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Message from the President

On Brotherly Love: Thoughts in Honor of the *Shloshim* of my Brother *a"h*

INTRODUCTION

My dear friend, colleague, and editor of the Journal, Rabbi Moshe Walter *shlit"a*, came to comfort me when I was sitting *shiva* in January for my brother, Gershon Feivel ben Zelig HaLevi *a"h* — “Gary.” Rabbi Walter felt that the *shiva* stories he heard at that time were sufficiently inspiring and universal to warrant inclusion in the Vaad Journal. I thought long and hard about how an outpouring of personal grief could possibly help the Greater Washington Jewish community prepare *hashkafically* for Pesach — the ultimate reason for this Journal message. That said, Rabbi Walter specifically requested this piece and today marks the conclusion of Gary’s *shloshim*. May these humble thoughts facilitate the *aliyah* of his *neshama*.

REDEMPTION

Rav Matisyahu Salomon *shlit"a*, in his Haggadah, *Matnas Chaim al Seder Leil Pesach* (Essay 12), quotes the Chofetz Chaim, who states that removing *sin'as chinam* (unwarranted hatred) is the critical condition for bringing about the final *geulah* (redemption) and the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Since an essential feature of the *Seder* is the achievement of a personal redemption from one’s “own *Mitzrayim*,” it is incumbent upon every participant to eliminate resentment, irritation, impatience, intolerance, and animosity toward one another and replace those *middos ra'os* (bad traits) with appreciation, gratitude, respect, and love.

In *Ahavas Chesed* (Section 2, Chapter 5), the Chofetz Chaim cites the Tana d’bei Eliyahu, who provides powerful support for this concept. The Jews in *Mitzrayim* merited redemption not only because they spoke *Lashon HaKodesh* (the Holy Tongue) and maintained their mode of dress. They also recommitted to the sacred covenant of Avraham Avinu in the most practical ways and under the most difficult circumstances. They were kind and supportive of one another even while enduring incessant, backbreaking labor. They shared their meager rations — the *lechem oni* — even when they were hungry. They offered encouragement to one another even when their own hearts were broken. In so doing, they awakened tremendous *chesed shel ma'alah* (loving kindness from Above) and hastened their redemption.

Rav Yerucham Olshon *shlit"a* (*Yerach LaMoadim: Pesach*, Chapter 26) explains that the *Seder* begins with the recitation of *Ha Lachma Anya* (“This is the bread of affliction”) to recall our ancestors’ selflessness and to remind us that the path to our own personal and collective redemption is through kindness and compassion — even (and especially) when it may be very difficult to be kind and supportive. The paths of Torah that lead to freedom, growth, authentic spirituality, and happiness are those characterized by genuine feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood.

At *Har Sinai*, the Torah relates:

...וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגְדַּ הַהָר.

...and Israel camped there opposite the mountain. (Shemos 19:2)

Rashi comments: Israel camped *k'ish echad b'lev echad* — like one person with one heart.

BROTHERHOOD

My brother Gary was always exploring new interests and developing new skills. He was a licensed ham radio operator, a certified scuba diver, a sailor, a computer programmer, a successful entrepreneur and, in the latter part of his life, a “gentleman farmer” in Maine.

He deeply loved his wife of 45 years and took care of the people in his life. At one point, he lived with his wife, mother, mother-in-law, daughter, and stepdaughter — all in the same house. At the funeral, a contractor described Gary as “the kindest man I ever knew.” He helped people get back on their feet in ways that preserved and enhanced their self-respect and dignity, whether it was that contractor, Gary’s employees, or close relatives.

To me, he was simply my big brother. That meant that he was my primary babysitter, my protector against bullies, and a reliable source of support throughout the course of my entire life. The most illustrative and important example of his support occurred when I was about 26 years old.

When I was young, my life was pretty much “mapped out.” I was to graduate from a good college, go to medical school, become a resident in a prestigious medical specialty, marry a Jewish girl, buy a nice house in the suburbs, and have a couple of kids. That plan was completely upended at the tender age of eighteen, when my father died. The solid ground upon which I had stood could no longer support me, and the values and goals I had previously embraced proved cold and empty. Although I did succeed in eventually graduating from college, I could not understand how a professional career, or even starting a family, could lend meaning to my life.

Baruch Hashem, all that changed when I started to learn Torah at the University of Colorado Hillel House, under the auspices of Rabbi N. Weitzner *zt”l*, and later with the Hornosteipler Rebbe in Denver, Rabbi Shloime Twerski *zt”l*. After a couple of years, the Rebbe suggested that I study in Migdal Torah, a “late starter” Yeshiva in Chicago. I worked hard there and eventually secured a spot in the Beis Medrash in Telshe Yeshiva.

Thus, at 26 years old, I was definitely not a resident in a medical specialty and did not own a home, have a wife, or have a penny to my name. I did, however, have Torah, a *mahalech* (a religious path), and purpose in my life — and was genuinely happy for the first time since my father’s passing.

When I subsequently came home to Boston to visit my family, my mother and brother picked me up at the airport. On the ride home, I enthusiastically shared some of the particulars of my newfound joy. Not only was I studying things that were meaningful, good, and beautiful, but my scholarship also included tuition, room and board, and a five-dollar-per-week stipend for spending money.

My mother, no doubt haunted by her visions of a newly married medical resident, promptly burst into tears. Gary, by that time a very successful businessman, spoke to her firmly: “Ma, leave him alone. He is doing what makes him happy. The only thing we should be doing is supporting him.” And that is what my entire family did, including my mother, for the next 45 years.

Gary always took great pleasure and pride in my success. He was so happy when I met Miriam and when I became the Rav of Young Israel Ezras Israel of Potomac. He loved my children dearly and did his best to keep up with the ever-increasing number of family *simchos*, *bli ayin hara*. Gary and I were so different. He was not observant and I was an Orthodox rabbi. We sat at opposite ends of the political spectrum. But it didn’t matter: Our mutual love and respect for one another transcended those differences and we always made the necessary accommodations to make things work — even when it was difficult. Brotherhood.

THE TIES THAT BIND US

In *Likutei Amarim* (Chapter 32), the Baal HaTanya suggests that people who consider their bodies more important than their souls — who prioritize fulfillment of their physical needs over their spiritual ones — are able to experience neither genuine love nor authentic brotherhood. Instead, their connection to others will only be as strong as the mutual interest in which they have invested. True love derives from the realization that the bonds between the Jewish people, especially between family members, are precious and holy — and must be nurtured and protected even at great cost. Arguments over money, past hurts, or differences in *hashkafic* orientations should not be allowed to destroy the fabric of familial love or interpersonal relationships. These arguments bring nothing but misery and delay our personal and collective redemption.

WITH GRATITUDE

I wish to express my profound *Hakaras HaTov* to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, who has “kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season”; to my wife, who is a *tzadeikes*, a *tznu’ah*, and the bedrock of my life; to my children, for their love, devotion, and commitment to *gadlus* in Torah; and to the members of Young Israel Ezras Israel of Potomac, who have become, over the past 26 years, members of my extended family.

Finally, on my brother’s *shloshim*, I extend my gratitude to the *bnei Torah* across the world who participated in the completion of *shas mishnayos* for an *aliyah* to my brother’s *neschama* and to the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, who so generously dedicated a day of learning in his memory.

With warm wishes for a *Chag Kasher v’Sameach* and *geulah* in our time,
Rabbi Yosef Singer

Introduction from the Director

It is a pleasure and an honor to introduce yet another edition of the biannual Journal of the Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington: Volume 11.1, Pesach 5783.

The goal of the Journal is fourfold:

One, to impart meaningful and educational *divrei Torah* to enhance the Yom Tov season.

Two, to share with the community the work of the Vaad in various areas of specialty, most prominently in the areas of *kashrus* and *Beis Din*.

Three, to highlight the amazing work of various organization and individuals in our community, both past and present.

Four, to raise awareness of important issues of the day.

This issue of the Journal does all that! We begin with inspiring and uplifting *divrei Torah* relating to Pesach and *Sefiras HaOmer*. Next, you will find a section on communal and national *kashrus*, highlighting the work of our *mashgichim* and examining the current nationwide shortage of *mashgichim*. In the next section, the Journal examines end-of-life issues that should be of concern to each one of us. Finally, we are pleased to present a very special article on the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington in 1964, highlighting the rabbis who served the community during that era.

These sections and the articles within speak to the goals of the Journal: to draw the community together and update you on the areas highlighted above. Thank you to each of our contributors for penning essays on these important topics.

This past September, the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington conducted an important symposium at Young Israel Shomrai Emunah, entitled **Protecting Our Children from Predators and Abusers**. Featuring Rabbi Aaron Lopiansky and Dr. Norman Blumenthal, the program included valuable advice, practical suggestions for parents and grandparents to understand the issues at hand, and guidance on how to protect our precious children from predators. Because of the importance of constantly remaining vigilant and never allowing these concerns to be silenced, I draw your attention to the video recording of the symposium, available at <https://www.vaadgw.org/protecting-our-children-event.html>. The presentations contain a wealth of valuable information on this topic.

For your convenience, all issues of the Journal of the Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington, chock-full of Torah essays and important communal matters from the past ten years, are available at <https://www.vaadgw.org/publications--events.html>.

Special thanks are in order to three individuals:

Our gratitude to Rabbi Yosef Singer, President of the Rabbinical Council, for his tireless and constant leadership, direction, and stewardship.

Thank you to Mrs. Mindy Tolchinsky for her awesome efforts and keen editorial skills that continue to enhance and upgrade the Vaad Journal.

Thanks to Mrs. Wendy Guberman, whose talent and care in typesetting the Journal give it the final touch that allows us all to benefit from the written content.

Finally, we thank the community for your support and partnership and wish one and all a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach* and a year of *shalom, geulah, and besoros tovos*. May we merit to hear the *shofar of mashiach* speedily in our days!

Rabbi Moshe Walter

Sefirat HaOmer and the Dialectic of Time

*Rabbi Brahm Weinberg
Kemp Mill Synagogue*

Time is perhaps the most valuable human commodity. It has played a vital role in human life and Jewish life since the creation of the world. Time is a common motif in the story of *Bereishit*. Each day of creation is described by the Torah in units of time: “And there was evening and there was morning, day one...” (1:5). Creation of the celestial beings on the fourth day is specifically “to divide the day from the night” (1:14): to be able to mark time. Finally, creation culminates in Shabbat, which delineates a full created cycle of time.

As the Torah proceeds from the creation of the world to the creation of the Jewish people, once again time appears as a central theme. The first *mitzvah* given to the Jewish people while they were still in Egypt was the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush HaChodesh* (*Shemot* 12:2) — to sanctify the new months and set the calendar. According to the Seforno, counting time was the primary expression of our freedom:

This is by way of contrast to the years when you were enslaved when you had no control over your time or timetable at all. While you were enslaved, your days, hours, minutes even, were always at the beck and call of your taskmasters (Seforno, *Shemot* 12:2).

Even the name given to the holidays which *emerge* from that set calendar speaks to the importance of time in Jewish life. The holidays are called *moadim* (*Vayikra* 23:1): designated times, times when we come together, times when we come close to Hashem.

Beyond the infancy of nationhood, as the Torah depicts a future permanence of life in the Land of Israel, time is indispensable to proper observance of agricultural *mitzvot* like *Terumah*, *Maaser*, *Orlah*, *Shemittah* and *Yovel*, as well as the laws of purity and of mourning. We are required to count days, weeks, years, cycles, and even minutes — because time informs almost everything that we do.

While counting time is important to us philosophically and practically, it is our *specific* approach towards time that speaks to our identity as Jews. One feature of our unique approach to time is the value of memory. If one asked any person to describe the Jewish attitude towards time, they would almost certainly say that Judaism is a nation that values the past and mandates that we remember it. In his work, *Zachor*, Professor Yosef Haim Yerushalmi notes that the Hebrew word *zachor* (remember) is mentioned nearly two hundred times in *Tanach*, which bespeaks its centrality.

Memory is one of the cornerstones of religious life and of the way the Torah shapes our national story. To us, our past is not just something that happened to our people long ago, but something

that continues to inform our identity today. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l* so eloquently stated:

History is the story that does not belong to us. It may be interesting and valuable to learn from, but it is not part of our own identity. Memory is our own story and our own identity. It is personal, and is the basis for who we are, and the collective identity we transfer to the next generation. Judaism is concerned with this transmission, and therefore places great significance on ritual and education in order to ensure the next generation receives the national memory and, with it, our collective identity. It does this through much of its ritual that is based around an active process of memory (such as the Pesach *Seder* night ritual). These rituals aim to personalize the national memories of the people through the re-experiencing and reenacting of events that took place thousands of years ago. Together with the core Jewish value of education, the heritage and national identity of the Jewish people is transmitted from generation to generation (*The Politics of Memory Family Edition*).

The events that occurred in our past are not memorialized on stones and monuments, but in Jewish memory. They are events that we are supposed to recall, relive, and almost re-experience in the present. On Pesach, for example, it is not enough to simply retell the story that happened to our ancestors thousands of years ago. Instead, we must act, speak, and experience the slavery and freedom of the night *ourselves*. As the Talmud states and as we reiterate as part of the text of the Haggadah, "In every generation a person is obligated to see *himself* as if he left Egypt" (Pesachim 116b). Even more emphatically, in the language of the Rambam,

In each and every generation, a person must act as if **he himself** has left the slavery of Egypt **right now**...Regarding this matter, G-d commanded in the Torah: 'Remember that you were a slave (*Devarim* 5:15),' as if you, yourself, were a slave and went out to freedom and were redeemed (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah* 7:6).

On Tisha B'Av it is not enough to read *Eicha* and listen to what happened to the Jews living at the time of the destruction of the Temple, or in the course of the Crusades, or during the Holocaust. Rather, we must *act* like mourners by sitting on the ground and removing our leather shoes as if we are mourning something that happened right now in our midst. On Sukkot, it is not enough to state that Hashem protected the Jewish people during their travels in the desert from Egypt to the Land of Israel. We *ourselves* must dwell in *sukkot* under the shade of the Divine protection and reenact it to the best of our abilities. Anything less would fall short of the mandate that "future generations may **know** that I placed Bnei Yisrael in booths..." (*Vayikra* 23:43). "Knowing" involves more than just recounting; it involves re-experiencing.

Without a doubt, Jews are a people that value memory as one of the central facets of our approach to time. However, according to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, there is another, less

known, less recognized, less appreciated component of the Jewish approach to time and that is *pre-experiencing* the future:

On the one hand, Judaism requires us to re-experience the past. On the other hand, Judaism requires us to pre-experience the future, the as yet non-real that will become real at some point in time. In this pre-existential awareness, the future to the Jew is a reality before it has arrived...if the Jew had not felt close to the future, he would have disappeared in the Middle Ages...to exist as a Jew means to be at the juncture of past and future, at the non-real any longer and the non-real as yet. Our mission is to engage in retrospection and anticipation, in recollection and expectation (*Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer, and Shavu'ot*, David Shapiro, p.151).

As Jews, we are required to re-experience the past and also to pre-experience the future. We are supposed to be able to taste, feel, and smell a bit of the past that we were not a part of and the future before it even happens. We are supposed to transport ourselves, mentally and emotionally, back in time to moments of our past and forward in time to moments that have not yet occurred.

Moreover, what is unique about the Jewish experience of time is that we are supposed to live in both places, past and future, at once:

Man's time awareness is elusive and paradoxical. In grammar, we have three tenses: present, future, and past. Experientially, however, the present can never be isolated and perceived; the point of time we call present lies either in the past or in the future. In a word, we experience time either as retrospection—recollection or as prospection—anticipation...To exist means to remember and to anticipate...**In light of the above, we may state that Judaism has formulated a unique philosophy of time. We are to experience time simultaneously in its two dimensions, as recollection and anticipation, as review and meditation, and as quest and search.** Time is the experiential memory that reaches out for the as yet non-real future (*Festival of Freedom*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, p.175).

While this requirement to feel the dialectic of time pulling us backward into the past and forward into the future simultaneously is a broad one, there are specific moments when this is manifested more poignantly. The one *mitzvah*, the one period, the one opportunity that truly embodies *both* sides of the dialectic and speaks to its fulfillment almost by default is *Sefirat HaOmer*.

The counting of the *omer*, by its nature, serves as a bridge between past and future. The Ramban describes how the counting is intended to connect the holidays of Pesach and Shavuot, almost like days of *Chol HaMoed* in between the Yom Tov before it and after it. It is a structure Hashem modeled after the holiday of Sukkot when *Chol HaMoed* connects the first days of Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret:

Now with respect to the Festival of Unleavened Bread, He commanded that it be observed for seven days, with the first and seventh [days] being holy...From then on we are to count forty-nine days, which are seven weeks comparable to the [seven] “days” of the world, and then to sanctify the “eighth day” [i.e. Shavuot] just as the eighth day of Sukkot [is holy]; and [the forty-nine days] counted between them are in the “intermediate days” of the festival, in the interval separating the first day and “eighth day” of the festival, this being the day of the Giving of the Torah (Ramban, *Vayikra* 23:36).

The Ramban is perhaps suggesting that the structure of *Sefirat HaOmer* illustrates how the freedom achieved on Pesach in the past was to be merged with the receiving of the Torah in the future in order to tell our most complete story. Freedom without Torah would not have been meaningful; Torah without freedom would not have been possible. If these events were to have remained stand-alone events in time, the impact on our identity would have been lacking. The counting in between helped achieve the merger and gave both foci in time their fullest meaning.

The unification of past and future into one experience is also symbolized by the very act of counting. When we count as part of a continuum, we declare every moment to be one that has a past and a future — because every number in a series, by definition, has one that precedes it and one that follows it. When a person declares that “today is the sixth day of the *Omer*,” he or she is actually saying that today is the sixth day because yesterday was the fifth day and because tomorrow will be the seventh day:

When one counts, one ushers in a continuum...at any position in which you find yourself while counting, you have to be aware of two things: of the preceding position and of the following position (*Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer, and Shavu'ot*, p.152).

Time is precious and irreplaceable. While we may not be able to fully determine the length of time with which we will be blessed, we undoubtedly can learn to value and maximize that which we *do* have. That valued experience of the present can be enriched by our recollection of the past and by our hope for the future.

The unique Jewish approach to time as embodied by *Sefirat HaOmer* speaks to the capacity we have to synthesize memory and anticipation and, by doing so, bridge time. This *mitzvah* is emblematic of all that Judaism expects of us with regard to our approach to time throughout the year and the impact it can have on our personal and national identities.

Is This What We Call Freedom?

*Rabbi Berel Wolvovsky
Chabad of Silver Spring*

As we prepare for Pesach with a blur of activity, we often do not have time to stop and consider the meaning of freedom for us as Jews in the twenty-first century. Thank G-d, we are not enslaved in the physical sense, as were the Jews in *Mitzrayim*. Additionally, we have the opportunity to study the Torah and perform *mitzvos* every day.

With this in mind, what does the concept of the freedom of Pesach mean today? How do we make this idea relevant and relatable in our modern-day lives?

Pesach is known by several names, including *Chag HaMatzos* and *Z'man Cheirusanu*. Each name highlights a unique aspect of the holiday. Since we learn that the Torah is *Toras Chayim* (a living Torah) and that everything written in the Torah has direct relevance to our everyday life, let us examine the names of Pesach through that prism.

Chag HaMatzos (the Holiday of Matzos) seems straightforward, as a significant *mitzvah* of the holiday of Pesach is eating matzah at the *Seder*. What is the practical application for the name *Z'man Cheirusenu* (the Season of our Freedom)? The Gemara notes:

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

*In every generation one must look upon himself
as if he had personally gone out of Egypt. (Pesachim 116b)*

Every day, we must believe that Hashem is taking us out of *Mitzrayim*.

The concept of freedom may be understood beyond the absence of physical slavery and in other realms of life. For example, a plant — whose only needs are water, sun, and soil — obtains “freedom” by having those needs met and being able to live and grow without interruption. In short, freedom for a plant means having the opportunity to perform its essential functions.

For an animal, merely having access to food, water, and shelter is not enough. The essential need of an animal is the ability to move freely, and it cannot experience “freedom” without that.

Humans — who possess intellect, speech, and reason — require their basic needs to be met as well. A human denied the opportunity to express his or her intellect would be constrained, feeling unfulfilled and unhappy. For a Jew, this essential nature extends further to include spiritual connections. Through his or her *neshama*, a Jew seeks connection to Hashem. If a person spends time focusing exclusively on physical needs, and not intellectual and spiritual needs, they are bringing self-imposed limitations upon themselves — and the consequences could be serious.

The Torah demonstrates this by linking the exodus from *Mitzrayim* to the giving of the Torah on *Har Sinai*. The Jewish people experienced physical freedom when they left *Mitzrayim*, but could not escape the spiritual chains of their exile until they received the Torah. The Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, is related to the Hebrew word *meitzar* — a strait, a place of limitations — and highlights the intense slavery of the Jews in Egypt. Enslavement can stem from external factors, but also from self-imposed limitations. Just as the Jews leaving *Mitzrayim* could not be truly free until they received the Torah and were able to “serve G-d on this mountain,” we learn that we cannot be truly free until we serve Hashem through Torah and *mitzvos*.

There was an additional aspect of *Matan Torah* that the Jewish people experienced and that we, too, must experience to achieve the same level of freedom. Every Jew at *Har Sinai* accepted the Torah; the Jewish nation was united in its acceptance of Hashem’s Torah and *mitzvos*. Each person, with their unique strengths and personality traits, achieved the true freedom of receiving the Torah, together with the other members of the Jewish nation. Our search for spiritual freedom today requires the same connection to other Jews. The *Seder* reminds us of this by mentioning four different types of Jews: the four sons, who come together at the *Seder* table to retell the story and help bring about spiritual freedom by following the *mitzvos* of Pesach.

So how do we fulfill the obligation to treat every day as if we are being freed from *Mitzrayim*? We know this means that we must seek to achieve greater spiritual freedom. Fortunately, the tools for achieving this freedom have already been provided to us. Torah and *mitzvos*, as demonstrated by the generation who left *Mitzrayim*, are the keys to true freedom. For Jewish people, the *neschama* is such an essential part of our being that we must use it to fulfill the purpose for which we were created. With our *neschamos*, we must connect to Hashem through Torah and *mitzvos*. We must seek to remove the limits and constraints that hamper us from spiritual growth, connection, and the service of Hashem.

The other name for the holiday of Pesach provides a clue as to how to achieve the freedom to fulfill our purpose. *Chag HaMatzos* refers to the unleavened bread that we eat at the *Seder*. There are two *mitzvos* related to this: (1) eating matzah; and (2) refraining from eating, owning, or even deriving benefit from *chametz*. When we eat matzah, we are serving Hashem and fulfilling a *mitzvah* in a practical way. *Chametz*, our rabbis explain, represents haughtiness and a sense of self-importance. We must rid ourselves of even the smallest amount of pride to be able to achieve the true benefits of fulfilling the *mitzvos* of Pesach.

Freedom is therefore not something achieved just once and maintained in a static state. As Jews, we must constantly reflect upon ourselves, ensure that we are not living with excess pride and a sense of separation from other Jews, and look for ways to build a connection with Hashem. The exodus that we may have experienced yesterday no longer applies today; today’s exodus will not apply tomorrow. We have the potential to reach new spiritual heights and levels of connection to one another, to Torah and *mitzvos*, and to Hashem — each and every day.

Our human composition, of body and soul, reaches its highest potential when we utilize every aspect of our connection to Hashem, through Torah and *mitzvos*. This personal and spiritual

freedom applies to the life of every single Jew. As we perform the seemingly mundane physical tasks in preparation for the holiday, we have the potential to turn each of those moments into a connection to the true meaning of the holiday. When we bind ourselves together — as the Jewish people did at *Har Sinai* — and fulfill the highest expression of our *neshamos* and the purpose of our creation, we can unlock and achieve the true freedom experienced by the Jews after they left *Mitzrayim*.

May our actions merit the achievement of the ultimate freedom and *geulah* with the coming of *Moshiach*, speedily in our days.

Wishing you a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach* and a holiday filled with true freedom!

(Compiled from the teachings and public letters of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory.)

Chametz After Pesach 2023

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 not be purchased from the following locations following Pesach:

- One should not purchase *chametz* until 2 weeks after Pesach from any major Jewish-owned supermarket that does not sell its *chametz*.
- One should ideally not purchase *chametz* until 4 weeks after Pesach from supermarkets that purchase *chametz* from Jewish distributors that do not sell their *chametz*. This includes Giant, Safeway, and Target.
- One should not purchase liquor until Shavuot from a Jewish-owned liquor store that does not sell its *chametz*.

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- **Chametz may be purchased from all Capitol K establishments and caterers one hour after Pesach 2023.**

- **Chametz may be purchased from the following stores in the Greater Washington area after Pesach 2023:**

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

*One may purchase *chametz* after Pesach 2023 at this store throughout the United States.

A Day in the Life of a Mashgiach

*Rabbi David Frost
Mashgiach, Capitol K*

While I have had the honor to serve as a *mashgiach* in Kansas City, in Savannah, and even in Eretz Yisrael, it was only here in Greater Washington, working for the Vaad HaRabanim, that I have truly learned how to be a successful *mashgiach*.

We are very fortunate in Greater Washington to have a variety of locations in which to procure kosher food, including bakeries, restaurants, and two kosher supermarkets. It is the responsibility of the Vaad's *kashrus* arm — and, by extension, its *mashgichim* — to ensure the *kashrus* of each of our kosher establishments and all the food therein.

I am currently the *mashgiach* at Moti's Market and its companion restaurant, Al Ha'esh. The variety of products offered in these twin establishments — fresh produce; refrigerated and shelf-stable packaged products; raw meat, fish, and poultry; prepared pareve, dairy, and meat foods; packaged and store-prepared baked goods; and a complete restaurant menu — gives you a sense of the wide scope of the responsibilities of a *mashgiach* in this environment.

It is the *mashgiach* who opens up in the morning and it is the *mashgiach* who locks up at night. In the intervening hours, the *mashgiach* must ensure that every item that is delivered, every food that is cooked or prepared, and every delicacy that is served is kosher and prepared according to the stringent standards of *halachah*.

The day starts in the bakery, where homemade pita bread, fresh challahs, and a variety of cookies and cakes are baked. Each ingredient must have been checked when delivered and the ovens are lit by the *mashgiach* to ensure that the baked goods are *pas yisroel*.

Shortly thereafter, the *mashgiach* opens the meat and chicken department. Meat and poultry deliveries are carefully inspected for kosher certification. It is the *mashgiach's* responsibility to determine if all meats and chickens and their preparation conform to the Vaad's *kashrus* standards, whether the meat is acceptable to Chabad customers, and if the offerings conform to the Beit Yosef standards observed by Sephardic shoppers.

Throughout the day, the *mashgiach* must verify the *kashrus* of items delivered, both those to be offered for sale to customers on the shelves and those to be included as ingredients in food preparation. The *kashrus* certification of each item delivered must be verified carefully by the *mashgiach*.

The *mashgiach* must supervise food preparation in each of three kitchens at Moti's Market — meat, dairy, and pareve — where dishes are prepared for the deli, for the restaurant, and for catering. Common to food preparation in all three of these kitchens is the use of fresh produce. Whether you are purchasing a falafel sandwich, a container of tabouleh, or a refreshing salad, the fresh vegetables included in that dish must be carefully inspected for the presence of insects,

both dead and alive. This time-consuming process occupies a significant portion of the *mashgiach's* day in a kosher establishment.

As the day progresses, the responsibility to oversee food production in the Moti's Market kitchens wanes. It is at this time that Al Ha'esh, its companion restaurant, requires increasing attention on the part of the *mashgiach*.

Fires are lit, ingredients are checked, and vegetables are inspected. Food preparation must be observed and, in particular, the preparation of chicken liver must be supervised. It is unusual to offer chicken liver on the menu in the United States, as chicken liver requires a grilling area — separate from the beef and chicken — in which the blood is removed via the grilling process. Separate utensils and skewers must be maintained for the chicken liver at all times. This process requires careful vigilance on the part of the *mashgiach*.

During the course of the restaurant shift, customers often query the *mashgiach* about the *kashrus* status of menu offerings — whether items are Glatt Kosher, are acceptable to Chabad patrons, or conform to Sephardic Beit Yosef standards. Some Sephardic customers may also request that the *mashgiach* personally place the food on the grill, as is their custom.

Each spring, the work at Moti's Market truly goes into high gear in advance of Pesach. The meat department's prep areas, equipment, and coolers are cleaned of *chametz* and *kashered* around Purim time so customers may make their home preparations at their own pace. As the holiday nears, the kitchens are cleaned and *kashered* so Pesach foods may be prepared. Large quantities of Kosher for Passover foods are delivered and shelved in Passover areas; the Pesach certification on each of these items must be carefully verified.

As the store continues to sell *chametz* items right up until Pesach, the *mashgiach* must constantly verify that all products on the Pesach shelves are indeed kosher for Pesach. Shoppers may erroneously place *chametz* items on the Pesach shelves, so the *mashgiach* must check and re-check the Pesach shelves to verify that all products have Passover certification. The customer, too, is reminded to carefully check each item they place in their cart to ensure that it has Pesach certification.

The additional work required to prepare for Pesach cannot be handled by one person alone. For this reason, one or more additional *mashgichim* are assigned to Moti's Market to assist with the increased pre-Pesach responsibilities.

The *mashgiach* provides a necessary and valuable service to the Jewish community, assisting the community as it maintains a kosher lifestyle. The *mashgiach* also has an opportunity to assist the business itself. The vigilant *mashgiach* may observe problems that require intervention, such as a refrigerator that is not cooling properly or an oven that is not accurately maintaining cooking temperatures. Reporting these observed anomalies can make the *mashgiach* a valued member of the business team who contributes to the business' success.

It is critical for the *mashgiach* to remember to be a positive role model to business owners, employees, and customers alike. There is great opportunity to create a *Kiddush Hashem* in one's dealings with others. On a daily basis, the *mashgiach* can demonstrate that it's not just what goes

into one's mouth that is important but, rather, what comes *out* as well. As the *mashgiach* explains the insect checking process to an employee, for example, he must consider the feelings of others when he speaks. When the *mashgiach* must briefly introduce the concept of kosher food to someone who wishes to send a platter to a friend who has suffered a loss, he must similarly speak with respect and patience to the uninformed consumer.

Hashgacha work can be very difficult and time-consuming, but it also can be very fulfilling and rewarding. It is truly an honor to help our community observe *kashrus* in all its facets. My position in Moti's Market and Al Ha'esh provides me with ample and varied opportunities to actively contribute to this process.

More Than Holding Up the Walls

Beryl Randall
Mashgiach, Capitol K

As a native of DC, I was thinking about the historic implications of managing a kosher event in a Washington Jewish venue certainly not known for its adherence to *kashrus* and *halacha*. There I was, being the *mashgiach*. As I was setting up everything kosher, the social director came over to me and said, “I wouldn’t know what kosher is if it bit me on the nose.” The event went well and, as I walked about checking on things, I saw someone I’d known for a long time. This person didn’t comment on how extraordinary it was to have a kosher event in such a location but, rather, asked what I was doing there. I answered that I was the *mashgiach* — to which the person responded, “Oh, you’re holding up the walls.”

Having been a *mashgiach* now for some years, I can attest that it is a bit more than holding up the walls. I have been the *mashgiach* at a variety of businesses, including restaurants, caterers, hotels, and other establishments. Food establishments tend to be very busy and a *mashgiach* always has to keep up. It is necessary to be a diplomat: dealing with employees, owners, rabbis, and customers.

There aren’t many instances where an employee deliberately does something wrong (though this does happen). More often than not, it is a case where the employee forgets or misunderstands the procedures in place. I have found that getting to know the employees and explaining proper procedures is important and prevents problems from occurring.

It helps greatly that I studied Spanish for six years and can communicate with employees in that language. Several times I have encountered employees who speak very little English at all; even those who do speak English appreciate being able to communicate in either language. For several years, at one position, I spoke very little English all day long — most employees spoke Spanish and another spoke to me in Hebrew.

Being a native of the Washington area has helped in numerous ways. One non-Jewish employee in an important position turned out to have been someone with whom I attended junior high and high school; checking on his department was thus smoother and simpler.

In the course of a day, I often check the *hechsherim* (*kashrus* symbols) on products. I know the main *hechsherim* — and most of the obscure ones — but, every so often, I am confronted with a *hechsher* with which I am not familiar. In those instances, I check with Rabbi Holland (Rabbinical Coordinator of Kashrus, Capitol K).

Readers would likely be quite surprised at the number of non-approved products that show up in kosher places. In a way, finding them is a bit like being an auditor: one looks for items which don't belong. Do actual non-kosher products sometimes appear? Usually I am checking out the reliability of a *hechsher*, but items with no *hechsher* do sometimes show up — and completely non-kosher items as well. The time a box of bacon and three other cartons of non-kosher meats arrived at a kosher establishment perhaps tops them all.

There is a reason owners of kosher establishments do not function as *mashgichim*. When I find a non-approved product, which occurs fairly often, they are not necessarily thrilled to pieces or thanking me for catching something. After all, this discovery creates extra work for them to return the item and restock with an approved alternative. Ensuring that I have a good working relationship with the owner can certainly help in that regard.

After a while, one develops a sense of what to look for. Suppliers from companies that carry both kosher and non-kosher products may sometimes ship the wrong items, so I am extra vigilant when a shipment arrives from such a company. Even suppliers of only kosher products have been known to ship non-approved items. Because they simply function as distributors of closed, packaged products, they are not necessarily under any rabbinical supervision.

I seem to be called a variety of names — not all meant to be complimentary: *SuperMashgiach*, *the Sherlock Holmes of Kashruth*, and *Mr. Keeping it Kosher* are some that I've heard. One learns to take it all in stride and try to see the big picture.

A great rabbi once told me that the true job of the *mashgiach* is to field complaints from all directions: from owners, *rabanim*, and customers. Every so often, though, one of the rabbis of the Vaad will take the time to express gratitude for my work.

At those times, I confess that I am actually yearning for the approval of Rabbi Rabinowitz *zt"l*, the longtime *rav* of Keshet Israel. Anybody of a certain age who grew up in the Washington area and had any sort of real Jewish education had Rabbi Rabinowitz as a teacher, myself included. Long after we, his *talmidim*, were grown, Rabbi Rabinowitz would have a line of people waiting to greet him at Soviet Jewry rallies or pro-Israel demonstrations. His efforts to educate and train a generation of committed Jews were tremendous. Working as a *mashgiach* in the community in which I grew up is my modest way of honoring his efforts.

It can be long and tiring, but being a *mashgiach* is my way of doing something for the *kehilla*. It definitely is more than holding up the walls.

The Mashgiach Shortage: Identifying the Problem and Searching for Solutions

Rabbi Moshe Walter
Woodside Synagogue – Ahavas Torah

By now, you have likely heard that the Vaad HaRabanim's Capitol K is suffering from a dearth of *mashgichim*. What you probably have not heard is that every *kashrus* agency in the country — including the OU, Star-K, Kof-K, OK, and smaller *vaadim* in every city north, south, and west of Silver Spring — is struggling with the very same problem.

Enter the Mashgiach Shortage Crisis. The problem is an existential one that causes supermarkets and restaurants to be unable to open and commissaries to cease operation. The *mashgiach* is the cog in the engine that allows the *kashrus* machine to run. Without our *mashgichim*, production is slowed and kosher food becomes harder to acquire — and significantly more expensive when available.

In the Vaad's recent [Yamim Noraim Journal, September 2022](#), we interviewed Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, Kashrus Administrator of the Chicago Rabbinical Council (CRC) and Executive Director of the Association of Kashrus Organizations (AKO) regarding issues related to *kashrus* and *hashgacha*. The goal of the interview was to give community members more insight into *kashrus* operations locally and nationally and a deeper understanding of what is happening in the field.

We asked Rabbi Fishbane: What challenges do you see in the field of *kashrus* today?

Rabbi Fishbane responded:

There is no question that hiring and maintaining adequate *mashgichim* (*kashrus* supervisors) is a very difficult challenge facing local *Vaadei HaKashrus* today. This is partly due to the general upheaval in the workplace due to the Covid pandemic, which has resulted in a lack of people interested in taking these positions. Local *Vaadei HaKashrus* need to work to increase the attractiveness of these positions by raising salaries, identifying *mashgichim* with enhanced titles, and contracting with vendors to ensure that *mashgichim* are not assigned menial tasks. *Mashgichim* should feel pride in their work and should be able to adequately support their families.

Allow me to elaborate upon Rabbi Fishbane's comments and suggestions.

The most salient reason for the shortage of *mashgichim* is, in large part, the COVID years, during which many workers, in general, stopped working, found other means of employment, or retired early. The food industry, in particular, suffered greatly from COVID; the lack of employees interested in returning to the food industry caused business closures, bankruptcy, and severe supply chain breakdowns.

Similarly, many *mashgichim* began looking for other employment and left the field of *kashrus* supervision. While this was a challenge during the COVID years, it was still manageable — as business was slow, and the supply and demand for *mashgichim* were roughly equal. With the very strong return to in-person catered events and jammed restaurants in the post-Covid era, the problem is now a very real one.

While it is important to identify a problem, it is even more critical to find solutions. In that vein, in July 2023 I led an AKO mini-conference entitled “Sharing Ideas to Help Solve the Food Service Mashgiach Shortage.” The goal of the Zoom conference, attended by over fifty *kashrus* professionals worldwide, was to brainstorm and devise creative ideas to attract and retain talented *mashgichim*. While each city has its own unique challenges and a variety of ways to implement solutions, here are some of the practical suggestions that are universal, actionable, and currently implemented in an effort to address this problem.

RAISING SALARIES

The most obvious solution to attract a new cadre of capable *mashgichim* is to raise the minimum wage for a *mashgiach*. The Vaad is working with its proprietors and *mashgichim* to reach a salary that matches the *mashgiach's* responsibilities, experience, and job description. Each location is different and each position is different.

While this would seem to be a simple solution, it is not: Increased food costs and higher monthly payrolls in general mean that the profit margins for kosher providers are no longer where they used to be. These higher costs are transferred to the consumer by raising prices in stores, in restaurants, and on catering events. Consumers then find it necessary to eat out less often, limit their take-out purchases, and be more fiscally cautious about their food purchases in general. As a result, revenues in stores and restaurants are lower than they used to be. This revolving door is a never-ending problem that we cannot seem to shake.

PROVIDING BENEFITS

If raising salaries is not a complete panacea, what about identifying other benefits to help our *mashgichim*? For example, we could ensure that all our *mashgichim* receive a discount on their grocery bills and special benefits on food orders before the Yamim Tovim. Moreover, our community could create a fund to benefit our *mashgichim* with these and other “soft costs,” including *Daled Minim*, matzah, and similar items.

The problem with this proposed initiative is that the average community member does not understand and appreciate what our *mashgichim* do, and may view such an initiative as unnecessary or actually benefiting the proprietor. Hence, a third suggestion follows.

OFFERING HONOR AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Our community has done an incredible job of raising the esteem of our teachers, *rebbeim*, and *moros*, who devote their lives to educating our children, day in and day out. We all recognize the dedication and commitment of our Torah teachers and we try to give this population, *Shevet Levi*, the honor they rightfully deserve.

We must now move in this direction with our *mashgichim*, many of whom dedicate all their waking hours to ensuring that we have kosher food to grace our tables. We need to honor our *mashgichim* and inform our community about the vital work they perform — so that we can all better understand and appreciate what they do for us.

Please see the articles in this section by two of the Vaad's very talented and experienced *mashgichim* to appreciate better their role in our community. Additionally, please know that taking a moment to acknowledge a *mashgiach's* efforts when you see him or her goes a very long way.

ESTABLISHING A DATABASE FOR HASHGACHA POSITIONS; RECRUITMENT

A national database of job openings — that all *kashrus* agencies and potential *mashgichim* can access across the country — should be created, along the lines of LinkedIn and ZipRecruiter. While highlighting job offerings around the country, we need to do a better job of recruiting *mashgichim*, advertising job opportunities, and proactively searching for talented and capable *mashgichim*.

The Vaad HaRabanim recently ran a very successful *mashgiach* training session that we hope will inspire a new group of individuals to enter this critical field. If you are interested in applying, or to learn more about becoming a *mashgiach*, please contact Rabbi Dovid Stern, Director of Field Operations for the Capitol K, at dstern@vaadgw.org.

We hope to see these ideas implemented successfully, gain more traction locally and nationally, and help retain and attract more capable, talented *mashgichim*. We must work together to raise awareness of the important role of *mashgichim* in our community, acknowledge their holy work, and help this special group of *klei kodesh*.

On behalf of the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington and our wonderful community, we take this opportunity to thank and salute our *mashgichim* for their incredible efforts and (often all-too-thankless) work to ensure the highest standards of *kashrus* supervision for which the Capitol K is so well known.

End-of-Life Preparations: Caring for Ourselves and Others

*Rabbi Dovid Rosenbaum
Young Israel Shomrai Emunah*

We spend so much time planning. Despite all our efforts, many situations arise that we could not have predicted. We pray to Hashem that it will be after many years — but we recognize that our final day will ultimately arrive.

While contemplating it is difficult, there are certain decisions and plans that we can make while we are well that may provide, with Hashem's help, for a much smoother path for those involved in our care whenever it is time for us to leave This World. In addition to clarifying our wishes, we are also performing an act of kindness for those who will bear this awesome responsibility later on.

DECISIONS FOR ONE'S CARE

Many medical questions can arise near the end of life. Frequently the patient is not in a position to make his/her own decisions. Who should represent you in the event that you are unable to speak for yourself? If that person is not able to serve as your representative, who should be the alternate?

Many end-of-life medical questions have halachic implications. Which rabbi would you wish your representative to consult? If that specific rabbi is unavailable, who should be the alternate?

The following links contain useful medical directive forms, with instructions and guidance:

- The Agudath Israel of America Halachic Medical Directive:

http://nasck.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/maryland_halachic_medical_directive.pdf

- The Rabbinical Council of America Halachic Health Care Proxy:

<https://www.nasck.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/rca-halachic-living-will.pdf>

It is best to share decisions regarding one's representative and halachic authority with all relatives who may be involved, not only those whom you have chosen to designate. It is common for each relative in such stressful situations to reach out to his/her rabbi looking for guidance. Different rabbis will likely suggest different approaches, only adding to the confusion of the moment. If the family knows in advance which rabbi to contact, and which family member should be contacting him and interfacing with medical professionals, the process will go that much more smoothly at a time that is already fraught with challenges.

Burial is another issue to consider. Where would you like to be buried? There are various possibilities: in Israel, with deceased relatives, and/or near living relatives. Many of us may find this decision difficult. If we feel conflicted about this subject, think how much *our relatives* may feel conflicted (and possibly with each other) if we do not make our wishes clear. The long-standing Jewish custom is to purchase our burial plot in advance and not to leave this task to surviving relatives (see *Shiltai Giborim*, end of the sixth *perek* of *Sanhedrin*).

DECISIONS FOR OTHERS' CARE

We never know how much time we have in This World. It is vital for young parents to consider who would be the appropriate person(s) to raise their children in the horrible event that neither parent was living — and to confirm that these parties would be willing to serve in that role, if need be. Once this decision has been made, one should contact an attorney to prepare a will to address this and many other matters. It is worth noting that there are halachic issues that arise in the preparation of a will. Please consult your rabbi for guidance.

Additionally, it is essential for parents to have a life insurance policy to provide properly for the family's financial needs at a time when so many other voids will be apparent.

These matters require significant thought and will likely necessitate discussion with others. While difficult, these reflections and discussions are yet another way for us to be kind to our loved ones. May we all merit lengthy days and many opportunities to perform wonderful *mitzvos*.

Chesed v'Emes: For Yourself, Your Family, and Klal Yisrael

Rabbi Elchonon Zohn

Director, Chevra Kadisha, Vaad HaRabonim of Queens

Founding President, NASCK: The National Association of Chevra Kadisha

The work of the *chevra kadisha*, to which I have devoted my life, is called *chesed shel emes*. Derived from Yaakov's request of his son Yosef, וְעֲשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת — Do 'kindness and truth' with me (Bereishis 47:29) — it is most commonly understood as Rashi interprets it: *Chesed* without expectation of reward.

In a most profound thought that I was privileged to hear from Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l, he explained that every society has a desire to perform *chesed* for those who die — but that *chesed* is defined by their own feelings and culture, which tend to change. The *chesed shel emes* which the *chevra kadisha* performs for a deceased Jew must be absolutely guided and defined by the ultimate, and completely objective, *emes*: that of *Toras Emes*, the truth according to the Torah.

Chesed is part of the spiritual DNA of every Jew. The Gemara teaches:

שְׁלֹשָׁה סִמְנֵי יֵשׁ בְּאוֹמָהּ זֹאת: הַרְחֻמָּנִים, וְהִבִּישָׁנִין, וְגוֹמְלֵי חֶסְדִּים.

Three signature traits are in this nation:

They are compassionate, humble, and perform acts of kindness. (Yevamos 79a)

Nevertheless, not every act of *chesed* we wish to do is appropriate. There is a well-known road paved with good intentions down which we should never travel.

We strive to be *baalei chesed* (those who perform kindness) because it is a *mitzvah* to emulate Hashem:

אַחֲרַי ה' אֵלֵקִיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ...

After Hashem Your G-d shall you walk... (Devarim 13:5)

As the Gemara states:

הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בִּיקַר חוֹלִים... אַף אַתָּה בִּיקַר חוֹלִים.

הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נִיחַם אֲבֵלִים... אַף אַתָּה נִיחַם אֲבֵלִים.

הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא קָבַר מֵתִים... אַף אַתָּה קָבַר מֵתִים.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu visited the sick; so too you should visit the sick.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu consoled mourners; so too you should console mourners.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu buried the dead; so too you should bury the dead. (Sotah 14a)

The only way to perform the *mitzvah* of doing *chesed* is to practice it in the manner that the Torah directs.

In each morning's *tefillah*, we immediately follow *Bircas HaTorah* with *divrei Torah* from three different sources. The last is the following:

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהם בעולם הזה ותקרו קיימת לעולם הבא, ואלו הן :
כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים, והשפמת בית המדרש שחרית וערבית,
והכנסת אורחים, ובקור חולים, והכנסת כלה, ולוית המת, ועיון תפלה,
והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו – ותלמוד תורה כנגד כלם.

*Man enjoys the fruit of the following mitzvos in this world,
and receives their principal reward in the World to Come:
honoring one's father and mother, performing deeds of kindness,
early attendance in the Beis Midrash morning and evening, providing hospitality to guests,
visiting the sick, participating in making a wedding, accompanying the dead to the grave,
concentrating on the meaning of prayers, making peace between people —
and the study of Torah is equal to them all. (Peah 1:1, Shabbos 127a)*

Classically, the meaning of *v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam* is that the study of Torah is equivalent to performing all of these important *mitzvos*. I heard a profound thought from Rav Yosef Grunblatt *zt"l* of the Queens Jewish Center which imparts a beautiful insight. He suggested that *v'Talmud Torah k'neged kulam* means that the Torah must be reflected upon each of these *mitzvos*, to define and refine how they are to be performed. It is analogous to the use of the word *k'neged* when Hashem created Chava as an *ezer k'negdo* for Adam: the intention was not to create a counterforce, but a counterpart. Chava's role was to complement Adam, helping to define and refine him, enabling him to perfectly fulfill his mission in life.

Years after hearing this insight, it struck me that the particular deeds mentioned in this *beraisa* are *mitzvos* that everyone thinks they already know how to perform. After all, don't the performance of *kibud av v'eim* (honoring one's mother and father) and making peace among friends just require "common sense?" Yet it is *precisely with these mitzvos* that the *beraisa* emphasizes the need for the guidance of Torah. When not wholly defined by Torah, *chesed* is influenced instead by the culture that surrounds us. The power of surrounding culture is both pervasive and imperceptible. We absorb it without noticing and without question, and it transforms our ideas and our actions — even actions that we believe are driven by Torah.

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l*, *mashgiach* of the Mir, notes: Over and over again, Moshe Rabbeinu warns the *dor deiah* — the people who witnessed *Matan Torah* with their very own eyes — about the need to protect themselves from the influence of the nations surrounding them. This is actually the most common admonition in the Torah.

In addition, the Alter of Kelm *zt"l* makes the powerful point that the *lo sa'aseh* (negative commandment) prohibiting this influence reads:

וּבַחֲקֵיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ.

You should not follow their laws. (Vayikra 18:3)

In so doing, the Torah uses the term *chukim*, the laws we don't understand, as opposed to the term *mishpatim*, the laws that "make sense" to us. The Torah speaks about *chukos hagoyim*, not *mishpatei hagoyim*, to refer to the ways of the Gentiles, the Alter says, in order to alert us to the overwhelming power of cultural bias and influence which can drive us to absorb and imitate behaviors that do not even have a rational basis (*Da'as Chochmah u'Mussar, Chelek 2*, pp. 301-304).

THE MISSION OF CHESED SHEL EMES

Even though all *chesed* must be defined by *Toras Emes*, it is significant to note that only the work of the *chevra kadisha* is actually called *chesed shel emes*. This is because everything a *chevra kadisha* does has an even deeper connection to *emes*. As Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt"l* explained to me, each and every *minhag* reflects our *ikarei ha'emunah* (basic tenets of belief): belief in an eternal *neshamah* (eternal soul), *schar v'onesh* (reward and punishment), *Olam Haba* (the World to Come), and *techiyas hameisim* (the Resurrection of the Dead). There is also an understanding that we are meaningfully preparing the person in our care to transition to the *Olam Ha'emes* (the World of Truth).

At the same time, there is little found in *Shulchan Aruch* or in codified halachic sources on how best to perform the details of this *chesed*. It is mostly based on *minhagim* and *takanos* (rabbinic ordinances), a *mesorah* passed down through generations. I believe this is one of the reasons that *chevros kadisha* have historically clung — and must continue to cling — to their *mesorah* and *minhagim*. In a letter of approbation from the Veitzener Rav, Rav Tzvi Hersh Meisels *zt"l*, to the Jewish Sacred Society of Chicago upon the adoption of its *Guidelines and Procedures*, the Veitzener Rav exhorts them not to deviate from their *minhagim* even *k'chut ha'si'arah* — by the breadth of a single hair. The *minhagim* of the *chevra kadisha* are sacrosanct, beyond any dispute or question.

As the head of a large *chevra*, and of NASCK, an association of *chevros kadisha*, I have always felt deeply that my first responsibility is to maintain and strengthen the *kavod hameis* of the *niftarim* (honor for the departed) whom we serve and the Jewish customs that define our practice. That is also the obligation of all members of every "Sacred Society." In a world as open to cultural influence as ours, that may be difficult — but that only makes the task even more sacred.

When I began working in the *chevra kadisha* back in the 1970s, the vast majority of Jews were buried. Period. The cultural battle then was for immediate burial rather than embalming, for a closed casket rather than viewing, for *tahara* (ritual cleansing) and *tachrichim* (burial shrouds) rather than Bubbe's cherished dress and Zaidy's favorite suit. Fewer than five percent of Jews in Queens merited to have *kevrach k'halachah* (burial according to *halachah*) at that time. *Tahara* was mainly relegated to very observant families and to instances where cemeteries or burial

societies required it as a prerequisite for burial. *B'chasdei Hashem*, we have made significant progress in those battles. Today, many Jews who are buried choose to have a *tahara* and *tachrichim*.

The even more significant problem that we face today is that not all Jews are buried. In fact, a majority are not. Many Jews choose above-ground or mausoleum entombment, which is contrary to *halachah* and — to add to the problem — frequently requires embalming. An even greater tragedy is that, in today's world, cremation has become an acceptable — even preferable — choice for the “disposition” of a body, even for Jews. And it's not only cremation. We also have options like alkaline hydrolysis, also known as “aquamation,” which is nothing other than dissolving a body and then flushing it away. To add insult to injury, the state of New York just legalized “human composting,” becoming the sixth state to do so.

Those making these choices may believe they are doing *chesed*, but it is certainly devoid of *emes*.

CHESED V'EMES: FOR YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, AND KLAL YISRAEL

NASCK, the National Association of Chevra Kadisha, was founded in 1996 to promote appropriate standards for *tahara* in *chevros kadisha* across North America. We started with training sessions, lectures, and answering the many complex questions that can arise in the *tahara* process. We expanded our mission to include such *kevurah k'halachah* concerns as avoiding autopsy and burial on legal holidays.

About ten years ago, after a number of complicated and heartbreaking cremation cases in which people who chose to be buried were cremated because they had left nothing in writing, NASCK began addressing the epidemic of cremation.

With that mission in mind, we created the EMES card, a wallet-sized card which attaches to one's ID or driver's license, that states the carrier's objection to autopsy and cremation. At that point, it made sense to transform the EMES card into a quasi-legal Halachic Living Will, instructing that all emergency medical decisions are to be directed by the agent and rabbi named on the card. Today, where medical ethics and mores are based on the prevailing judgments of “quality of life,” a Living Will is truly *chesed* only when it is halachic, guided by the Torah's understanding of life's value and sanctity. People do not want to suffer, and do not want their loved ones to suffer, at the end of their lives, but if their only guidance is from a secular healthcare team — however well-meaning — they can end up making choices the Torah may well consider to be *retzichah*, murder.

The Mishnah tells us that “*מִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה* — *One mitzvah leads to another*” (*Pirkei Avos* 4:2). We quickly realized that few people are aware of the host of *chasadim* they must perform — for themselves, for their families, and for *Klal Yisrael* — and that these *chasadim* need to be informed by *emes*. Thus was born our Shabbos Vayechi program. Every year on the week of *Parashas Vayechi*, we draw attention to the following important end-of-life issues, which every responsible Jew must address — proactively and with the guidance of *Toras Emes*:

- Understand the difference between the Torah view — that life itself has sanctity and value — and the secular view, which judges the value of life by its “quality.”
- Enact a Halachic Living Will, naming an agent and a rabbi you trust to safeguard the Torah’s view of life’s sanctity and value.
- Have adequate life insurance. It provides you with peace of mind and is a *chesed* both for your family and for *Klal Yisrael*.
- Make a decision about your place of burial, and make sure that it is halachically appropriate. Even if you are not ready to purchase a plot, have a plan in case of emergency.
- Make funeral arrangements in advance. It is a *chesed* to you, especially if you are alone or have family members unfamiliar with proper Jewish tradition. It is also a *chesed* to your family, providing them with direction and allowing them to be together during the fragile time between death and burial, rather than busy making a multitude of decisions with a funeral director.
- Care for your elderly parents. Find out if they are prepared and offer your help if they want or need it.
- Write a *tzava’ah* (a last will and testament) that complies with *halachah*. Ask your rabbi or use a lawyer who is knowledgeable in the applicable *halachos*.
- Leave an ethical will articulating the legacy you want to leave. The process of writing it will help you clarify your deepest values and the document itself is an eternal gift to your family.
- Open a conversation with a Jew in your circle who may be one of the fifty percent of Jews who choose cremation. Caring for the *meis mitzvah* of our time (a Jew who needs burial) was the focus of *Shabbos Vayechi* 5783. Visit www.endcremation.org for more information, and consider bringing a workshop to your community on this subject.
- Strengthen your community’s *chevra kadisha*. Join if you can. If you are a community rabbi or *chevra* member, be sure the *chevra* has established procedures and proper training.

For more information on all these topics, visit shabbosvayechi.org.

ADHERENCE TO MINHAGIM IN OUR CHEVROS KADISHA

The need for *chesed shel emes* to be defined by *Toras Emes* and authentic *minhagei Yisrael* applies even in the world of *chevra kadisha*. Changes in contemporary society have the potential to wreak havoc with how *chevros kadisha* practice their sacred work. Social media and chat groups encourage a free exchange of ideas, experiences, and practices between members of different *chevros kadisha*. The increased mobility of the Jewish population has led to members of a *chevra kadisha* joining a *chevra* in another city or a different *chevra* within their own city. This can easily create confusion, inappropriate changes in practice, or even conflict within a *chevra kadisha*.

Awareness of *chevra kadisha* in the non-Orthodox Jewish world has also grown; this is, in general, a welcome development. Unfortunately, it has brought with it dilution — and at times distortion — of our traditional *hashkafah* and *minhagim*, introducing ideas and practices that are not defined by *Toras Emes*.

There is a need to carefully codify the authentic *minhagim* of each of our *chevros*, and to institute ongoing oversight of those practices by *rabanim* and *chevra kadisha* members who are knowledgeable of, and have fealty to, *mesorah* and *minhagei Yisrael*. In this way, we can ensure that our *chesed shel emes* will always be *chesed v'emes*.

A Brief Guide to Funeral and Burial Arrangements

Devorah Grayson
Chevra Kadisha of Greater Washington

FOR LOCAL BURIAL

- **Identify a funeral home**

Prices vary from one funeral home to another. One should inquire about pricing from each vendor. Prices may change annually.

- **Hines Rinaldi:** 301-622-2290. Be sure to ask for the 'Jewish Funeral Package,' which may represent savings for the family.
- **Sagel Bloomfield:** 301-340-1400
- **Torchinsky:** 202-541-1001

- **Request a traditional Jewish burial**

This will inform the funeral home that you want a *tahara* for the deceased.

You must request a *shomer* separately. This may be a separate charge. The family may also provide their own *shomrim*.

- **Identify a local cemetery**

Plot prices depend on the cemetery selected. Expect additional fees for plot maintenance and burial. If the plot is purchased at the time of death, many cemeteries will waive the burial fee.

- **Death certificate**

The funeral home will ask the family the following questions for a death certificate and will provide the certificate to the family:

Deceased's legal name	Marital status at time of death
Location at the time of death	First and last name of deceased's father
Home address	First and maiden name of deceased's mother
Date of birth	For a man: wife's first name and maiden name
Social Security number	For a woman: husband's first and last name
Job title, field of work	Next of kin [person taking responsibility, who will receive the death certificate, how they are related, and their address]
Country of origin, including city and state	Number of death certificates desired
Highest level of education	
If they served in the armed forces	

FOR BURIAL IN ISRAEL

- **Choose a funeral home**

A number of local funeral homes handle burial in Israel, including Sagel-Bloomfield and Torchinsky.

Transport to Israel can be arranged by the local funeral home or by Maalim B’Kodesh. As with a local burial, request a traditional Jewish funeral, which includes a *tahara*. Ask for or provide *shomrim*.

Make sure to obtain a letter from your synagogue rabbi attesting that the deceased had an Orthodox *tahara*.

- **How to buy a plot in Israel**

To buy in Eretz HaChaim in Bet Shemesh, reach out to:

Maalim B’Kodesh: 718-435-6100, or

Aryeh Mandel (a broker in Brooklyn): 347-564-4141 or 718-851-8925

The Maalim B’Kodesh number is monitored from 8 am to 12 am. An answering service covers the other hours. They are closed on Shabbos.

Maalim B’Kodesh will connect the family with the cemetery for sales. They can also make arrangements for transport, coordinating with a local funeral home or working directly with a funeral home in New York.

- **Transport to Israel**

Currently, JFK is the closest airport that will transport a casket.

Family will need to have a form of identification for the deceased — a current or expired passport for a U.S. citizen, a *te’udat zehut* or Israeli passport for an Israeli citizen. Family will need to answer all the questions listed above for the death certificate.

- **Additional information required for transport to Israel**

- Hebrew name of the deceased and whether their father was a Kohen or Levi
- Family member’s email and two contact numbers
- The name of the person flying with the deceased and a contact number in Israel to coordinate funeral timing

- **Security scanning at the airport**

Family will be asked whether the deceased has any metal in his or her body and, if so, where it is located.

Family will be asked, to the best of their knowledge, to list all surgeries and identify scars on the deceased, including knee or hip replacements, etc. This information should be given to the funeral home, who will deal with airport security.

The person accompanying the deceased should bring cash for tips, which can smooth the way if speed is of the essence for a pre-Shabbos burial.

- **Additional fees**

Expect a number of fees payable to the different organizations involved. These include:

- The funeral home price (see above)
- Airfare to Israel: Expect a one-way price of more than \$2000 for the casket.
- Cemetery plot maintenance fee of \$1800
- Burial fee
- Cemetery/transport broker fee: This fee pays for the broker from Maalim B'Kodesh to arrange transport from the airport to the cemetery. Expect a fee of between \$1800 – \$3000 for this broker.

We strongly recommend buying a plot in advance. Prices increase regularly.

A Snapshot in Time: The Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington, Circa 1964

Shlomo D. Katz

If you were to drop a typical Washington, DC Orthodox synagogue member of the late 1940s–early 1960s into the community we know today, he would not recognize his hometown. In the Washington that person knew, some shuls had stronger *minyanim* on weekdays than on Shabbos, as many “Orthodox” Jews owned retail shops that did their biggest business on Friday night and Saturday. *Mechitzos* in shuls were getting lower — or disappearing entirely. Congregations were merging due to lack of attendees or were leaving Orthodoxy to retain and attract members. Most children attended public school and received a few hours of Jewish education per week, at most. In short, Washington of that era was viewed, even by some of its rabbis, as a non-religious town with no Jewish future.

Much of the credit for the community’s turnaround goes to the Vaad HaRabanim/Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington members who posed for this photograph in approximately 1964:



Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington, circa 1964. Standing, left to right: Rabbi Hillel Klavan, Rabbi Harry Kaufman, Rabbi Gedaliah Anemer, Rabbi Philip Rabinowitz. Seated, left to right: Rabbi Chaim Williamowsky, Rabbi Moshe Levinson, Rabbi Simon Burnsein, Rabbi Dr. Arthur Bogner.

This article presents short biographies and reminiscences about each rabbi, presented in the order in which they arrived in Washington, gleaned from the memories of those who knew them, newspaper articles,¹ and other documents.² Of course, these vignettes are not complete biographies and some readers may remember certain incidents or dates differently. In this season when we recall the birth pangs of the Jewish People, it is our hope that this article will give the reader an appreciation of the challenges these rabbis faced and their roles in building the thriving *makom Torah* (Torah community) we enjoy today.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Levinson zt"l (seated, second from left)

Rabbi Levinson was born in Yerushalayim in the summer of 1898 and received his rabbinical training there. After briefly holding a rabbinic post in the Galilee, Rabbi Levinson came to America in 1924 and led a congregation in Greenport, NY. In 1929, Rabbi Levinson moved to Alexandria, VA, where he was rabbi of Agudas Achim Congregation until about 1935. Moving across the Potomac, his next position was as rabbi of Beth Sholom. In 1947, he became rabbi of Congregation Beth El, where he remained until 1965, when he became rabbi of Congregation Beth Joshua. For many years, Rabbi Levinson served the Vaad as the *sofer* for *gittin* (scribe for divorce documents).

Rabbi Levinson's daughter, Mrs. Norma Burdett (Kemp Mill), related that during the Beth Sholom years, Rabbi Levinson taught Hebrew school at the shul. He did not own a car, so he would walk twenty minutes from the family's home at 435 Newton Place NW. Along the way he picked up the students, so that he soon looked like the Pied Piper of legend.

Mrs. Burdett also recalled that, during the World War II years, there often would be soldiers sleeping on every available surface in their living room. When the family came down in the morning, they would count pairs of shoes to see how many guests they had.

To accommodate those working on the war effort and ensure that they would experience Shabbos in some form, Rabbi Levinson introduced a late Friday night *Kabbalas Shabbos* service in Beth Sholom (in addition to prayers at the regular time) followed by a kiddush.

Rabbi Levinson spearheaded the founding of Yeshivas Bais Yehuda, better known as the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington ("the Academy"). Mrs. Burdett explained that Washington's population swelled with temporary workers, many of them Jewish, during World War II. Rabbi Levinson foresaw the impending end of the war and realized that a Jewish day school would be necessary to induce some of those wartime workers to remain in Washington. He called a meeting of rabbis and lay leaders to kick off the effort to establish the school.

The Academy opened in February 1944 with 21 students and two teachers. Rabbi Levinson served as the first president of the school, while his son-in-law, Rabbi Sam Rosenbaum, became the first principal. By December 1949, the student body had grown to 230 and work began on the building

¹ Washington's *Evening Star* newspaper frequently carried respectful stories about the Orthodox community and the Vaad used that newspaper to communicate with the community.

² Due to space constraints, citations have been omitted. An annotated version is available by contacting the author at shlomodkatz@gmail.com.

at 16th Street and Fort Stevens Drive NW that served the school for decades thereafter. (A year earlier, sixteen Washington and Northern Virginia congregations and their rabbis had participated in “Hebrew Academy Sabbath,” with the rabbis dedicating their sermons to enrollment in and fundraising for the school or, perhaps, the building campaign.)

A sign of the times: In 1952, the newly founded Shomrai Emunah congregation borrowed a Sefer Torah from Rabbi Levinson’s shul. Seeing Rabbi Levinson in tears, Shomrai’s members asked why. Rabbi Levinson explained that “no one starts Orthodox shuls anymore,” and he feared that in six months the new congregation will have left Orthodoxy.³ Thankfully, his worry was for naught.

Rabbi Levinson passed away in 1981. The Hebrew Academy’s Upper School was named in his memory. His wife, Rebbetzin Tikva Levinson, passed away in 1983.

Rabbi Dr. Arthur (Meir) Bogner zt”l (*seated, right*)

Rabbi Bogner was born in Vienna, Austria on December 6, 1906, and earned his *semichah* there. He also studied at the University of Vienna, including under Dr. Sigmund Freud, and earned a PhD in Philology (the study of languages — more about this below). In 1938, Rabbi Bogner fled Vienna and was soon hired as rabbi of Washington’s Ezras Israel Congregation, which he served for the next 40 years.

Rabbi Bogner’s grandson, Dr. Ari Gross, a Washington native now living in West Hempstead, NY, related that his grandfather’s knowledge of seven or eight languages came in handy during the Holocaust, when he would translate for European-born rabbis such as Rabbi Avraham Kalmanowitz zt”l, who tried to lobby the White House on behalf of European Jewry. Much has been written about President Roosevelt’s refusal to meet with visiting rabbis. After one such refusal, Rabbi Kalmanowitz stood in a White House corridor crying out in anguish. He was heard by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., a Jew, who offered to help. That meeting led to the establishment of the War Refugee Board. Another grandson, Mr. Nossi Gross, leader of Baltimore’s Zemer Orchestra, added that there was a period when Rabbi Bogner was visiting the State Department three times a week.

Dr. Ari Gross related that Rabbi Bogner always dressed formally, as he believed befit a rabbi, even on the hottest summer days. When he would walk in the streets on Shabbos, storekeepers would come out of their shops and apologize to him for being open. Washington native Rabbi Tzvi Rosen, now a STAR-K Kashrus Administrator, and my father, Dr. Irving Katz, both recall that Rabbi Bogner had higher expectations of his congregants than did many rabbis of the era. For example, he was raising the height of the *mechitzah* when many others were struggling to keep a minimally kosher separation between men and women. He encouraged shopping at Shabbos-observant merchants while others were elated if their congregants ate kosher. Likewise, Rabbi Bogner was the first to encourage congregants to observe *halachos* such as not shaving during the Omer, according to Rabbi Rosen. Rabbi Bogner’s grandson, Rabbi Isser Malin (Yerushalayim), recalled that his grandfather insisted on *Cholov Yisrael* long before it was popular or even practical; therefore, he usually had to drink his coffee black.

³ As told by Rabbi Dr. Hersh Mendlowitz, now of Yerushalayim, one of Shomrai Emunah’s founding members.

In approximately 1950, Rabbi Bogner established Sinai House (later renamed Raphael House), the first kosher halfway house in the United States.

One of Rabbi Bogner's sons-in-law was Rabbi Nechemiah Malin *zt"l*. In the 1950s, he started the first Yeshiva high school in Washington, DC, named Ohr Torah of Brisk, together with his brother, Rabbi Meir Malin *zt"l*. On June 7, 1959, the *Sunday Star* announced that singer Shlomo Carlebach would give a concert to benefit the "Brisker Yeshiva . . . which prepares high school students for advance[d] studies to become rabbis and other workers in the religious field." In 1961, Ohr Torah was meeting at 1333 Emerson Street NW and had 15 students. The next year, however, Rabbi Nechemiah Malin made *aliyah* and the school closed.

Rabbi Bogner passed away in Yerushalayim in 1996, one week after his 90th birthday. His Rebbetzin, Felice (Lichtig) Bogner, passed away in 1987.

Rabbi Chaim Tuvia Williamowsky *zt"l* (seated, left)

Rabbi Williamowsky was born in 1896 in Grodno Gubernia, in today's Belarus. At age nine, he left home to study at the Bialystok Talmud Torah. Later, he studied at Yeshivas Toras Chesed in Brisk, headed by Rabbi Moshe Sokolovsky *zt"l*. He also studied under the famed Rabbi Shimon Shkop *zt"l*.

In 1924, Rabbi Williamowsky came to America and became the rabbi in Hendersonville, NC, where he had relatives. From there, he moved to Durham, NC, where he remained for ten years. In the late 1930s, he briefly served as rabbi in Alexandria, Virginia.

From 1939 to 1941, Rabbi Williamowsky was rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation ("Southeast"). During his brief tenure, Rabbi Williamowsky focused on the youth, introducing a Friday night *minyan* at which the youth led the services and delivered a *Dvar Torah*. In 1941, he left the rabbinate, but remained in the Washington community for decades as a *mohel* and served on the Vaad, at times, as Treasurer. (Many of the men I interviewed for this article indicated that he had been their *mohel*.) He served as Executive Director and as a Trustee of the Academy, as well as chaplain of various organizations and institutions, including the Jewish Welfare Board and St. Elizabeth's Hospital. A small item in the *Washington Evening Star* on April 11, 1956, reports that Rabbi Williamowsky is asking the Jewish community to donate Hebrew and English books to that hospital's library. Another newspaper story announces a Chanukah party for Jewish servicemen at the Williamowsky home, 6500 Ninth Avenue, in Chillum (Prince George's County). In 1958, Rabbi Williamowsky was among the founders of the Jewish Foundation for Retarded Children, now known as the National Children's Center.

Rabbi Williamowsky passed away in September 1971.

Rabbi Simon (Yehoshua) Burnstein *zt"l* (seated, second from right)

A descendant of twenty-four generations of rabbis, Rabbi Burnstein was born on March 25, 1917, in Wiszkow, Poland, and was brought to America at five years old. His Hebrew name was given him after someone who had been named for Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk *zt"l* (1680–1756), author of the classic Talmud commentary, *Pnei Yehoshua*.

The future Rabbi Burnstein was the first student to enroll in Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim (the Rabbinical Seminary of America) in New York, founded by Rabbi Dovid Leibowitz *zt"l*. Rabbi Burnstein subsequently received *semichah* from that yeshiva.

In 1942, Rabbi Burnstein succeeded Rabbi Williamowsky as rabbi of Southeast, when it was still located on Capitol Hill in the southeast quadrant of Washington, DC (hence its name). After World War II, he spearheaded the construction of a 450-seat synagogue on 9th Street SE where Southeast continued to meet for more than 25 years — the last remaining shul in that part of Washington. Demographic changes eventually reduced the shul's membership and ultimately necessitated its relocation in 1971, under Rabbi Burnstein's leadership, to its current home in White Oak.

During World War II, Rabbi Burnstein was active in the efforts of Vaad Hatzalah to rescue European Jews. He also served as a chaplain at several hospitals and military facilities in the area, as well as both a teacher and Executive Director at the Academy. Rabbi Rosen recalls Rabbi Burnstein regularly singing Birkas HaMazon (Grace After Meals) out loud, from a *bentcher*, in the Academy teachers' room. Around 1975, Rabbi Burnstein was instrumental in building an *eruv* in White Oak, which later expanded to become the Silver Spring Eruv that encompasses White Oak, Kemp Mill, and nearby neighborhoods. Rabbi Burnstein served as President of the Vaad and, for the last twelve years of his life, Executive Vice President.

Rabbi Burnstein passed away on October 17, 1980. Speaking on the occasion of his 10th *yahrzeit*, Rabbi Hillel Klavan recalled how Rabbi Burnstein had mentored him in the 1950s when he (Rabbi Klavan) was a young rabbi taking over his recently deceased father's pulpit in Washington. Rabbi Klavan's recollection is reminiscent of one of the repeated themes that I heard while researching this article: the cooperation and friendship among the members of the Vaad as they fought their common enemy — the impending death of Orthodox Judaism in Washington.

In the realm of interpersonal relations, Rabbi Burnstein's son-in-law, Mr. Eddie Steinberg of Teaneck, NJ, shared two of the life lessons he learned from his father-in-law: "Once, when I was writing a check to pay a *frum Yid* (Orthodox Jew) who had gone well beyond the call of duty in performing a service for me, my father-in-law (Rabbi Burnstein) suggested, 'Write him a note, too. It will mean more to him than the check.'

"On another occasion," Mr. Steinberg wrote, "my father-in-law sensed that I was feeling good about something I had done for another person. He commented softly, 'Chesed is measured, not by how much you do, but by how much the recipient needs.'"⁴

Rebbetzin Celia (Spiegel) Burnstein passed away in 1972.

Rabbi Harry (Yehoshua Heschel) Kaufman *shlita* (*standing, second from left*)

The highlight of researching this article was meeting Rabbi Kaufman, now a centenarian living in Lakewood, NJ. Rabbi Kaufman was born (in his words) on "*Chai* (18) *Teves*," 1923, in Tarnopol, Poland — in the very house where his ancestor, Rabbi Yosef Babad *zt"l* (1801–1874, author of

⁴ E. Steinberg, *Between Mincha and Maariv*, p. 7 (*Kislev* 5781).

the classic work *Minchas Chinuch*) had lived. The future Rabbi Kaufman arrived in America at age six and his family settled on the Lower East Side. He studied at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and, in 1948, received *semichah* from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein *zt"l*. Concurrently with his Yeshiva studies, the future Rabbi Kaufman earned an undergraduate degree from Columbia University.

In 1948, Rabbi Kaufman's friend, Chazzan Sholom Katz *z"l* (no relation to this writer), informed him that Beth Sholom Congregation in Washington was seeking a rabbi. Rabbi Kaufman got the position and led that shul until 1969, first at Eighth and Shepard Streets NW and then at 13th Street and Eastern Avenue NW. Rabbi Kaufman related that Beth Sholom took its name ("House of Peace") from the fact that it was the product of a merger of several congregations. Most of Beth Sholom's members during Rabbi Kaufman's tenure were business people.

In 1950, Rabbi Kaufman married Devorah Gittel Small, the daughter of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's sister. My father, Dr. Irving Katz, recalls going to Beth Sholom for a weekday *mincha* and encountering Rabbi Feinstein there. Rebbetzin Kaufman *a"h* passed away on the second day of Shavuos 1993.

Looking at the picture that inspired this article, Rabbi Kaufman recalled the "exceptionally fine" rabbis with whom he served, each of whom "was a significant person in his own right." Rabbi Kaufman noted that there were no rivalries between the rabbis, which made Washington "unique in this respect." Although Beth Sholom and Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah (OSTT) were only blocks apart and "should" have been competitors, their two rabbis were exceptionally close, studying Torah together and taking their families on vacation together, according to Rabbi Kaufman's son, Rabbi Eli Kaufman, rabbi of Congregation Ohav Emeth in Highland Park. (I took a framed copy of the Vaad photo to present to Rabbi Kaufman as a "thank you," only to discover that it was already hanging in his home in Lakewood, a testament to his positive memories. Rabbi Kaufman also noted with satisfaction that grandchildren of his current wife, the former Rebbetzin Indich of Cleveland, are married to grandchildren of his late colleagues, Rabbis Burnstein and Klavan.)

As President of the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington, Rabbi Kaufman was a member of President Nixon's first inaugural committee. Upon being invited to the prayer service that would precede the inauguration, Rabbi Kaufman declined, explaining that he could not enter a church. As a result, the service was moved to the auditorium of the State Department and Rabbi Kaufman did participate.

After Beth Sholom, Rabbi Kaufman served as rabbi of the Young Israel of Montreal. In 2015, he published *Ohr Yehoshua*, containing his original thoughts on the *parashah* and festivals.

Rabbi Philip (Yerucham Fishel Aryeh) Rabinowitz *zt"l* (standing, right)

Rabbi Rabinowitz was born in a suburb of Lomza, Poland on December 15, 1920. He studied in the Lomza Yeshiva under Rabbi Eliezer Shulevitz *zt"l*, a student of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter *zt"l*, founder of the Mussar movement. In July 1938, the future Rabbi Rabinowitz came to America and studied under Rabbi Chaim Korb *zt"l* at Hebrew Theological College in Chicago (now known popularly as "Skokie Yeshiva"). In 1945, he received *semichah* from Rabbi Korb.

Though not his formal student, Rabbi Rabinowitz used the term “My Rebbe” when referring to Rabbi Dovid Lifschutz *zt”l*, rabbi of Suvalk, Poland, and later a Rosh Yeshiva in Chicago and at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Rabbinical Seminary of Yeshiva University. A family member related that, when the first hints of the Holocaust reached America, Rabbi Lifschutz was moved by the young Rabbi Rabinowitz’s recitation of *Tehilim*; this led to the development of a close *Rebbe-Talmid* (mentor-protégé) relationship between them.

Rabbi Rabinowitz’s first rabbinic position was at the Young Israel of Mapleton Park, in Brooklyn, NY, and he taught at the Yeshiva of Flatbush as well. In 1950, he was appointed rabbi of Keshet Israel Congregation in Georgetown. There he focused on three objectives: studying and teaching Torah, sustaining the daily *minyanim*, and watching over the welfare of his community. Keshet Israel had once housed a large Talmud Torah (Sunday school), and Rabbi Rabinowitz worked to keep it alive, first in the shul and, later, in his home. He was described as a “one man show,” leading the prayers, reading the Torah, and announcing the pages (in addition to his rabbinic duties). At times, he would spend two hours on the phone to ensure a weekday *minyan* for *mincha*; then he would send his son to pick up the necessary tenth man. His dedication to his congregants is illustrated by the time he drove seven hours to a Rabbinical Council of America convention in the Catskills, only to receive a message that a congregant had passed away. Rabbi Rabinowitz could have asked another rabbi to officiate in his place, but he did not. He got back in the car and drove the seven hours home.

In addition to his rabbinic duties, Rabbi Rabinowitz taught the 7th and 8th grades at the Academy. A family member recalled that Rabbi Rabinowitz did not have a car and had to take two buses from his home in Georgetown to the school at 16th Street and Fort Stevens Drive NW. Zev Teichman, now living in White Oak, was a student of Rabbi Rabinowitz and recalls his teacher as “soft-spoken” and a “wonderful teacher.” “Everyone was precious to him,” Mr. Teichman said. Others recalled that Rabbi Rabinowitz used to address students as *mein tiere kind* (“my dear child”) — but not because he didn’t know their names. In fact, he remembered his students’ names many years later.

Rabbi Rabinowitz once invited his colleagues from the Academy to a dinner at Keshet Israel. Rabbi William Millen *zt”l* wrote in a 2001 reminiscence that, not seeing place cards, the Hebrew Academy rabbis chose a table in the corner. No, Rabbi Rabinowitz told them: the head table had been set for them. When they balked, Rabbi Rabinowitz said, “This is not about you. It is about *Kavod HaTorah* (honoring the Torah).” No honorees or wealthy donors sat at the head table, only rabbis, Rabbi Millen recalled.

The Rabinowitz home was always open to anyone in need, even strangers. A family member recalled that, until Rabbi Rabinowitz walked into the house, they never knew how many places to set at the table. Tragically, on the evening of February 28, 1984, Rabbi Rabinowitz was murdered in his home, presumably by a wayfarer he had taken in. The crime remains unsolved.

Today, the *eruv* encompassing Georgetown, adjacent neighborhoods, and all of downtown Washington is named in Rabbi Rabinowitz’s memory.

Rebbetzin Selma Rabinowitz *a”h* passed away in 1978.

Rabbi Hillel Klavan zt"l (standing, left)

Rabbi Klavan was born in Kovno, Lithuania on January 10, 1923. As an infant, he immigrated with his family to Burlington, Vermont, where his father, Rabbi Yehoshua Klavan zt"l, was rabbi of the Combined Congregations. Moving to Washington in 1935, the elder Rabbi Klavan served as rabbi of Talmud Torah Congregation and was recognized as Washington's unofficial "Chief Rabbi" or *Shtot Rov* (Yiddish for "City Rabbi") until his passing.

Rabbi Hillel Klavan received his *semichah* from Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore in approximately 1950, after which he assumed his first rabbinical post in Brooklyn, NY. Fifty or so years later, after his retirement from the rabbinate, Rabbi Klavan would return to Ner Israel for the High Holidays. Several Ner Israel alumni have described to this writer the respect with which Rabbi Klavan would be greeted by Rabbi Herman Neuberger zt"l, the venerable President of that Yeshiva.

The elder Rabbi Klavan passed away in July 1953, and his youngest son, Rabbi Hillel Klavan, came to Washington to succeed him. (Another son, Mr. Harry Klavan z"l, was a DC lawyer and an active lay leader in the community.)

In 1958, Congregation Talmud Torah merged with Ohev Shalom. Rabbi Klavan led the combined congregation, OSTT, for the next half-century, during which time OSTT moved uptown from 14th and Emerson Streets NW to 16th and Jonquil Streets NW. Rabbi Klavan was known for his charm, his practical common sense, and his ability to connect with non-religious Jews and even gentiles — all while remaining true to the *mesorah* (traditions) that his father had learned from the *Gedolim* (great sages) who were his mentors in Europe. Rabbi Klavan also served as President of the Vaad for many years, remaining active as Honorary President until his passing.

Rabbi Klavan is remembered by Dr. Lee Spetner, now of Yerushalayim, as being the first DC rabbi to endorse the founding of the Yeshiva High School ("YHS" — now the Yeshiva of Greater Washington or "YGW"). At the time, the Academy did not include a high school and the existing high school, Ohr Torah, did not attract many students. Instead, most children who wanted to continue their Jewish education went out of town. In 1961, at a meeting of the local HaPoel Mizrachi chapter, Rabbi Klavan spoke about the need for a new Jewish high school in Washington. Dr. Spetner recalled that one parent, Mr. Elazar Kaufman (a teacher at the Academy), referred to it as a "Yeshiva" high school, and many of the other parents present did not know what the word "Yeshiva" meant.

When I was a child in the early 1970s, my family attended OSTT on Friday nights. My clearest childhood memory of Rabbi Klavan is his recitation of *Krias Shema*, carefully enunciating each word in his deep voice long after the congregants had completed their own recitations. In particular, I can still hear Rabbi Klavan's emphasis of the letter *zayin* in the word *tizkeru* (see *Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 61:17*). Incredibly, the same memory was shared with me by Mrs. Chana (Kasachkoff) Poupko, now of Yerushalayim, who attended Congregation Talmud Torah on Friday nights during Rabbi Klavan's first years there. Mrs. Poupko also recalls how much it meant to her that Rabbi Klavan greeted her enthusiastically, by name, every Friday night, though she was in her words, "a seven-year-old nobody." In truth, she was not a "nobody" — as all the rabbis

profiled here viewed connecting with children as a major part of their task to save Judaism in Washington.

Rabbi Klavan lived his final years in Kemp Mill, *davening* at Shomrai Emunah and YGW, and regularly attending Rabbi Anemer's Wednesday night Gemara shiur. Many were thus privileged to witness the mutual respect these two rabbis had for each other. Rabbi Rosen recalls Rabbi Klavan, in his late 80s, studying Gemara at YGW through the night on Shavuos. Rabbi Rosen said: "He was *mechayev* us (set a high standard for younger, healthier people to meet)" (compare Yoma 35b).

Rabbi Klavan passed away on March 14, 2016. Rebbetzin Myrna (Jaray) Klavan *a"h* continued to live in Kemp Mill until her passing on August 26, 2021.

Rabbi Gedaliah Anemer *zt"l* (*standing, second from right*)

Rabbi Anemer was born in Akron, Ohio, on March 19, 1932. At a very young age, after the tragic passing of his father, he followed his older brother to Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's yeshiva on New York's Lower East Side. Rabbi Anemer would later recall that a bus ticket from New York to his home in Ohio cost five dollars; he earned part of the money by passing a test on his learning and then borrowed the rest from Rabbi Feinstein.

From 1944 to 1956, the future Rabbi Anemer attended Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, where he was a close student of Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch *zt"l*, who had transplanted the yeshiva from Europe. Rabbi Anemer received *semichah* at a young age in 1952. While in Telshe, Rabbi Anemer taught a high school class. He used to recall ironically that he, a staunch Litvak (non-Chassid), taught a class that included four future Chassidic rebbes. Upon leaving Telshe, Rabbi Anemer helped establish, and served as Rosh Yeshiva of, the Boston Rabbinical Seminary. That yeshiva reached its peak enrollment of 300 in the late 1950s but eventually closed.

In September 1957, Rabbi Anemer was named rabbi of Shomrai Emunah Congregation (YISE), then meeting in Chillum, Maryland. A sign of the times is that Shomrai was seeking a rabbi with an academic degree. Unfazed, Rabbi Anemer told the search committee members, "You have enough degrees between you. You need someone who will teach you Torah and answer your halachic questions." Rabbi Dr. Hersh Mendlowitz was one of the few yeshiva-educated members of that committee. He related that Rabbi Anemer impressed him, even then, as someone capable of being a *posek* (halachic authority who could decide difficult and novel questions).

Shortly after joining Shomrai Emunah, Rabbi Anemer moved his young family to 806 Whittington Terrace, behind the present-day YISE Preschool, and began holding services in his home. Mr. Joel Becker recalls going to the Anemer home on Friday afternoons as an eleven-year-old to set up chairs for the *minyan*, after which Rabbi Anemer would learn with him until his parents picked him up. In the beginning, Rabbi Anemer would walk the 6.5 miles to the official shul building at 5701 Eastern Avenue, on the boundary of DC and Prince George's County, on Shabbos morning. Eventually, congregants started moving closer to Rabbi Anemer's new home, thus planting the seeds of what was to become the Kemp Mill Jewish community.

Along with Rabbi Klavan, Rabbi Anemer was one of only two Vaad members who enthusiastically supported the founding of YHS, which opened in 1963 with six girls. (The boys' division opened the following year with ten students.) Dr. Spetner related that the other local rabbis worried that the school would be a financial burden or that it would not remain Orthodox. Rabbi Anemer quickly became the dominant figure in YHS and led it for the next 45 years as the Dean and Rosh HaYeshiva. The school is now named Yeshiva of Greater Washington-Tiferes Gedaliah in Rabbi Anemer's memory.⁵

Rabbi Anemer's love of Torah learning was demonstrated for this writer by the following incident: Rabbi Anemer took great pride in the fact that he had encouraged me to publish *Hamaayan/The Torah Spring*, a weekly compilation of *Divrei Torah*, and he read it regularly. In approximately 2003, Rabbi Anemer told me, "You answered a question I have had on the *haftarah* since 1951!" He then proceeded to relate the exact circumstances under which the question arose, including whose home he had eaten at on that Shabbos 52 years earlier. Only a truly unique Torah scholar could be "bothered" by a question on the *haftarah* to that extent.

Rabbi Anemer married Yocheved Balgley in 1954. Rabbi Anemer passed away on Rosh Chodesh Iyar in 2010. Rebbetzin Anemer *she'tichyeh* now lives with her daughter in Baltimore and continues to enjoy a warm relationship with many former congregants.

* * *

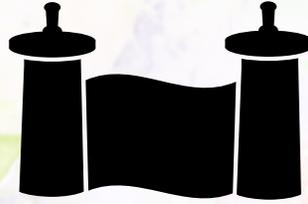
In the 1950s and 60s, shuls were still "hanging on for dear life," in Rabbi Tzvi Rosen's words. The Hebrew Academy's founding had been a "game-changer" and had "changed the complexion" of the community, but the fight to keep the community's children interested in Judaism was ongoing.

This is starkly illustrated by the Vaad's public statement before Pesach 1957, calling upon Washington's Jewish parents to see that their children "experience to the fullest extent the inspiration, the joy, and the infinite spiritual enrichment which the proper observance of our Jewish festivals makes possible." The statement added: "Therefore we urge you to see to it that your children stay out of public school during the Passover holidays and instead attend religious services in their respective synagogues on those days."

In a 1960 Pesach message, Vaad President Rabbi Kaufman felt the need to declare, "[W]e appeal to Jewish parents to help make a brighter future for their children by striving to give them a maximum awareness and knowledge of Judaism." Sixty-three years later, Rabbi Kaufman expressed great surprise when I told him that a Washington area child can now study Torah here starting in nursery school and continuing through *kollel*, long after marriage. We should be, as Rabbi Kaufman was, very pleased to know that the Greater Washington Jewish community is now "firmly entrenched in the Torah world."

And these are some of the leaders whom we should thank.

⁵ Much of Rabbi Anemer's impact on the community occurred after the period on which this article focuses and will not be elaborated upon here.



VAAD HARABANIM
THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL
of GREATER WASHINGTON



Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington
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.