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**Rabbi D.O. Kleinman Highlights**

**Commonly Neglected Halachos**

**By Daniel Keren**



One of the highlighted speakers in last month’s Hakhel Yarchei Kallah Event for the legal holiday of Martin Luther King’s Birthday in Flatbush was Rabbi Doniel Osher Kleinman, Rav of K’hal Nachlas Dovid and author of the multi-volum Sifrei Koveitz Halochos. He spoke on the intriguing topic of “What You May Be Unaware of…Often Neglected Halachos from Daled Chelkei Shulchan Aruch – Halachos for Everyday Life.”

The Mechaber (Rabbi Yosef Karo, zt”l,) mentions the halachah of netilas yadayim, the washing of one’s hands before tefilah (prayer). Rabbi Kleinman said there is an obligation to wash one hands if water is available. And if there is no water, one is obligated to travel a parsah (approximately an hour’s travel by foot) so long as you don’t have to go out of your way.

**The Obligation to Wash is Even if Your Hands Are Not Dirty**

This would mean that if you were travelling on your way to daven, you should walk an hour’s distance. Rabbi Kleinman reiterated that this isn’t only if your hands are dirty, but if your mind wasn’t on your hands for a period of time and you didn’t actually dirty them; you still have an obligation to wash your hands before davening.

Rabbi Kleinman also discussed whether one has to have kavanah (intention or concentration) when doing a mitzvah. Some poskim hold that if you are going to do a mitzvah, you automatically have a built-in-kavanah to do that particular religious obligation. But others disagree and hold that one should focus on an intention. For example when putting on a talis, one should contemplate all of the other mitzvahs that one is reminded of when looking at the tzittzits of the talis.

One has to be aware, Rabbi Kleinman said, of the purpose of the mitzvah according to the Aruch Hashulchan. He holds that otherwise one hasn’t performed the mitzvah without kavanah. The Mishna Berurah (authored by the Chofetz Chaim, zt”l,) while agreeing that kavanah is preferable, holds that one fulfills the mitzvah since the act of performing the religious commandment implies a type of built-in-kavanah.

Another halacha discussed by Rabbi Kleinman that is frequently overlooked and ignored is the zecher hachurban (remembering the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh) by leaving an area on the wall in the house that is not painted. This area should be an amah (18-24 inches) by an amah. Unfortunately, today this is a very much neglected halachah.

**The Need for Vigilence if One**

**Employs a Non-Jew in the Home**

Rabbi Kleinman also discussed the need to be vigilant if one employs a non-Jew in the home to make sure the employee is not left alone in the kitchen over a period of time in which the worker could cook a meal and thereby assur (make forbidden) the pots and silverware. You have to make sure that you instruct them not to use your pots and silverware at it would thus become forbidden to you because of the prohibition of bishal akum (having been cooked by a non-Jew). He said that security cameras that would allow someone outside the home to keep track of activities in the kitchen might be a possible solution if the worker knew that the employer was regularly checking the camera.

Another important halachah that many people may be lax regards the giving of maisah (a percentage of one’s income to tzadakah, charity.) If you give 10% of your salary or income to maisah that is valid, although it is just the bare minimum of the requirement. Chomesh (the giving of 20% or a fifth of one’s income is more proper.) But less than 10% is absolutely wrong, Rabbi Kleinman said.

Many people are careless because they think giving maisah is only a minhag (custom). There are minhagim which are chayuvim (religious obligations.) Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zt”l when told by people that they were in a serious and painful economic downturn and had lost almost all of their money, would always ask if they were careful with giving maisah. And he declared that never once did anyone who lost their fortune ever claim that they were careful in giving maisah before their economic calamity.

*Reprinted from the February 7, 2020 edition of The Flatbush Jewish Journal.*

**How Does One Quit Judaism?**

**By Rabbi** [**Aron Moss**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/8051/jewish/Moss-Aron.htm)

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***Question:*** Although I was raised in a traditional home, was brissed and barmitzvad (sorry about these spellings) I have never had any faith or "religious" belief. I am now aged 34, and would describe myself as an atheist. I have no wish to be buried in a Jewish cemetery (and my Will will also make this clear) and have married a non-Jew in a civil ceremony.

My question is, can I consider myself officially non-Jewish, by my effective opting-out, or do I need some sort of form or dispensation to be officially no longer Jewish?

Many thanks for your help with what is perhaps an unusual question.

Best wishes,

Edward

***Answer:***

Dear Edward,

I would like to help you, but I feel there's nothing I can do.

According to your question, you have done everything possible to negate your Jewishness: in practice you do not keep Jewish tradition; in belief you are an atheist; in family life you have married a non-Jew and thus won't have Jewish children; and even in death you are determined not to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

One would think that all this would be enough to confirm your un-Jewishness.

But no! For some reason, you are still unsatisfied: you still feel Jewish! So much so, you feel you need official dispensation!

And so, being an atheist, who do you turn to to solve this problem? A doctor? A psychiatrist? The civil celebrant that married you? No... You turn to a rabbi!

I'm reminded of the child who ran away from home, but ended up just going around and around the block because his parents told him never to cross the road by himself.

I'm sorry, Edward. There is nothing more you can do. You are as Jewish as Moses, Ariel Sharon and the Chief Rabbi of Wales!

In fact, it seems that being Jewish is the most dominant factor of your personality. It is even influencing the place you want to be buried! (Why would an atheist care about where they are buried?)

Edward, Jewishness is not a belief, a feeling, a conviction or a lifestyle. It is a state of being. We can either celebrate it or fight against it. But it will always be there. So why not celebrate it?

*Reprinted from the Parashat Bo 5780 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**The Shmuz onParshas Yisro**

# **The Neshamah and the Ape**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Yisrael, His people — that HASHEM took Yisrael out of Egypt.*” — Shemos 18:1

The Ramban explains that one time in the course of history, HASHEM demonstrated that He alone created, maintains and orchestrates all of physicality. When taking Klal Yisrael out of Mitzrayim, He showed the world His might and His control over every facet of nature.

The Torah tells us that Yisro heard about the wonders that HASHEM had done, and he joined the Jewish people. Rashi explains that while Yisro heard about all of the miracles, the two that actually moved him were the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek. The others were impressive, but these alone actually affected him.

This Rashi is difficult to understand. How can those two events even be mentioned in the same breath? Keriyas Yam Suf was the greatest miracle ever revealed to man. The war with Amalek may have been a miracle, but it was nowhere near as stupendous. At the time of the battle, the Jewish people numbered six hundred thousand men between twenty and sixty years of age. They weren’t soldiers — they were born slaves — but they were armed and fighting for their lives. Many a small band of people fighting for their existence have beaten powerful armies. Of all the miracles, why should this be part of what moved Yisro?

**Understanding Free Will**

The answer to this question is based on understanding one of the most difficult dilemmas in Creation: free will. To give man credit for making himself into what he is, HASHEM gave him the ability to choose good or bad, right or wrong. By making the difficult choices presented to him, he is considered the one who shaped himself and, forever, he can enjoy the rewards of his labor.

However, here is the problem: Man has wisdom that is greater than the malachim. Man understands that he was put into this world for a few short years, given a mission to accomplish, and when he leaves this thing called life, forever he will be exactly what he shaped himself into. Every mitzvah is designed to help him grow, and every sin damages him. The stakes are very high, the risks and rewards are great — and he understands that. He is fully aware that who he will be for eternity is in his own hands.

If so, how does man have free will? How is it possible that he would choose anything other than following every nuance of every commandment exactly as his Creator said he should? In theory, he would have free will. In theory, he can choose poorly but never would because it would be self-destructive. How then does man have free will in a practical sense?

**Blurring the Consciousness of Man**

To allow for practical free will, HASHEM added another dimension to man to blur his consciousness.

To help understand this feature, let’s imagine that you are watching Shmeil, a young yeshivah bachur. It’s Purim, and he is drunk. You see Shmeil walking into the middle of a busy street. You grab him by the arm and say, “Shmeil! What are you doing?”

“Whad am I doinnn? I’m playing, playing with the pretty cars.”

“Shmeil! You are going to get hit by one of those cars!”

“Yeah. I know. Isn’t that fun? Smack, Crack. Break my back. Hee, hee, hee.”

“Shmeil! Don’t you understand? If a car hits you are going to be in the hospital!”

“Yeah, break those bones. Crack. Crack. Splatter goes me. Hee, hee, hee. And then… and then, they take me to the hospital. Hee. hee. hee. All those nice doctors with the white coats. Maybe they can put some pins in my legs that set off the metal detectors in airport. Ding. Ding. Ding. Hee hee hee.”

What you are watching is a great disconnect. Part of Shmeil gets it. He understands that playing in traffic is dangerous, but in his current state, the danger doesn’t register; he can’t see the consequences. His normally sharp intellect is dulled, and he is capable of making choices that are quite unwise.

**The Neshamah and the Ape**

In a similar sense, HASHEM blurred our understanding, not by making us drunk, but by putting us into a body. This body isn’t simply a physical entity; it has its own desires, hungers, and appetites — all of the drives and instincts needed to keep it alive. By taking the brilliant part of man and inserting into it a physical entity, HASHEM has effectively blurred our vision. The “I” who thinks and feels now has another dimension. Part brilliant and wise, part instinct and appetite, the darkness of physicality blinds my mind from seeing consequences and truth.

Now man has free will. Now man can just as easily choose bad over good because his inner sight, his wisdom, is blurred. Much like the drunk yeshivah bachur, he can’t see the consequences and doesn’t relate to the danger.

The physical part of us affects every decision that we make. As an example, imagine for a moment that Eliyahu HaNavi said to you: Klal Yisrael has sinned, and some retribution must be meted out. Either you will break your arm, and for six months you will be in pain, or an earthquake will strike Yerushalayim, and a hundred thousand Jews will die. It’s your choice.

Of course you scream out, “Break my arm, in three places! Go ahead!” And while that may be what you say, it is important to recognize that there were two voices in your mind. Part of you said, “Of course, I would rather suffer than have that calamity occur,” but another part of you said, “What? Break my arm? I need my arm! You can’t break it. What do I care if other people die?”

There is a full half of you that doesn’t care about anyone else. In fact, it can’t care about anyone else. It was created to care for you and you alone. It is incapable of feeling the pain of anyone else, and it doesn’t even know about a place as far away as Yerushalayim, wherever that may be.

**Who’s in Charge Here?**

This concept is essential for making sense of our lives. As but one example of many, it helps us understand how we can daven with real kavanah, fully relating to the fact that HASHEM controls everything in our lives, and then thirty minutes later leave to work, and poof! — HASHEM is gone. I am back in charge; my wisdom, my skills are what determine my success. Part of me gets it, and part of me doesn’t. Part of me understands that HASHEM is always present, and part of me walks completely alone.

This seems to be the answer to Yisro. He saw two miracles. One was very lofty, a G-d like miracle, and the other was very mundane, something that spoke directly to his nefesh ha-behami, his animal soul. When he heard about the splitting of the sea, that is G-d type of stuff. Hurricanes, typhoons, droughts — those are the things that G-d controls. But when it came to the war — this was war, and war is concrete, here and now. And there was a part of him that was very powerfully moved by the danger, the realness of the moment. “Wow, G-d saved you from that!” Even though it paled in comparison to the splitting of the sea, it spoke directly to the animal soul of Yisro, and he was moved.

By being aware of our inner makeup and understanding the different forces that play out in our personality, we are able to better accomplish our mission in life. The key is to allow that wise part of me, the brilliant neshamah, to control my physical side so I can reach the greatness that all humans are destined for.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**The Eternal Unity of Learning Torah and G-d**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



This week's Torah portion, Yisro, contains the narrative of the most definitive event in human history -- the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

In order to understand what happened at Mount Sinai, we need to examine the concept of Torah itself.

As wisdom, the Torah is Divine, and therefore higher than any other body of knowledge on earth -- "For it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations."

As a moral guide, the Torah is the epitome of all virtue, superior to any code of ethics that can ever be devised by man.

All man-made ideologies and schools of philosophy contain an admixture of good and evil, truth and falsehood; in fact, any element of truth found in a particular ideology is merely a derivative of the eternal truth of Torah.

Yet the greatness of Torah far supersedes our human and therefore limited perception.

The Torah is intimately connected to all of existence, as G-d created the world according to the "blueprints" contained in the Torah. Its minutest details directly affect all of creation, determining the amount and type of G-dly influence present in the world.

Observing this fundamental relationship between Torah and reality, King David declared in Psalms, "Your statutes were music to me in my dwelling place."

And yet, as explained in the Talmud, G-d was not pleased by these words of praise. King David was reprimanded for comparing the Divine wisdom of the Torah to something as mundane as song. The Torah is even greater than the mere fact that physical reality is dependent on it.

What then, is the essence of Torah?

Chasidic teachings explain that Torah is simply the wisdom and will of G-d, united with Him in absolute unity.

G-d and the Torah are one entity. The Holy One, Blessed Be He, has granted us the opportunity to grasp the Divine by allowing us to partake of His eternal wisdom.

All other attributes and characteristics of Torah -- its unlimited enlightenment, its ethical superiority, its direct influence on existence -- are only secondary to this fact, the logical outgrowth of its essential nature.

As Torah is a part of an infinite, omnipotent G-d, it is only natural that its perfection extends to all these other areas as well.

This eternal quality is most obviously manifested in the inner, esoteric part of the Torah, the teachings of Chasidut.

Chasidut is not limited to one particular realm, but rather animates and illuminates all of Torah, which is why it is known as "the light of the Torah." The study of Chasidut therefore serves to prepare the world for the revelation of Moshiach and the Era of Redemption, when "the knowledge of G-d will cover the world like the waters of the ocean cover the sea bed."

*Reprinted from the Issue #352 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parashat Yisro 5755/1994)*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parashas Yitro**

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We once again see in this week’s Torah reading the Torah’s penchant to use outsiders and their ideas to advance the welfare of the Jewish People. After the granting of the Torah on Sinai, Moshe attempts to institute a one-man – himself – system of justice for the Jewish people.

In theory, this is the ideal system, for everyone would wish to be heard and judged by Moshe. There cannot be anyone better or wiser to hear disputes and render clarifications of Torah ordinances and values than Moshe Rabbeinu. Yet, like many, if not even the greatest ideas in theory, do not usually work out in practice in the messy world of everyday human behavior and life.

It is the complete outsider, Yitro, who immediately grasps the danger to the people and to Moshe that is inherent in his role as the sole judge of the Jews. Yitro cautions Moshe that under such a system, Moshe and the people will wither away because of the impossible physical, emotional and organizational strain.

Yitro proposes an alternate system of justice, more bureaucratic and cumbersome but infinitely more workable than the one Moses proposed. And Heaven agrees with the outsider, and Yitro’s proposal becomes the accepted norm for justice for that generation of Jewish people. Moshe himself agrees with the wisdom of Yitro’s words. The fact that Yitro is a complete outsider in Jewish society of that time in no way disqualifies his observations and suggestions.

Generally, people ignore and even resent the comments and opinions of outsiders on internal or domestic matters. What can an outsider possibly know about how we should behave or how we should run our home, business or society? Yet, as the professional fields of counselling in all sectors and disciplines in our society continue to grow and expand, we are witness to the value of outside guidance*.* It is their ‘outsiderness’ that provides a perspective that the person or society cannot achieve by itself.

The rabbis in the Talmud phrased it succinctly and correctly: “A prison inmate cannot free himself by himself from his incarceration.” As it was in the case of Yitro, it is the outsider – oftentimes the ultimate outsider – who may be the key to progress and who offers a better perspective on the challenges facing us. We should never deliberately close our ears to what is being said about us or to advice given, even if it is not requested.

The great unmatched humility of Moshe allowed him not only to accept the words and advice of Yitro, but also to cherish them, and even openly credit Yitro for his insight and wisdom, Moshe will say to Yitro later in the Torah, “you have been to us our guide and eyes,” Only outsiders can free us from the bonds of our own self-imposed subjectivity. This is one of the great subliminal teachings that fill the Torah and instruct us about life.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Thoughts that Count for Parshat Yitro**

*And Yitro heard* (Exodus 18:1)

Yitro was not the only person to hear of the miracles G-d had wrought for the Jewish people, as it states, "The nations heard it and trembled." Yitro, however, was the only one who acted upon what he heard and became a Jew. *(The Kotzker Rebbe)*

For by the very thing in which they sinned was punishment brought upon them (Exodus 18:11)

A person's punishment is determined by his own judgment of others: When a Jew sees someone transgressing and immediately "sentences" that person in his heart, he is thereby fixing his own sentence, as the sin most certainly exists in him as well. *(Baal Shem Tov)*

*Reprinted from the Issue #352 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parashat Yisro 5755/1994)*

**Rav Avigdor Miller On**

**Our View of Sports**



**QUESTION:** May a yeshiva bochur listen to sports on the radio?

**ANSWER:** I'll ask you a different question: May a yeshiva bochur stand on his head? Yes, if he wants to. But he's a *meshugenah* if he does it.

What is sports? It's so silly! The Yanks and the Mets hitting the baseball. It's so meshugah. It's an American goyishe meshugenah velt. It's the headlines - Yanks, Mets. It's so silly.

What sports does is the following. The headlines show us how empty the gentile world is. And therefore, we take a lesson from that. These foolish people who can make headlines from the most silly things - we have to say, "Can they be an example for us at all?! In anything?!"

Boruch Hashem that He has separated us from these lost *neshamos*.

Tape # E-210 (December 1999)

**QUESTION:** A lot of Jewish youth - and even adults sometimes - have an interest in playing sports and watching sports. What do you say about this phenomenon?

**ANSWER:** It depends what you mean. If sports are played for the prestige of the uniform, for the prestige of being a sports player, then it's as silly as could be. It's a silly gentile thing. Here's a boy, strutting down the street, in a lacrosse uniform. Did you ever see a lacrosse uniform? You don't know what it is? It's a game that high schools and colleges play.

So he's strutting down the street in his uniform, all covered with helmets and padded things all over him, and he walks down the street like a hero. He has a halo of sanctity around him. That's what they think. They think that sports is something noble. So this garbage we have to get out of our heads. There is nothing noble about holding a stick and smacking a baseball. There's nothing noble about that; nothing heroic about it.

However, if it's something done for exercise, then there's no question - you don't need me to tell you that exercise is important. If it's not too strenuous, then exercise is very good.

But it would be even better if you would take a brisk walk for forty-five minutes. Not in the night time. And not on lonely streets. But a brisk walk in the fresh air is the best sport and the best exercise. And while you're doing that, you can be thinking over all of the important ideas that a Jew should be filling his mind with.

There's no end to the thoughts that you must be filling your mind with that will prepare you for the World to Come. Whereas, if you're banging around a ball or some other thing like that, that keeps your mind busy on small unimportant things, and the precious time is entirely wasted.

But watching sports?! That's a one hundred percent waste of time! You should forget about all the ideals of sport and the glamour about sports. Because actually, it's nothing at all. Tape # 48 (January 1975)

*Reprinted from the February 2, 2020 email of Toras Avigdor adapted from Tape #48 (January 1975).*

**The Container**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**



After Beneh Yisrael encamped at Mount Sinai, G-d spoke to Moshe and had him convey to the people the terms of the covenant which they entered into at the time of Matan Torah.  G-d told Moshe, “So shall you speak to the House of Yaakob, and say to the Children of Israel.”  Rashi comments that the term “House of Yaakob” refers to the women, and “Children of Israel” refers to the men.  Meaning, G-d wanted Moshe to first present this information to the women, and only then to the men.

Why would that be?  Why did G-d want Moshe to speak about the Torah first to the women and only then to the men?

The Gemara (Baba Batra 141) comments, “Bat Tehila Siman Yafeh Le’banim,” which literally means that if a couple’s first child is a girl, this is an omen that boys will be born thereafter.

However, the Shab Shemateta offered a deeper interpretation of this remark.  Women in Jewish life generally serve a more private role, running the household and tending to the children, while the men traditionally spend more time out of the house.

Symbolically, then, the woman represents Yirat Shamayim – the internal sense of fear of Hashem that we are all to experience at all times.  Some people conduct themselves in a pious, upright manner in public, in the presence of their peers, in order to earn their approval and respect, but fail to live up to those same standards in private.  There are people who are very generous with their time and money, and rush to assist those in need at any hour of the day or night, but are rude and insensitive to their wife and children.

There are people who ensure to buy meat with the strictest standards of Kashrut, but buy on credit without any intention of ever paying their bill.  People such as these outwardly appear pious, but lack Yirat Shamayim.  A person who genuinely senses that Hashem is watching him or her at all times will act in a proper, dignified and upright manner both in public and private; in the synagogue, in the office, at home, and on vacation.

The Gemara teaches us that this keen awareness of being watched by G-d is a prerequisite to Torah.  Before anything else, we need to engender within ourselves the sense that we are being watched by the Almighty.  “Bat Tehila” – before anything else comes the “Bat,” the woman, the internal mindset of Yirat Shamayim. Once this mindset is in place, then one is eligible for “Banim” – to move to the next step and pursue greatness in Torah and Misvot.

Indeed, at the very beginning of the Shulhan Aruch, the Rama (Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Cracow, 1525-1572) cites the verse in Tehillim (16:8), “Shiviti Hashm Le’negdi Tamid” – “I have placed G-d before me, at all times,” and adds, “This is a great principle of the Torah.”

Right at the beginning of the most important Halachic code, we are told that before all else we need to “place G-d” before us, and be mindful of His presence and watchful eye at all times. Unless we truly believe and sense that G-d is always watching us, we cannot properly fulfill the dictates of Halacha.  We might be able to impress our peers by appearing religious in public, but this means nothing if we are not consistent and flagrantly violate the Torah in private.

For this reason, G-d instructed Moshe to first speak to the women before addressing the men. Before we can speak of the traditional “male” role – Torah study, prayer in the synagogue, and communal service – we must first establish the “female” role – the private, personal experience of Yirat Shamayim. As Moshe prepared the people to receive the Torah, he was to impress upon them the importance of the indispensable prerequisite of Yirat Shamayim.

The famous Pasuk in Tehillim (111) teaches, “Reshit Hochma Yir’at Hashem” – fear of G-d must precede wisdom. A person who lacks Yirat Shamayim and amasses Torah knowledge is comparable to a set of Talmud loaded onto a donkey, or, to take a more modern example, a computer with the entire corpus of Torah literature stored on it.

The knowledge may be impressive, but overall, the accomplishment is meaningless. Torah knowledge is significant only if it is preceded by Yirat Shamayim, by a genuine, keen sense of our accountability to G-d. Only once we have established this mindset can we then proceed to pursue Hochma – knowledge – and strive for spiritual excellence.

In preparing Beneh Yisrael for Matan Torah, Moshe was to tell them that if they accept G-d’s commands, “Vi’hyitem Li Segula Mi’kol Ha’amim,” which Rashi explains to mean that they would be G-d’s “treasure.” Rashi’s comment may be viewed as a reference to a Pasuk in the Book of Yeshayahu (33) where the prophet tells us, “Yirat Hashem Hi Osaro” – G-d’s “treasure” is Yirat Shamayim.

A person can own many valuables, but they will not help him if he does not have a safe container in which to store them. Yirat Shamayim is the “treasure chest,” the container we need in order to “store” all the positive qualities which we are expected to develop. Just as valuables left outside in the street are bound to be stolen or lost, our Torah knowledge and good deeds are meaningless if they are not “stored” in the “container” of Yirat Shamayim.

A man once mentioned to Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky (1891-1986) before Purim that he was thinking of calling in sick on Purim morning so he could stay home from work. The man was allowed a certain number of sick days, and so he figured he could pretend to be sick on Purim, which would allow him to celebrate the holiday with his family and community.

Rav Yaakov told the man in no uncertain terms that this was absolutely wrong. Rather than tell a lie, he should pack a deli sandwich and eat it during lunch break as his Se’udat Purim. The idea that one can lie for the sake of celebrating Purim reflects a deplorable lack of Yirat Shamayim. One cannot be “religious” by giving Mishloah Manot and hearing the Megilla, if at the same time he is dishonest with his boss.

Another story is told of a man who was needed as the tenth man for a Minyan, but if he stayed he would be late for an appointment.  The Hazon Ish (Rav Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, 1878-1953) sternly told the man to go to his appointment.  If one has Yirat Shamayim, he is just as adamant about keeping his word as he is about praying with a Minyan.

“Yirat Hashem Hi Osaro.”  Torah offers us many priceless treasures, but their value depends upon our Yirat Shamayim in which they are contained.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of the Edmond J Safra Synagogue of Brooklyn.*

**You Can’t Defend Haredi Orthodox Jews Against Violence While Demonizing Our Schools**

**Bu Rabbi Avi Shafran**

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NEW YORK ([JTA](http://jta.org/)) — Relentless [campaigns](https://www.jta.org/2020/01/13/united-states/new-york-is-trying-to-reform-the-orthodox-yeshiva-system-which-some-graduates-say-barely-taught-them-to-speak-english) calling for curricula reform in the nation’s yeshivas. Misleading headlines about educational standards at Orthodox schools. [Zoning efforts](https://www.jerseycitynj.gov/community/noknock) aimed at keeping large Jewish families out of suburban towns. Some see a direct link between such things and the anti-Semitic violence that has erupted on the streets of Brooklyn.

I don’t.

But links can be indirect.

Groups that smear yeshivas, and suburbanites who assail observant Jews for daring to want to move into their towns, thicken an expanding cloud of hostility against Jews who wear their Jewishness openly. Denying that subtle but significant link should not be an option.

Since 2012, an activist group called Young Advocates for Fair Education has accused a number of Hasidic yeshivas of neglecting secular studies and thereby handicapping their students, preventing them from becoming productive members of society.

The group’s founder and executive director, Naftuli Moster, would himself seem to belie his claim. He has mounted a tremendously successful, if misleading, public relations campaign against those yeshivas, and convinced a wide assortment of media to parrot and embrace his claims — an impressive accomplishment for a graduate of what he insists is a school that didn’t prepare him for a career.

Rabbi Avi Shafran

Moster insists that his only concern in championing state control and radical overhaul of all yeshivas and private schools in New York State is to ensure that Hasidic children will be able to make decent livings. But some observers, who [note](https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2012/04/16/des-amours-regimentees) that he has characterized Orthodox rules governing family purity as “absurd” and “crooked,” feel that Moster may be motivated by the antipathy he harbors for the community in which he was raised.

He also claims that many Hasidic parents are overjoyed by his crusade but are too cowed by nefarious community leaders to register their chagrin.

The truth emerged when New York State released proposed regulations calling for tight state oversight of private schools. YAFFED reportedly managed to amass 2,000 comments of support for the measure. Opponents, though — actual parents and grandparents of yeshiva students who [went on record against the regulations](https://nypost.com/2019/09/11/state-hit-with-140k-public-comments-on-bid-to-boost-private-school-oversight/) — numbered more than 140,000.

Still, the New York City Education Department investigated YAFFED’s charges. It did not locate the thousands of students reputed to be [barely able to sign their names](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/opinion/yeshivas-literacy-new-york.html) in English.

Of the 39 allegedly deadbeat yeshivas YAFFED had pointed to, only 28 were found to in fact be K-12 schools — the others served older students and were thus outside of the department’s purview.

Two of those 28 were [found](https://www.politico.com/states/f/?id=0000016f-1fc6-dc86-ab7f-bfeed3d50000) to be fully providing the entire spectrum (12 distinct subject areas) of mandated secular studies; 21 were close to providing them or in the process of developing equivalency of instruction. A total of five yeshivas were found to be “underdeveloped.”

This means 82 percent of yeshivas reported as failing were meeting or close to meeting the DOE’s curriculum standards. Contrast this, if you will, with the [47 percent proficiency](https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance) in English and [46 percent proficiency](https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance) in math for students across New York City public schools.

In the [letter](https://www.politico.com/states/f/?id=0000016f-1fc6-dc86-ab7f-bfeed3d50000) detailing the findings, New York City Department of Education Chancellor Richard A. Carranza noted that “The DOE recognizes and applauds the significant progress made as a result of the proactive steps many schools have taken.”

Carranza also pointed out that a group called Parents for Educational and Religious Liberty in Schools “has developed and expanded… secular curriculum materials it has made available to yeshivas in mathematics, English Language Arts, and STEM.” He added, too, that “substantially equivalent instruction does not necessarily require that a school meet each and every item in the Education Law” and that “a strong argument has been made that Judaic Studies can be a powerful context in which to cultivate critical thinking and textual analysis skills.”

Then came the inflammatory headlines from national and Jewish outlets alike, which erroneously proclaimed that only two yeshivas provide basic secular education.

Pivot, now, to upstate New York and northern New Jersey, where Orthodox Jewish families from Brooklyn have been migrating since the 1970s, seeking a less urban and more affordable place to live.

A number of towns have enacted zoning changes forbidding new houses of worship.

In several communities in N.J., including Tom’s River and Jersey City, officials have pushed back against an influx of Jewish families by enacted so-called [“no knock” ordinances](https://www.jerseycitynj.gov/community/noknock), barring real estate agents representing the Hasidic community from offering to buy homes.

In the Orange County town of Chester, 60 miles north of New York City, housing rules were [used](https://apnews.com/08e256fa08f48b9deabab477eb3d71b5) to prevent an influx of Hasidic Jews. New York Attorney General Letitia James recently announced action to fight the rules.

James has called the town’s actions “[blatant anti-Semitism](https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-some-people-find-it-easy-to-present-orthodox-jews-as-the-source-of-their-problems-1.8357993).” She warns that “some people find it easy to present Orthodox Jews as the source of all their problems. That’s just wrong.”

Last year, a [video produced by the Rockland County Republican Party](https://www.jta.org/2019/08/29/politics/ny-countys-republican-ad-warns-of-a-hasidic-takeover) began with dark clouds rolling in and ominous orchestral music swelling as large text flashes slowly across the screen warning that “a storm is brewing” and “if they win, we lose.”

The “they,” the production makes clear, are the Orthodox Jewish residents of the county’s villages and towns.  After an outcry, the video was removed. But its creation was telling.

The previous year, Councilman Pete Bradley of Clarkstown, a Rockland County town, [encouraged](https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/clarkstown/2018/10/03/jewish-group-rebukes-clarkstown-officials-residents-only-comments/1508378002/) local residents to call or text him if they “suspect that non-residents are using our Town Parks.” Orthodox families from neighboring towns had apparently been bringing their children to play in Clarkstown’s parks.

A few months earlier, [Bradley criticized](https://www.jta.org/2018/11/16/united-states/new-york-state-councilman-sorry-suggesting-orthodox-jews-arent-normal) New York Governor Andrew Cuomo for visiting with Hasidic Jewish community leaders, contrasting them with what he called “normal Jews.”

In Jackson Township, New Jersey, Councilman Robert Nixon was [accused](https://shorenewsnetwork.com/2017/11/27/calls-for-resignation-of-anti-semitic-councilman-made-in-new-jersey-town-divided/) of orchestrating the creation of several ordinances aimed at curbing the activities of Orthodox Jewish residents, of spying on Jewish residents and of coordinating his efforts with “Jackson Strong,” a group that has demonstrated deeply anti-Orthodox sentiment. After becoming the subject of two federal civil rights lawsuits, Nixon resigned.

In the Ocean County town of Toms River, the town’s mayor once called the growing Orthodox presence “[an invasion](http://crownheights.info/chabad-news/572824/chabad-files-lawsuit-new-jersey-town/),” and residents posted unfriendly comments online, including one referring to the Orthodox Jews as “stinkin cockroaches.”

There is no direct line from seeking to undermine yeshivas and seeing Hasidic Jews as targets for physical violence. Stupid thugs don’t know a yeshiva from a yurt.

And there is no direct line, either, between those who don’t want Jews moving into their towns and jerks who take pleasure in knocking off Jews’ hats or punching them.

But people who promote the perception of Orthodox Jews as “the other” add to a nebulous but very real animus against such Jews.

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**Thoughts that Count for Parshat Yitro**

*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy* (Exodus 20:8)

Explains Rashi, the great Torah commentator: Take heed to remember the Sabbath at all times, so that if you happen to find something special, set it aside for Shabbat. Likewise, our Sages state that we are not to give special names to the weekdays, but to refer to them in the context of Shabbat ("first day to Shabbat, second day to Shabbat," etc.). Thus we are constantly conscious of the upcoming Shabbat and prepare for it every day.

The same applies to the Messianic Era, the "day that is entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting." Throughout the present "weekday" of exile we must constantly remember and remain conscious of the "Shabbat day" that is coming, preparing ourselves and everything around us for the arrival of Moshiach. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 11 Sivan, 5744)*

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