brooklyn. Lost in a deserted industrial area, I approached a Black man and asked for directions to Boro Park. He started telling me about a bus stop a few blocks away, but I interrupted to say I would be walking. That's not possible, he insisted, and asked whether I needed money for the bus. When he started taking money out of his pocket, I assured him that I was okay, walked until I came to a residential neighborhood, and figured out how to make it home.

That was not the only time I walked on strange streets on Shabbos without money or identification. I did it in Russia, China, Vietnam, and other police states. It also was not the only time I got lost and someone tried to assist me. It happened in Tokyo when I started walking the short distance from the Jewish Center to my hotel and took a wrong turn. I approached a Japanese pedestrian, mentioned the name of the hotel, and started walking with him. When the short trip turned into a long one, I realized that he, too, was lost. I waved him goodbye but he continued walking with me until I turned toward him and bowed. He reciprocated with a bow and departed — and I found my way to the hotel.

Two bizarre experiences occurred on one Shabbos during a visit to Romania in the late 1970s, a decade before the collapse of the Soviet Union. I was staying at a hotel in Bucharest that provided a free breakfast for its guests so, before going to Shul, I stopped at the dining room and ordered a glass of orange juice. The waiter who served the juice told me that the charge was 13 leu — the Romanian currency — and that I had to give him cash. I had no money, no identification, and no good options in a Communist country that could "disappear" me behind

the Iron Curtain. Thinking fast, I asked the waiter for another orange juice and fled the hotel when he went to get one for me.

That Shabbos' trials were not over. I walked to the Malbim Shul and davened with a minyan of barely a dozen elderly men. After davening, I joined them at a bare-bones Kiddush during which one of the men offered a brief Dvar Torah drawn from the Malbim and the group sang the heartfelt words of *Tehillim* 119: *Z'chor Davar Le'avdecha ... Mi'torascha lo natisi*, which concludes, "I have not turned away from Your Torah."

I left the Shul spiritually uplifted and in awe of how the remnants of Romanian Jewry, who had endured the Holocaust and Communism, remained faithful to Torah and mitzvos. One of the congregants accompanied me at the start of my walk back to the hotel. As we were about to go in different directions, I told him that I would ask for his address after Shabbos and send him something from America. He suddenly became agitated, said there was no Mincha-Maariv minyan, and cried out in Yiddish, "*eppes fun America, eppes fun America*" (something from America, something from America)! He then took a pen and paper from his pocket, wrote his address, and thrust the paper at me. Stuck in the middle of a street, I walked on and let the paper float to the ground — but still thought of these truly courageous survivors who, despite suffering severe privation, had remained as much as possible religious Jews.

I encountered many recurring Shabbos problems that were due to technological innovation. There were times that I approached a hotel entrance that seemed to have manual doors but I unwittingly activated electric or electronic controls that opened them. After a troubling experience, I always waited until the door opened for another person and then rushed through it. I had a tougher time with automated room controls that turned on lights or air conditioning. One approach was to leave the door to my room slightly ajar; another was to place a plastic key in the room's control box. The best remedy was to ask Chabad for advice on Shabbos-friendly hotels.

When I checked into a hotel before Shabbos, I requested but did not always get a room on a low floor. After checking in, I would walk down the stairs to determine whether the building had an acceptable route for leaving and entering during Shabbos. Sometimes I ended up in the hotel's kitchen or laundry; sometimes I reached locked doors on the second floor or entrance level and had to climb back up ten or more flights of stairs. My impression is that, during the latter part of my career, hotels tightened security by locking entrances to the lobby or street.

I often spent an entire Shabbos without leaving my hotel room, prearranging with hotel staff to turn off the lights at a specified time. When everything worked as planned, I had a restful Shabbos, davened and studied the Parsha, ate the simple food that I had brought with me, took my accustomed afternoon nap, and read and learned until Havdalah. Throughout the 25-hour period, I felt the specialness of Shabbos. There were times on the road, however, when things did not work out as planned. I realized that one's awareness of Shabbos can be even more acute when plans are disrupted.

KOSHER FOOD: TREIF, INEDIBLE, MISSING, AND DELICIOUS

My travel plans always considered whether kosher food was available at my destination and the number of days I would be away from home. I tried to exclude my hosts from these plans because it is exceedingly difficult to explain the complex rules of kashrus to someone who

does not live within the *daled amos* (confines) of Halacha. One difficult experience occurred when I was the featured speaker at a lunch attended by hundreds of employees of a major New Jersey company. Minutes before I was scheduled to talk, a chef approached the dais with a smile as wide as the steak he presented to me, proudly announcing that he had purchased it at a kosher butcher shop. Thinking fast, I apologetically told him that I do not eat when I am the speaker.

Planning for a trip, I usually contacted Chabad and was elated when the local *shliach* told me that he operated a restaurant or invited me to his home. Over many years, I've met few people who were as selflessly committed to assisting fellow Jews as Chabad *shluchim* and their wives. I visited dozens of Chabad houses that differed in size, number of guests, the types of meals they provided, the schnapps they shared, and other conditions. But in terms of their eagerness to assist fellow Jews, all *shluchim* were alike. On one trip to China on which my wife Miriam joined me, we met Rabbi Shimon Freundlich, Chabad's new, youthful *shliach* in Beijing, who delivered delicious meals to our hotel. When Miriam inquired how long he would be staying in Beijing, Rabbi Freundlich replied, "for the rest of my life." About thirty years later, he still serves as the Chabad *shliach*, is fluent in Mandarin, and oversees a corps of young *shluchim* who provide a vast array of services.

Before traveling, I always packed an ample supply of canned red salmon and graham crackers (earlier years) or granola bars (later years). I tried LaBriute's self-heating meals on some trips but concluded that old-fashioned staples suited me better. During air travel, however, LaBriute's meals would have been welcome. On hundreds of flights, I struggled with layers of embarrassingly crinkly packaging to get to the inedible kosher food securely tucked inside. My complaints to airlines were futile; they claimed that kosher meals cost them more than their regular meals. This might be true but, unfortunately, the meals provided were rarely edible or satisfying.

In my decades of travel, I've known at least one exception to the bad kosher food syndrome. When I traveled business class on British Air or various Asian airlines, I often had delicious food provided by the London-based company Hermolis that included an appetizer, side dishes, an entrée, and dessert.

My wife Miriam took charge of our kosher dining needs when I was appointed a Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland. This position included an annual dinner with the president of the University and the small group of professors accorded this title. The University assured us that it would supply kosher meals, but Miriam arranged for Hillel to provide the same type of food other guests received, served on our own dishes and tableware. When other guests had salad, we were served salad, etc. Miriam and I retrieved our plates and tableware before they were combined with the others. Once we had established this procedure, we relied on it until I retired.

During my travel years in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, kosher caterers arranged through my hosts tried to align my kosher meals with what was served to the non-kosher diners, presenting them on attractive but inexpensive dinnerware that was discarded after a single use. Because Commonwealth countries regarded morning and afternoon tea as obligatory, there were days when I was treated to five ample meals. I had too much to eat, but that's a far better predicament than having nothing worth eating.

A PERSON APART: PROFESSIONAL ATTACHMENTS AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

Most of my professional acquaintances had never knowingly interacted with an Orthodox Jew before they met me. Many may have heard about the Jewish Sabbath or that Jews don't eat pork, but knew nothing about short Fridays, holidays that fall on weekdays, no phone calls on the Sabbath, and no drinking wine served at office parties — until they experienced scheduling difficulties because a colleague had to leave early on Fridays or would miss almost half of the workdays in September.

When they encountered my religious habits, some were curious and most were respectful. No one asked about the yarmulke I wore throughout my years at Yale or about any other aspect of my faith.

I did not experience any overt antisemitism during my 60-year career, but I did endure snide comments from marginal Jews who were discomfited by my Orthodox practices and convictions. The first time that happened, I had applied for a university teaching position and a Yale professor inserted disparaging remarks about my experience as a Talmud Torah teacher into my dossier. During my early years at the University of Maryland, a Jewish colleague taunted me from time to time at faculty meetings with “Is it good for the Jews?” My biggest problems occurred when the dean of my school, an alienated Jew, took actions that might have derailed my career if I had not been protected by my professional accomplishments. I should note that he was succeeded by a secular Jew who admired my work and campaigned for me to be named a Distinguished University Professor, a distinction accorded to only two percent of the University of Maryland’s full professors.

Many of my overseas trips were as a member of a team who worked together for a week or longer in a foreign country or as a participant at an international conference attended by delegates or experts from many countries. I never initiated a conversation about religious matters with colleagues; I am certain that almost all were clueless about the rituals and restrictions that shape an observant Jew's life. Some OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and World Bank colleagues were aware of my religious scruples and practices because they had worked with me on multiple missions. I do not recall a single instance in which they were disrespectful or pressured me to put professional responsibilities ahead of my religious obligations. However, I was excluded from many missions and conferences because of my calendrical constraints.

Working with others away from home, I often was a silent witness to urgent chatter by my colleagues about the restaurant they would visit each night and the area they would explore over the weekend. They rarely visited the same restaurant twice, often spent more on wine than food and, despite busy work schedules, never rushed their meals — which sometimes lasted three to four hours. I was absent from most dinners, but attended those that combined work, gossip, and an expensive meal. I paid an equal share of the tab, even if the only thing I ate was an apple.

I did not conceal my religious practices and constraints from OECD colleagues. I worked with them in Paris for months at a time over a 40-year period, and dined with some at kosher restaurants whose culinary standards were grossly inferior to their affected French tastes. I celebrated July 4, 1984, which happened to be my 50th birthday, by hosting a wine and cheese party at OECD headquarters. I purchased an assortment of kosher cheeses and expensive wines at a mehadrin market in the Marais section of Paris and expected my colleagues to

applaud my selection. Instead, they dismissively rated the wines and cheeses as correct, okay, or passable.

I had more success a quarter of a century later when I celebrated OECD's publication of a large compilation of my articles with a dinner for about twenty colleagues at an expensive kosher restaurant near the Arc de Triomphe. Throughout the delicious meal, a corps of diligent waiters repeatedly filled our wine goblets, and my French colleagues complimented me on the splendid dinner and wines. I did suffer sticker shock when the restaurant presented the bill and I produced my credit card — only to be told that I had maxed out. Fortunately, I had another card and continued my association with OECD for another dozen years.

A PATH APART

From time to time, I reflect on the cautionary farewell staged by my Boro Park chaverim that introduces this essay. Most of them dedicated their lives to learning and to serving the Jewish community. I am aware that the path I chose differed from theirs. I do not claim it was the right one, but hope it fulfilled the promise in *Mishlei* 3:6:

בְּכֹל דְרָכֶיךָ דַּעְהוּ ; וְהוּא יִשְׁרֶה אֶרְחֻבְךָ.

In all your ways, acknowledge Hashem, and He will correct your path.

From Small-Town Silver Spring to Big-Time Politics: An Interview with Elie Pieprz

The Vaad Journal recently spoke with Elie Pieprz, who has crafted a successful career in politics and international relations in Israel. We asked how his Greater Washington upbringing influenced him and his life choices.

WHERE WERE YOU RAISED?

I was really blessed to grow up in Silver Spring when it was still a relatively unknown community. My family first lived in Summit Hill before moving to a house in Woodside. Initially we would daven in a Woodside basement on Friday nights and make the long trek back to Summit Hill on Shabbos day — until the Woodside shul moved into the property on Noyes and Georgia, then just a farmhouse. It was a community that helped shape who I am today.

WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR ROLE MODELS GROWING UP?

Many of our communal leaders had grown up in New York. They had compelling opportunities there (career-wise, a larger Jewish community) but opted to build their families in a smaller, wholesome environment that required their time, energy, and commitment — in addition to funding — to succeed. My generation benefited immensely from their efforts and the community that they built.

The personalities that embodied the Woodside community were the very definition of “an embarrassment of riches.” Just about every shul member greatly impacted me, as they all prioritized Torah and *mitzvos* — making a *Kiddush Hashem* as they engaged in the outside world.

I looked forward to Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz’s 30+ minute *derashos* every Shabbos. He expressed deep Torah concepts so clearly and methodically — as if you were a student in his law school class. He combined this knowledge with his famously sweet persona and approachable demeanor. I have been blessed to call him my Rav for 40 years; more importantly, my children consider him their Rav as well.

Woodside shul included several individuals who had both *semicha* — from Rav Moshe Feinstein or Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky — and Ivy League college degrees. While not fully appreciating their work outside the shul (like advising former Soviet countries how to set up their economies after the collapse of the Soviet Union), I watched as Rabbi Dr. Allen Schick and Rabbi Lenny Dickstein *z”l* would wink affirmatively to each other during Rabbi Breitowitz’s *derashos*. I was watching greatness appreciating greatness.

Two incredible but humble men, Rabbi Avrom Landesman and Mr. Mel Rische *z”l*, used their legal skills either in senior U.S. government roles or defending high profile clients — including the State of Israel. At the same time, they didn’t just teach Torah — they lived it.

Behind each man, and often in front of him, was his *aishes chayil*. Many of the women of Woodside took the initiative to create *chesed* programs, hospitality efforts, and other undertakings that made the community so welcoming to guests and shul members. Their drive and accomplishments were unmatched; I continue to model my life after them and, as the father of three daughters, they have managed to have an influence on them, too.

HOW DID YOUR UPBRINGING IN SILVER SPRING IMPACT YOU?

An incredible amount of time and effort was invested in building our community. I learned that success requires effort.

Before we had a Rav in Woodside, a rotation of about a dozen leaders would give a ‘mini-shiur’ each week. I learned that going to shul was not a passive activity but an active one.

In the aftermath of a fire in the Woodside shul, the community banded together — men, women, and children — forming a “human chain” that not only saved many *sifrei kodesh*, but started the healing process we all needed to recover as a community from the fire. I learned the importance of communal unity and action.

WHAT LED YOU TO MAKE ALIYAH WITH YOUR FAMILY?

We felt that moving to *Eretz Yisrael* was the next step in the natural progression of our growth in Yiddishkeit. Woodside embodied involvement and Jewish development, so it is not surprising that almost my entire group of Woodside friends ended up in Israel — not to mention Rav Breitowitz!

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR EFFORTS SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL IN ISRAEL.

I had been working in real estate in Seattle, something that was not easy to transport to Israel, when I met a friend trying to make Israel accessible to Americans using a TV platform. I became producer of the TV show Tuesday Night Live in Jerusalem — a combination of inspiration, comedy, Torah, and Zionist fervor — an organic Israeli cholent. The first guest I booked was Naftali Bennet, just as he was launching his electoral career.

Following TV production, I launched the first organization to help Americans living abroad vote in U.S. elections. It is non-partisan and, while it is called iVoteIsrael, we assisted voters in dozens of countries to cast their ballots legally and seamlessly.

I then served as Director of International Relations for the Israeli mayors of Judea and Samaria (24 of them), helping American and other international policy makers understand the necessity of Israelis living and developing Judea and Samaria.

Together with the incoming Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Dr. Yechiel Leiter, and his son Moshe *hy"d* (who fell in Gaza), I ran an anti-BDS program for Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs. The program was designed to push back against the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement gaining traction among policymakers worldwide.

Subsequently, I was the campaign manager for two of Likud's (Netanyahu's) English political campaigns: we won both. In addition, I have worked with populations in countries that do not have relations with Israel to prepare them for what we now call the Abraham Accords.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT POSITION?

My consulting firm helps Israeli organizations gain access to policy makers in the U.S., Europe, and other countries. One of my more well-known clients is the Israel Defense and Security Forum, the leading organization of retired IDF generals who advocate for a robust Israeli national security policy. I introduce these Israeli leaders to policymakers worldwide and bring decision makers and other influencers to meet with the right people in Israel, thus helping them arrive at conclusions that strengthen and secure Israel, the U.S., and the free world.

I also work with individual Israeli leaders to raise their national and international profile. Finally, I often work with NGOs focused on human rights and religious freedom in countries around the world that are not (so) free.

WHAT SPURRED YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS?

I entered politics largely because of my upbringing in Silver Spring. After high school, I spent two years learning at Merkaz HaTorah in Jerusalem — which coincided with the First Gulf War, when Iraq was shooting Scud missiles at Israel. While many friends in yeshiva returned to the U.S. to escape the war, I stayed. My parents had confidence, from various people (some from our shul) who were 'in the know,' that it would remain safe to continue learning in Jerusalem throughout the war. That was the first time that access in D.C. seemed very tangible — and extremely beneficial. Through my shul contacts, I began networking and eventually broke into both the political campaign and lobbying worlds. The work has been extremely rewarding.

TO WHAT DEGREE DO YOU INTERACT WITH POLITICAL FIGURES IN WASHINGTON AS PART OF YOUR WORK IN ISRAEL?

I am regularly in touch with political leaders in the U.S. I provide them with weekly reports and regular remote briefings, host them when they come to Israel, and visit them quarterly in D.C.

WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN IN YOUR WORK SINCE OCTOBER 7TH?

Because I work in the diplomatic space, my workload has increased dramatically. I perceive significant shifts which will hopefully guide Israeli policy for quite some time. The recognition that Israel is not doing itself any favors by delaying inevitable wars with enemies — who consistently

and blatantly proclaim their desire to annihilate us — is a necessary conclusion that will hopefully help us avoid the kind of war we are currently prosecuting. This has allowed me, in a non-governmental role, but one backed by the credibility of thousands of retired IDF officers, to make the case for Israel in a way that would not have been possible before.

I also see Israel shedding its “*galus* mentality” and rejecting international agencies that have pushed Israel in ways that were harmful to our national defense. In the past, Israel did not want to get criticized by them. In response to the behavior of international organizations such as the UN, Red Cross, ICC, Human Rights Watch, etc., Israel is demonstrating a new form of sovereignty — confidence that comes from removing the shackles of these entities that unfortunately have become havens for anti-Israel bias. These organizations have no moral standing; Israel cannot look to them to help us and we must not be dissuaded by their disapproval of our actions, regardless of how they threaten Israel. This newfound Israeli approach has given me more credibility to focus on exposing many of their misdeeds to diplomats and decision makers worldwide.

I have also seen many elections tilt toward a pro-Israel side. In the U.S., Europe, and South America, we have seen supporters of Israel make remarkable gains. This shift is opening many doors that had previously been inaccessible.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR GOALS IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION?

- Building stronger ties between the U.S. and Israel, while not compromising on Israeli (and world) security
- Fostering world appreciation and support for the centrality of Judea and Samaria to the viability of the Jewish State of Israel
- A slightly harder goal: getting world Jewry to view Judea and Samaria as critical to the viability of the Jewish State
- Uniting diaspora Jews with Israeli Jews

WHAT CAN OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS DO TO SUPPORT ISRAEL?

Support from American Jews is paramount — and not just with *tzedakah* (which is great), economic engagement (Israel’s tourism economy depends on it), political engagement, and *tefillah* (not in that order). Israel will not be secure without *achdus* (unity) among Jews worldwide. It is critical to engage as many Jews as possible who are not currently connected to Judaism or Israel.

October 7th was one of those moments when many American Jews, those completely disconnected from Judaism (and Israel), were confronted by Judaism — whether they liked it or not. Some have responded by exploring their Judaism and expressing support for Israel and the IDF.

Others have tried to hide their Judaism, which is understandable. If they only receive their information on Israel from certain media outlets, there is no way they can view Israel — and, by extension, Judaism — positively. We all know people who are disconnected from Torah and Israel. Whether by directly connecting with them or by making more of an effort to make a *Kiddush Hashem* in public, it is imperative that we find ways to reach out. It is hard to see how Israel can be successful if world Jewry is not more unified and supportive.

We are collectively in a very challenging period — and unity has always been our answer. We have work to do in Israel and work to do in the diaspora, but there is no doubt that increased *achdus* will hasten the arrival of Mashiach, במהרה בימינו.

Berman at 80: Reflections on Our Town

Reuven Zakheim

In the winter of 1994, the Hebrew Academy Dramatic Arts Society (HADAS) staged Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. Drawn from a high school student body of some 110 students, the aspiring thespians took the stage in the gym at 2010 Linden Lane, then the home of the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington (and now the home of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington Girls Division and the Torah School of Greater Washington).

As the Stage Manager set the scene, describing the small New Hampshire town of Grover's Corners at the turn of the twentieth century, I felt at the time that there was something deeply familiar about Wilder's *Our Town*: the local school, an array of churches, a main street lined with stores serving a neighborhood of families, all knitted together by life cycle and community events and milestones.

"Nice town, you know what I mean?" the Stage manager/narrator tells the audience.

Toward the end of the play, after a decade or so has passed in the story, the Stage Manager comments, "You'd be surprised...on the whole, things don't change much around here...This is certainly an important part of Grover's Corners."

Thirty years after I watched my classmates perform, that "important part" of Grover's Corners can be equally said of the Greater Washington Jewish community where I grew up and where I reside today.

The schools, shuls, and communal institutions have all grown and expanded significantly since my childhood but, in the most important ways, Our Town remains recognizable across the decades. Indeed, Our Town has remained so because it has maintained those qualities that have kept it "*out of town*" — the colloquialism for a community defined by kindness and traditional values situated a healthy distance from the rough and tumble of city life.

That is not to suggest that the leafy suburbs of our community are not impacted or defined by its proximity to our nation's capital. Its character is no doubt shaped by its position near the Beltway. Yet, unlike other communities, the currency of our community is not the currency of our city. While finance is the fuel of New York and entertainment drives Los Angeles, politics and public policy do not define our community.

Perhaps because so many of us work within or around government, our pulpits and communal leaders rarely confuse principles and values for politics and partisanship.

My summers interning on Capitol Hill as a Hebrew Academy student in the 1990s shaped my professional trajectory. My teachers supported the interest — but the values imparted at school were not to seek higher office or enter public life. It was, in retrospect, a lesson in how to live a religious life imbued with meaning and purpose, both personally and professionally, devoted to America, *Am Yisrael*, and *Medinat Yisrael*.

That was my experience at Berman over thirty years ago and, from my present perch as a parent and lay leader, I can confidently say that it remains the case today.

How did it get this way? It was certainly not inevitable.

Elliott Abrams's recent book, *If You Will It: Rebuilding Jewish Peoplehood for the 21st Century*, recounts the sorry state of America's non-Orthodox Jews. With a 70% intermarriage rate, Abrams concludes, rightfully in my judgment, that non-Orthodox Jewry has lost its sense of Jewish identity, or "peoplehood" as he calls it, and requires a heavy dose of exposure to Israel and Jewish education to stem its decline. It's a stark reminder of what happens when a community fails to perpetuate its institutions of faith — our shuls and schools.

But faith alone doesn't capture the uniqueness of Our Town. It is also defined by a commitment to American civic life and a devotion to *Medinat Yisrael*, while at the same time providing an oasis from the partisanship, divisiveness, and tumult that seem to define modern life in our nation's capital.

Taking a glimpse into the past, it seems that this was a feature of the Berman Academy from its founding. Since its inception just over 80 years ago as the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington, one of the oldest Orthodox institutions in the Greater Washington Jewish community, the school was built on a foundation of *Torah*, *Derech Eretz* (proper behavior), *Tziyonut* (Zionism), *Chochma* (wisdom), and *Achrayut* (personal responsibility). In the words of Rabbi Joshua Klavan z"l in 1944, it was to be a school devoted to the "the holy task of preparing our children to be good Jews devoted to our traditions, and loyal Americans dedicated to all the noble ideals for which our beloved country stands."¹

When it opened its doors in a small house on Decatur Street in January 1944, twenty-one kindergarteners and first graders comprised the Hebrew Academy. Along with the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland and the Maimonides School of Boston, the Hebrew Academy was one of the first Jewish day schools established outside the New York area. The school community was a mix of federal government employees, professionals, and businesspeople, along with religious leaders, all dedicated to the belief that a modern Orthodox Jewish day school was needed in the nation's capital.

¹ The history of the Hebrew Academy in this essay is drawn from Evelyn Becker's article, "The Hebrew Academy of Washington, 1944-1994," *The Record*, Volume 20, 1993-1994, pp. 29-38.

At the start of 1944, the horrors of the Holocaust were beginning to be understood in America. We've all learned how the American Jewish community was shocked and outraged — while at the same time tragically paralyzed, unable to stop the slaughter of the Holocaust or rescue loved ones in Europe.

What I hadn't considered was how that tragic experience must have felt to the pioneers of this community. The sense of paralysis must have been especially acute for the Jews in Washington, DC. The President was just down the street. The Secretary of the Treasury was a Jew. Yet America failed to stop the killing of Jews in Europe.

When the Hebrew Academy opened its doors, America was still at war and D-Day was still months away. Allied victory in Europe over the Nazi war machine was uncertain at best. It remained an open question whether freedom would prevail over tyranny.

In Palestine, a weakened Yishuv failed to help European Jewry emigrate from their home countries to Israel and struggled to build its own fighting force during the British Mandate. A Jewish state — *Medinat Yisrael* — seemed like a fantastic dream.

Amidst all of this, communal leaders built a school. While loved ones fought under Eisenhower's command in the battlefields of Africa and Europe, while others had family — parents, siblings, or cousins — in Nazi-occupied Europe whose whereabouts were unknown, they built.

Politics and advocacy were not the hallmark of the community — it was, instead, a commitment to sustaining and building Jewish life in the heart of American political life. Despite the realities of that moment, they took control of what they could and invested in the next generation of the Jewish people:

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה...
It is a Tree of Life to all who hold on to it...

On February 6, 1944, those founders and builders gathered for the school's first banquet. There they sang *HaTikvah*, yearning for an עַם חֵפְזִי בְּאֶרֶץ חָנּוּ (a free nation in our Land) and, with their right hands on their hearts, they sang the Star Spangled Banner — understanding, perhaps like no other generation, the sacrifice and burden of being in the “land of the free.”

Those founders, whose names were Klavan, Weitz, Goodman, Green, and others regrettably forgotten — the original rabbis, teachers, administrators, and lay leaders — set the tone for the Jewish day school community in the capital of the most powerful country in the world.

Eighty years later, those twenty-one students have flowered to a school of nearly 800 students. I imagine those original students, like my first grader will do this week, stood on a stage in front of prideful parents and inspired teachers at a siddur play singing *Shema* with “all their soul and all their might.”

Those twenty-one founding children, with their cherubic faces, must have given comfort to the assembled adults who, understandably, could not imagine a world other than one stricken with אַפְּלָה (impenetrable darkness). Those children learned to pray amidst the darkness of 1944.

And, of course, the light would come.

One year later, in June 1945 — now with 65 students and oversubscribed — the second annual Hebrew Academy banquet was held. The אֹרֶךְ (light) was beginning to shine. Hitler, יְמֵי חַיָּו, lay dead in his bunker and America had celebrated victory in Europe just one month earlier in May.

Post-war Washington, DC now had a day school ready to welcome the children of veterans returning home, the survivors and displaced persons making their way in a new land, and the baby boomers to come. Over the next eight decades, the school would produce a thousand-plus graduates and would support a vibrant modern Orthodox community spanning multiple neighborhoods across the Greater Washington area.

In 1951, with an enrollment of 276 students, the Hebrew Academy moved to 16th Street and Fort Stevens Drive NW, now the site of the Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School North Campus. At the dedication ceremony, Israel's Ambassador to the United States, Abba Eban, gave the keynote address. The Anglo, Cambridge-educated Israeli diplomat who would go on to serve as Golda Meir's foreign minister told the community, "Teaching of Hebrew and Hebrew culture make the Hebrew Academy of Washington a cultural and spiritual link between the people of America and the people of Israel." He was correct — and that cultural and spiritual link continues to define our community today. Eighty years later, generations of Hebrew Academy graduates have strengthened that link both in the U.S. and in Israel. Today, over eighty percent of our graduates go on to study Torah in Israel; many choose to serve in the IDF and live in *Medinat Yisrael*. Since the horrific October 7th massacre and its aftermath, the "link" Eban described has only strengthened.

1944-45 to 2024-25: a community and its founders, separated by the distance of time yet united by a common set of timeless religious and patriotic values. "That," to channel Wilder, "is the most important part" of Our Town.

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Reminiscences from My Hebrew Academy Years: 1957-1966

Rabbi Ira Brandriss

To understand your present world, you must know what has come before you. Moreover, remembering how our *frum* world of today came into being is a matter of *hakaras ha-tov* to those who first laid its infrastructure. As believing Jews, we try to perceive the hidden hand of G-d shaping the broader history of our people, as well as the course of our personal lives. I believe we can perceive the same when it comes to our local communal history. So let me ask:

Do you remember, or has anyone told you about, the days when it was widely thought that Orthodox Judaism would die a slow death and that the Conservative and Reform movements were the wave of the future?

Do you remember, or has anyone told you about, the days when even within the Orthodox Jewish world there was scarcely a yeshiva and nary a Kollel to be found; where no one had ever heard of Daf Yomi; when Talmud study was something a few people did — maybe — once a week for an hour before *mincha* on Shabbos afternoon?

Do you remember when terms like *bitachon* and *lashon hora* were not part of our everyday lexicon? Or when the goals of growth in Torah learning and *Avodas Hashem*, as described in classics like *Mesilas Yesharim* and *Chovos HaLevavos* were the *raison d'être* of only a tiny few?

I remember. Most people in the community of my age remember. And our most senior members remember even farther back. Ask them: What was it like in the old days here and elsewhere in America? How did things change so much from then? Who made those changes happen? We might learn a lot if we simply ask those who were there.

So here is my contribution, covering my years at the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington from 1957 to 1966. This is only a collection of personal memories, gestated in a child's mind, subjective and impressionistic, subject to faulty recollection and affected by unconscious biases. It is my hope that this is where others will fill in, correct, take issue, and shed different light.

OUT IN THE SUBURBS

When my family moved to Silver Spring in late 1955, there was no communal Orthodox Jewish presence in Montgomery County. There were several young and growing Conservative synagogues in the area, including Har Tzeon, where my father, *a"h* was rabbi. It was from there that my mind's eye looked out as a child.

University Boulevard, where Har Tzeon erected its first building, was then a tar-covered road known as Old Bladensburg Road, with one lane in each direction. Most neighborhoods along this road (from today's Arcola Avenue towards Georgia Avenue) were first being built, and many young Jewish families — more or less traditional Conservative by persuasion — were moving in.

At the back of these neighborhoods was a wooded area through which flowed the beginnings of Sligo Creek. The first houses of the Kemp Mill neighborhood were being built a considerable distance beyond the opposite bank of the creek. But the bridge across it (behind and to the right

of what is now the Shalom Kosher parking lot) was not built until years later. There was, of course, no Kemp Mill Shopping Center.

There would be no Orthodox shuls in Kemp Mill for quite a few years, but some traditional members of Har Tzeon who lived in those original homes would walk through the woods on Shabbos to shul. To get to their side, we would take a footpath that started near the end of Inwood Avenue until a narrow part of the creek that you could cross on step stones, turning left at the old refrigerator dumped somewhere among the trees.

The Orthodox Jewish community was still centered in DC. Almost the only contact I had with it was through the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington. It was because of the Hebrew Academy — one of the first Orthodox Hebrew day schools in the country, founded in 1944 — that my parents moved to the DC area to provide us with a Torah education.

“The Academy” was located at 16th Street and Fort Stevens Drive, two miles south of the circle at 16th Street and Colesville Road on the border between Silver Spring and DC. Some of my classmates lived in Shepherd Park, just into the District on the other side of the circle. Of the two synagogues that today stand facing each other on 16th Street, Ohev Sholom Talmud Torah (Orthodox) had not yet been built when I started first grade. Across the street, Tifereth Israel (which had been Orthodox but was becoming Conservative) had just opened its doors.¹

I later learned about other Orthodox synagogues my classmates attended: Beth Sholom, with a new building at the corner of 13th Street and Eastern Avenue, on the border with Silver Spring;² Ezras Israel, on the DC side of Takoma Park; and Beth Joshua, housed in the Hebrew Academy building. One Orthodox classmate lived in Northeast; I imagine his shul was the original Young Israel Shomrai Emunah in Riggs Park. I later learned of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, now in White Oak, which was then located in (no surprise) Southeast Washington. I was also aware of Keshet Israel in Georgetown, an area that was by no means the ritzy neighborhood it is today. The Summit Hill shul (forerunner of Woodside Synagogue) opened in 1963.

FOUNDERS OF THE HEBREW ACADEMY; TWO LESSER-KNOWN INSTITUTIONS

Previous Vaad Journal articles have described the efforts of two *rabanim* instrumental in the founding of the Hebrew Academy: Rav Yehoshua Klavan, who had been a *talmid* of Rav Aharon Walkin (the Pinkser Rav), Rav Chaim Telzer, and Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz; and Rabbi Moshe Chaim Levinson, who was born and attended yeshiva in Meah Shearim and was one of the deans of the local rabbinate.

¹ Ohev Sholom and Talmud Torah were two Orthodox congregations that had merged. The new entity dedicated its 16th Street building in November 1960. See [History - Ohev Sholom Congregation](https://www.ohevdc.org/history). (https://www.ohevdc.org/history). Tifereth Israel, originally an Orthodox congregation, decided upon mixed seating for its sanctuary on 16th Street, which opened in September 1957. Soon thereafter, the congregation was suspended from membership in the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. See [Our History - Tifereth Israel Congregation](https://www.tifereth-israel.org/our-story.html) (https://www.tifereth-israel.org/our-story.html).

² One of my classmates lived right up the street from Beth Sholom, at 7811 Thirteenth Street. His address was the mnemonic we used to remember the number of windings you made between each double-knot when you tied *tzitzis*: 7, 8, 11, and 13.

From other articles, I learned that another founder was Rabbi Yaakov Aizer Dubrow, rabbi of Keshet Israel from 1925 until his passing in 1944. Rabbi Dubrow was one of the earliest Lubavitcher chasidim in America, and a *talmid* of the Rebbe Rashab (Rav Sholom Dovber Schneerson), the fifth rebbe of Chabad, in the town of Lubavitch itself. After the Rashab's passing, he continued as a disciple of the sixth rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson — now known as “the Friediker Rebbe” — whom he helped bring to America.³

Rabbi Zemach Green, *rav* of Ohev Sholom Congregation and a co-chair of the Vaad HaRabanim of Washington, was another Hebrew Academy founder, working together with Rabbi Yehoshua Klavan. A *talmid* of the Yeshiva of Slobodka in Europe, Rabbi Green had joined its contingent in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Yeshiva of Chevron, and thereafter became a *talmid* of Rav Avraham Isaac HaCohen Kook and his disciple Rav David Cohen (“the Nazir”), one of the first twenty students at Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav.⁴ He put the name of our city on the map of Israel (then not yet a state) by founding the youth village Givat Washington for orphans arriving in the country after the Holocaust. The institution now includes a secondary school, a *midrasha*, an *ulpan*, and an academic college.

Still another leader was Rabbi Jeremiah Weitz, described in a newspaper obituary as founder and head of the Hebrew Academy. Born and educated in Poland, Rabbi Weitz came to Washington in 1910. He was vice president of the Mizrahi in the city, president of the United Jewish Orthodox Congregation of Washington, and a past president of Tifereth Israel congregation (when it was an Orthodox shul), where he was also cantor for ten years.

Rabbi Sam Rosenbaum, son-in-law of Rabbi Levinson, was the first principal of the Hebrew Academy. Rabbi Avraham Kellner became the Academy's administrative director in 1951. An early member of Young Israel Shomrai Emunah in Riggs Park, Rabbi Kellner served as its part-time rabbi before the appointment of Rabbi Gedaliah Anemer z”l.

When I enrolled, the Hebrew Academy — now the Berman Hebrew Academy, which last year celebrated its 80th anniversary — was a relatively young institution. It is hard to imagine when Hebrew day schools were a new phenomenon in this country. There can be no understating the impact the Hebrew Academy had on Jewish life in DC, as well as the influence of its educators on the lives of generations of students and, by extension, their children and grandchildren.

There were two other *chinuch* institutions, of a different mold, in Washington when I started first grade, although I did not become aware of them until much later.

³ He also corresponded with Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who was to become the next Lubavitcher Rebbe. See [Rabbi Yaakov Aizer Dubrow - A Pioneer of Chabad in the U.S. - Chabad.org](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2818911/jewish/Rabbi-Yaakov-Aizer-Dubrow.htm) (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2818911/jewish/Rabbi-Yaakov-Aizer-Dubrow.htm).

⁴ See [ויקיפדיה – צמח גרין](https://www.wikipedia.org) ([wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)). See also [Troodler's Take: 'Flag of Israel Raised Over Jewish Agency'](https://troodlerstake.blogspot.com) (troodlerstake.blogspot.com) (recapping an article by N. Aaron Troodler in the May 9, 2024, edition of the Washington Jewish Week) describing the raising of the Israeli flag by the Jewish Agency of Washington, DC, on May 14, 1948, upon the founding of the State of Israel and recounting that Rabbi Green “donned a white robe and *tallit*, and delivered a heartfelt prayer at what was an incredibly exciting and emotional time for the Greater Washington, D.C., Jewish community and for Jews throughout the world.”

Yeshiva Ohr Torah of Brisk had been started in the 1950s by brothers Rabbi Nechemiah and Rabbi Meir Malin, who had both escaped World War II with the Mirrer Yeshiva to Shanghai. Rav Nechemiah, a *talmid* of Rav Moshe Sokolovsky of Brisk and Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, was a son-in-law of Rabbi Arthur Bogner of Congregation Ezras Israel. Their yeshiva closed in 1962. Later, the brothers founded Yeshiva Knesses Yehuda in Sanhedria HaMurchevet in Jerusalem, which became renowned throughout the Torah world.

A new student joined our Hebrew Academy class in fifth grade, transferring from another school which had closed. I recall hearing that its name was Bais Yaakov. It was not until a few years later that I learned what that name represented. In writing this article, I learned that Beth Jacob School of Washington was founded in 1954, directed by Rabbi Israel Orlansky with his wife as a mainstay of the faculty. Rebbetzin Orlansky was an alumna of Beth Jacob Teachers Seminary of America in Brooklyn, the flagship Bais Yaakov in this country, founded by Rabbi Boruch Kaplan and his wife, Rebbetzin Vichna Kaplan. Rebbetzin Kaplan was a prized *talmida* of the visionary Sarah Schenirer, founder of the Bais Yaakov movement.

THE TENOR OF THE TIMES, JEWISHLY SPEAKING

To understand Jewish consciousness during my elementary and junior high school years, one must remember that this was before the Six Day War, when the recapture of the Old City of Jerusalem and the Kotel HaMaaravi led Jews all over the world, religious and non-observant, to walk taller, with a new sense of pride. Still, love of Israel and glory in the establishment of the State was of central significance in our modern Orthodox education. We studied *Ivrit b'Ivrit* (translating Hebrew texts into simpler, modern Hebrew), learned the anthems of the *chalutzim*, and sang new-styled Israeli songs celebrating the holidays. I remember the 1960 movie, *Exodus*, stirring excitement in the hearts of young and old.

This was also long before the *baal teshuva* movement, which has changed the face of American Orthodox Jewry. Soviet Jewry — millions of Jews behind the Iron Curtain — had been all but forgotten. The struggle for their freedom began much later. Interestingly, there was not much talk about the Holocaust; people wanted to forget — or perhaps too many did not want to hear.

For a flavor of what typified religious Jewishness to me as a child — and without positive or negative comment — if you davened at an Orthodox shul, you were likely to hear *Kedusha* sung to the tune of the Israeli love song, *Erev Shel Shoshanim*. Someone once described services, with their use of such popular melodies, as “Sing Along with Mitch” (a popular 1960s TV show, where the home audience was encouraged to sing along).

It was a major Yom Tov at the Hebrew Academy when Molly Picon, star of Yiddish movies and theater, came to our school. Also memorable was the visit of Eliezer Ben Yehuda’s son, who had published a new pocket Hebrew-English dictionary based on his father’s work. On the other hand, I only vaguely remember an announcement about the *petirah* of Rav Aharon Kotler, and I cannot say that I had ever heard of Rav Moshe Feinstein. The first I ever heard of the *Mishnah Berurah* was when my teachers at the Hebrew Academy gave me a set for my bar mitzvah.

There was no Artscroll, no Targum Press. There was no widespread familiarity with basic Torah commentaries, other than what could be gleaned from the notes in the Hertz Chumash. You rarely

heard of a young man or woman spending a year or more in yeshiva or seminary in Israel. Even visiting *Eretz Yisrael* was a novelty; when my father *a"h* traveled to Israel in 1961 — in part, to attend the trial of Adolph Eichmann — the trip took 30 hours. On his return, he taught us a song he learned there: “*Essa Einai*,” the first Shlomo Carlebach tune we had ever heard. He brought back “*HaNeshama Lach*,” the first Carlebach album. The idea of a rabbi with a guitar was unheard of, and it was almost a sacrilege. Early articles called him “the Singing Rabbi.”

This was the naïve era when, if you read the ingredients on a candy bar wrapper and found, basically, that there was no pork in it, you assumed it was kosher. There were endless debates among us children as to whether you could buy ice cream from the Good Humor truck that frequented a street behind the Hebrew Academy. “But I saw Rabbi So-and-So’s daughter eating from there!” one would say, only to be contradicted later by reports to the contrary.

On the other hand, it was a time when Orthodox Jews were more familiar with certain strictures of *halachah* than their counterparts today. There were no community-wide *eruvim*, to my recollection; *halachah*-observant Jews never carried anything outside on Shabbos. When you bought meat at the kosher store, you had to first *kasher* it, because the stores didn’t. Today, lamentably, it is a forgotten skill — but, back then, every kosher *balabusta* knew how to do it.

THE LARGER CONTEXT

In the larger world, this was the height of the Cold War. The Soviets had sent the Sputnik into orbit in 1957, triggering palpable alarm that we would lose the space race. Among the things that excited us in 1959 was the granting of statehood to Alaska and Hawaii and the replacement of the “One Cent” inscription on the back of the penny with an image of the Lincoln Memorial.

I have no memory of the tension that gripped the world during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, but I do remember the construction of fallout shelters for fear of nuclear war. Schools held drills on what to do in such an emergency. Martin Luther King led the 1963 March on Washington, galvanizing the Civil Rights Movement. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated later that year, changing our world forever. I remember Gary (now Rabbi Yehoshua) Wender telling us about the shooting, and Ricky Proctor *a"h* opening classroom doors up and down the hallway, providing updates on the President’s condition.

The Beatles took the world by storm in 1964, and I remember our principal Dr. Skaist telling us — his expression perhaps displaying his affinity with *yeshivishe* circles — that they should be called the “*Bittuls*.” This was also the year that the U.S. significantly stepped up its military presence in Vietnam, although large-scale protests of the war did not occur until later. Social values were being radically altered in what became known as “The Moral Revolution.” To my recollection, feminism did not become a major force until some years later.

MY HEBREW ACADEMY CLASS

Roughly half my classmates were from *Shomer Shabbos* families. Others had parents with some ties to Orthodox tradition, were transplanted Israelis, or were activists for Israel and secular Jewish causes. There were a number whose parents worked for the Israeli embassy, one of whom I remember had no clue about even the basics of Judaism. An episode stands out in my mind: The

teacher had us taking turns reading aloud from the siddur. This boy's turn came in *Pesukei d'Zimrah* and, when he got to "*ki kol elohei ha-amim ellilim*," he simply stopped cold. Nobody knew what happened, until the teacher, with a laugh, realized that after that phrase, the student saw written in small Hebrew letters: "*Kahn tzerichim le-hafsik*" ("Here one must stop"), which, of course, indicated that one should pause briefly to separate the word "*ellilim*" (gods) from the name of G-d, which comes next in the *pasuk*. I hope my classmate gained at least some appreciation for Yiddishkeit from his time here. I later heard that he was an officer in the Israeli army.

Years later, I looked up another former classmate, now a professor at a prestigious university. She told me that she had not remained too Jewishly-affiliated and said, somewhat wistfully: "My parents taught me that Zionism was the main thing; my teachers at the Hebrew Academy taught me that being religious was the main thing. I took half from each."

On the other hand, a number of my classmates went on to become rabbis, heads of Jewish day schools, Jewish communal professionals, experts on Middle East policy, and active members of Orthodox Jewish communities around the world.

OUR PRINCIPAL: DR. SKAIST

The principal of the Academy for eight of my nine years there was an imposing figure: Dr. Solomon (Zalman) Skaist. He was a rabbi, but everyone knew him as "Dr. Skaist." It is hard to describe the "*yiras ha-kavod*" (fear and awe of his presence) we had for him. He was a large figure with a booming voice, and we were little kids. My recollections are of a man who insisted on excellence — a hallmark of our education under his leadership. I recall the primacy he placed on *derech eretz* (proper conduct), as well as the emphasis he also placed on *dikduk* (Hebrew grammar). What I learned from him has lasted me a lifetime: some of the finer points of *leining* and the *trop* (cantillation marks) for *Megillas Esther*.

Born in 1911, Dr. Skaist had been the first enrolled student in the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore ("TA") which, when founded in 1917, was the third Jewish day school in the United States and the only one outside New York. I doubt that many Academy students knew that Dr. Skaist was married to a daughter of Rav Sheftel Kramer, a prominent *talmid* of the Alter of Slobodka. Rav Sheftel was a *rosh yeshiva* in the Yeshiva of New Haven, the first yeshiva in America created in the mold of the great *mussar yeshivos* of Lithuania.

Dr. Skaist was a brother-in-law of Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, founder and *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel of Baltimore; and of Rabbi Naftoli (Herman) Neuberger, the legendary Ner Yisroel president. His wife's first cousin was the wife of Rav Aharon Kotler, founder and *rosh yeshiva* of Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood and leader in his generation of the Torah world in America.

MY HEBREW AND LIMUDEI KODESH TEACHERS

The Hebrew Academy's first grade Hebrew teacher, known to all as Morah Batya, is still fondly remembered by generations of students. Many of us cherished for years the hand-painted, clay *chanukiyot* she made with us and the handmade booklets for each *chag*, replete with our

childhood drawings of *mitzvah* objects and our first efforts at writing Hebrew letters. Our *limudei kodesh* teacher in second grade was Rabbi Paul Eilberg, a *talmid* of Rav Ruderman at Yeshiva Ner Yisroel.⁵ He started us out in *Chumash* with *Parshas Lech Lecha*. Our third grade teacher (I don't think we knew the term "*rebbe*" back then) was Rabbi Hersh Burko, who introduced us to Rashi. We had no idea that, before the war, he had been a *talmid* of the great Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz, *talmid muvhak* of Rav Chaim Soloveichik of Brisk.⁶

Our fourth grade teacher was a pillar of the Hebrew Academy and mainstay of *chinuch* in the DC area for decades. We all knew him simply as "Mr. Kaufman."⁷ It is hard to overstate his impact on us. He laid a foundation for us in *Chumash*, *Nach*, *dikduk* and other subjects that has stood us in good stead for a lifetime. Mr. Kaufman was not a *rebbe*-type figure; but he was a *melamed* and *mechanech* (educator) par excellence.⁸ He was the soul of the Hebrew Academy.

We had Mr. Kaufman again in junior high school, and I can still hear his voice thundering out the words of the *Navi Amos*, such that the prophet's admonishments became almost alive for us (2:6):

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אֶשְׁיבֶנּוּ...!

...for three transgressions of Israel I have looked away,
but for four I will not pardon them...!

I was only mildly surprised when my older brother, a couple of grades ahead of me, reminisced about him many years later and quoted this very same *pasuk*!

Of course, all this was taught *Ivrit b'Ivrit*, the method favored by modern Orthodox Hebrew day schools — although in Washington it was actually *Ivris b'Ivris*. The approach was not merely an ideal to which one paid lip service. All the elementary school teachers maintained the standard but, in Mr. Kaufman's case, I do not believe I ever heard a single word of English from him in his classroom. He was absolutely hard-core, old school. Years after we left the Hebrew Academy, it was unthinkable to meet him anywhere and speak to him in anything but Hebrew.

⁵ As told to me by his son-in-law, Rabbi Yoel Yankelowitz, Rabbi Eilberg came from Woodbine, New Jersey, a settlement for Eastern European Jews founded by the famed Baron de Hirsch. A Yeshiva of Slobodka alumnus who lived in Woodbine offered to teach Torah for free to anyone interested, and young Paul was a taker. The teacher later wrote his old friend Rav Ruderman to recommend Paul as a student.

⁶ Dr. Alvin Radkowsky, the renowned nuclear physicist and *talmid chacham* who was a member of the DC Orthodox community, told a friend of mine, upon completing *Shas*, that if he ever had a question anywhere along the way, it was Rabbi Burko whom he would call.

⁷ Mr. Lazar Kaufman was the uncle of my classmate Harry (Rabbi Tzvi) Rosen and his sister, whom Washingtonians know as Rebbetzin Rachie Reingold. Mr. Kaufman and his sister, Mrs. Miriam Rosen, were the only members of their immediate family to survive the Holocaust. Their personal history included fighting with the partisans in the forests of Poland and Russia before emigrating to the U.S. after the war.

⁸ Mr. Kaufman had attended yeshiva before the war and was a *melamed* in his shtetl and in a DP camp in Italy. He learned *shechita* and was admitted to the U.S. under a clergy provision to be a *shochet*. When the Hebrew Academy needed teachers, Rabbi Yehoshua Klavan said to him: "Why make living (chickens) dead when you can make children live?" He could not speak English, but somehow it worked. From a conversation with Rabbi Tzvi Rosen.

There is another reason I am forever indebted to Mr. Kaufman z”l. In the fourth grade, it became mandatory for us to attend *minyán* each morning at school, and Mr. Kaufman was in charge. Until that time, I had thought that to *daven* meant that you read each paragraph with your eyes and maybe murmured some of the words slightly with your lips. If you were the *chazzan*, you said the last line aloud. Okay, sometimes other people would also call out certain phrases, maybe (in my child’s understanding) to demonstrate their *kavanah* or something...but I never realized that you were actually supposed to say every word. Mr. Kaufman changed all that for me. There he stood at the side of the *shulchan* every morning, saying every single word out loud, clearly and with perfect articulation. He never explicitly instructed us about this; he just presented the model. This, too, has stayed with me for a lifetime.

Our fifth-grade teacher was Rabbi Mendel Silver, who had also studied in Ner Yisroel under Rav Ruderman. Rabbi Silver would become a prominent member of the DC area Orthodox Jewish community and a pillar of the Woodside Synagogue. I felt (and believe he felt) the special *talmid-rebbe* relationship we had through the decades until his passing just a few years ago.

Our sixth-grade teacher was Rabbi Aryeh Mayerfeld, also from Ner Yisroel, from the well-known family of that name in Vineland, New Jersey. As I recall, he and his wife lived in the apartments up Ft. Stevens Drive from the Hebrew Academy; I have a vague memory of him looking after our welfare when we were stuck for long hours after school due to a snowstorm.

Sometime during those years we were introduced to *Gemara* learning, using a historically curious text called *Talmud laTalmid*, too hard to describe here. Eventually we got to the real thing. One of our *Gemara* teachers in junior high was Rabbi Shlomo Goldstein, still another *talmid* of Ner Yisroel who infused a new freshness into our learning and whose guidance in *hashkafah* (religious outlook) had a lasting impact. In preparing this piece, I was delighted to find an article in which a classmate brought up Rabbi Goldstein’s name, nearly forty years later. The classmate, Rabbi Simcha Weiser, was being interviewed about what had led him to a career in *chinuch* and to become headmaster of the Hebrew Day School of San Diego. The article focused on the “*rebbe-talmid* relationship” and how it can impact generations, noting the influence of Rav Yaakov Kulefsky, *rosh yeshiva* at Ner Yisroel, on Rabbi Goldstein, and Rabbi Goldstein’s subsequent influence on a young Steven (Simcha) Weiser.⁹

Other *limudei kodesh* teachers in junior high school included Rabbi Philip Rabinowitz, of blessed memory, *rav* of Keshet Israel of Georgetown, a paragon of *derech erez* and old-world gentlemanliness,¹⁰ who taught us *Navi* in a scholarly manner with a mix of wry humor; Mr. Kaufman, already mentioned; Mr. Isaac Kast, a Hebraist of the old school; and Rabbi Dr. Emanuel Green, who was brought in to provide what in retrospect I think of as “enrichment” sessions to introduce us to a deeper understanding of Yiddishkeit. I still remember the exact words and tone he used when he asked us, in our first class session, what we thought *avodah zarah* (idolatry) was

⁹ [Jewish School Profile, Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School \(jewishschoolprofile.com\)](http://jewishschoolprofile.com/soille-san-diego-hebrew-day-school)

¹⁰ Rabbi Rabinowitz, a *talmid* at the Lomzer Yeshiva in Europe, arrived in America in his teens and studied under Rav Chaim Korb, *rosh yeshiva* at Hebrew Theological College in Chicago. He called Rav Dovid Lifshitz, Suvalker Rav and *rosh yeshiva* in Chicago and later at Yeshiva University, “my *Rebbe*.”

and what it meant for our forefathers to reject it. Did people really think you could pray to a tree and be answered, he asked. You would have to be “stark, raving mad!”

It is difficult to capture the extraordinary personality of Rabbi Avraham Baharan, our ninth grade *rebbe*, and the influence he had upon us and on the whole school in that era. He was an intellectual and creative genius who introduced us to dimensions of Torah culture, *Ahavas HaTorah* (love of Torah), and *hashkafah* in its fullest breadth — to which most of us had never been exposed. A child of the Old Yishuv and a descendant of one of the *gedolim* of Yerushalayim who founded the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood, he would graphically describe what it was like growing up in that milieu. It was from Rabbi Baharan that I first heard of the Chazon Ish and of Rav Avraham Isaac Kook. He would regale us with stories of the years leading up to Israeli independence; as a youngster, he was a courier of secret messages for the Irgun.

While commonplace today, I and many of my classmates had never seen, much less experienced, the practice of learning Torah *b'chavrusa* (in one-on-one study). Rabbi Baharan took our classroom and converted it into a *bais medrash*, pairing us off in a calculated way so each of us would gain from the strengths of the other. He innovated the creation of weekly *parsha* pamphlets, replete with sketches illustrating midrashic metaphors and concepts. He took time in class to teach us what he called “Chassidic symphonies.” In later years, his students would build beautiful stage sets for plays he developed on Torah themes. He invited us to his home on Shabbos (first time we had an invitation like that) and introduced us to some of the Orthodox Jewish professionals who were part of the then-famed Summit Hill community in which he lived.

Rabbi Baharan attended Talmud Torah Etz Chaim in Jerusalem as an orphaned child. An incident in which the head of the yeshiva Rav Aryeh Levine (known as the “Tzaddik in Our Time”) treated him with sensitivity and kindness inspired him to become a *mechanech*. Later, he studied at the Yeshiva of Chevron. On a trip to *Eretz Yisrael*, Rav Aharon Kotler recognized his brilliance and invited him to study in his yeshiva in Lakewood. He later became a close *talmid* of Rav Yitzchok Hutner of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin. Rabbi Baharan also spoke of his relationship with Rav Eizik Sher, son-in-law of the Alter of Slobodka and *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivas Slobodka in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Our final year at the Hebrew Academy saw the arrival of a new principal, Rabbi Moshe Horowitz, a devoted *mechanech*, religious Zionist, and *baal ruach* who subsequently headed Bet Midrash LeTorah (“BMT”) in Jerusalem. Although I knew him then only for a short time, a decade later he demonstrated the loyalty and commitment a genuine *mechanech* maintains to former students and their families. He performed a great kindness to my family when my father *a”h* passed away suddenly in Israel in 1975.

A pair of memories from our last year in the Hebrew Academy may convey a bit of the tenor of our lives. As graduation approached, a group of us decided to celebrate with lunch at Irv’s Korner, a kosher shop at the corner of East West Highway and Colesville Road. Irv’s was a novelty in its time: while there may have been other attempts to establish kosher eateries in town, I don’t recall any that lasted more than a couple of years — maybe even less.

Meanwhile, after our graduation ceremony at Ohev Sholom on 16th Street, a group of not-so-observant classmates was planning a dance party, at which some of us were thinking of at least

showing our faces. The religious faculty got wind of the plans and invited Shlomo Carlebach to perform and draw us into song at the Summit Hill shul. It worked — at least for the *frum* kids and others with leanings toward that kind of thing.

What was to be the future of our Jewish learning? There had been no high school in the DC area where one could continue his or her Torah education. My older brothers, as did many boys, went to Talmudical Academy in Baltimore. Many girls from Orthodox homes stayed and attended public school.¹¹ A local after-school *limudei kodesh* institute, Midrasha, partially filled the gap for some, although certainly not a replacement for a full-time Orthodox Jewish high school education.¹²

By the time I graduated ninth grade at the Hebrew Academy, the Yeshiva High School — the school that eventually became the Yeshiva of Greater Washington — had already opened, and I and some of my classmates became students. Some years later, the Hebrew Academy added its own high school. The entire face of Orthodox Judaism in our area was to be transformed. But that is the story of a new and different era, still waiting to be retold.



Hebrew Academy of Washington Junior High School Graduation, June 1966

Top row, left to right: Moshe Teichman, Steven Weiser, Abie Lang, Macy Wender, Israel Sheinbein.

Second row: Harry Rosen, Gerald Royston, Robin Epstein, Joel Seltzer, Roger Gordon, Freddy Barder, Ira Brandriss, Lenny Davis, Harold Lifshutz.

Third row: Adele Berman, Rochelle Black, Karen Karl, Molly Koperwas, Chaya Ingber, Gloria Hurwitz, Zahava Halpern, Marcia Zaltsman, Helen Weiss, Judy Mendlowitz.

Bottom row: Simaleah Kaufman, Joy Levinson, Stephanie Bier, Shoshana Milgram, Faye Kahn, Gittie Gorman, Sharon White, Sybil Leonard, Marcia Reznick, Linda Ellenbogen.

¹¹ The Hebrew Academy had briefly had a high school, as confirmed to by Barbara Billauer Price. A class of six girls some grades ahead of her graduated, circa 1960-61, but the school could not be sustained.

¹² The story of Midrasha, which accommodated high school students serious about their Judaism from all backgrounds, is one that still needs to be told.

Chametz After Pesach 2025

It is rabbinically prohibited to purchase *chametz* after Pesach from a Jew who maintained *chametz* in his possession over the course of Pesach. This is referred to in rabbinic literature as *Chametz She'avar Alav HaPesach*. A product is defined as *chametz* if it consists of any of the five major grains, including wheat, barley, oat, rye, or spelt, in a significant concentration.

There is no prohibition to purchase *chametz* from a non-Jew who was in possession of *chametz* over Pesach.

There is no prohibition to purchase items which are not *chametz* from a Jewish-owned business that did not sell their *chametz* over Pesach.

Chametz may be purchased from all Capitol K establishments and caterers one hour after Pesach 2025.

- **Chametz may be purchased from the following stores in the Greater Washington area after Pesach 2025:**

7-Eleven	Rite Aid*
Aldi*	Royal Farms*
BJ's*	Safeway
Costco*	Save-A-Lot*
CVS*	Sam's Club*
Food Lion*	Shoppers Food & Pharmacy*
Giant	Snider's
Harris Teeter*	Streets Market
H Mart	Target
Lidl*	Trader Joe's*
MOM's Organic Market	Walgreens*
Montgomery County Liquor & Wine	Walmart*
Petco*	Wegmans*
PetSmart*	Whole Foods Market

*One may purchase *chametz* after Pesach 2025 at this store throughout the United States.



VAAD HARABANIM
THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL
of GREATER WASHINGTON



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The Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington

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The Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington is an organization of Orthodox rabbis that provides the Greater Washington Jewish community with critical services such as *kashrus* supervision, a *beis din* for the administration of Jewish divorce, a *beis din* for arbitration of financial disputes, and a *beis din* for conversion. In addition, the Vaad, also known as the Rabbinical Council, acts as a rabbinic resource and supports vital communal service organizations, such as the *Chevra Kadisha*, *Bikur Cholim*, *Yad Yehuda* and the *Mikvah Emunah* Society. Members of the Vaad HaRabanim are dedicated to serving the broader Jewish community in whatever way possible and appreciate the opportunity to do so.