

lems, or both. Of course, it is possible that a young adult who “flipped” is not in the throes of a rebellion or an emotional crisis masked by an intense focus on Torah study and religious ritual. Nevertheless, any extreme changes in a teenager’s behavior and beliefs should be taken seriously and examined carefully. Psychotherapy is an important resource that can help in this area.

It is important to respect the choices our children make as adults, and to allow them to recognize and appreciate the ramifications. By rejecting a parent or child, one creates a power

ful, Dr. Waxman notes that though peers are a significant influence on adolescents, relationships between parents and children play the most important role in the adolescent developmental process. The level of parental religiosity, or the lack of it, appears to be the most reliable predictor of a child’s religious commitment. In my practice, I have observed that when children feel a serious lack of spirituality and religion at home and sense an emphasis on professional and material success, they tend to be more receptive to their yeshivah teachers in Israel in

home-based lifestyle, since they will shape the lives of their children—the next generation.

Finally, the book lacks suggestions on how to best help families of children in the throes of “flipping.” What advice can be offered to families as they face strong shifts in their child’s personal, religious and educational choices? While no single book on this subject could possibly deal with all the issues “flipping” raises, some practical ideas would have been appropriate. Perhaps a sequel will include a guidebook for parents on developing and maintaining

How do parents strike the right balance between staying involved in their children’s lives and not being intrusive or controlling?

struggle that prevents an honest assessment of the conflict. Longstanding expectations may be replaced with new realities as children reject Ivy League colleges (or college at all), and finding new ways of maintaining a connection between parent and child may be necessary. Honest and respectful conversations will allow and ensure growth and harmony.

The first section of *Flipping Out*, written by Dr. Berger, describes the history and progress of the year-in-Israel phenomenon. He notes that despite the intensity of the yeshivah experience, most students, when returning home, do not embrace radically different life goals and do not abandon their college plans, although they do become more committed to Jewish law and Jewish learning and to considering *aliyah*. He also cites varied reactions from parents, ranging from those who are horrified at the prospect of their child changing his way of dressing to those who embrace the changes in their child as they are grateful he is no longer the rebellious teen he was in high school.

Significantly, Dr. Jacobson does not try to offer a single explanation for “flipping.” One must recognize the vast differences among “flipping” students with respect to motivation, emotional and psychological realities, family background and personal hopes and fears. Providing a sociological perspec-

an effort to achieve a more spiritually meaningful life. Others may “flip” to avoid the pressure of competing in the academic or business worlds, while still others “flip” to separate from exceedingly controlling or intrusive parents. These are all extreme cases. However, these explanations highlight that the phenomenon of “flipping” defies facile generalization.

A significant omission in the book is a serious study of the effects of the year in Israel on young women. One cannot help but be struck by the picture of a large black hat on the book cover, clearly conveying the message that the book addresses conflicts specifically related to young men. Worse, perhaps, is the implication that if young women “flip” it is less consequential than if young men do. Though Dr. Jacobson acknowledges that his statistics focus on young men, and he refers the reader to the work of other psychologists for information about young women, he also suggests that one can extrapolate about young women in many of the cases. This may sometimes be true, but there are many differences between young men’s and young women’s experiences in yeshivah in Israel that should have been acknowledged. In fact, I would suggest that the effect of a year’s study in Israel may have more repercussions for women than for men, especially in those cases where young women adopt a more traditional and

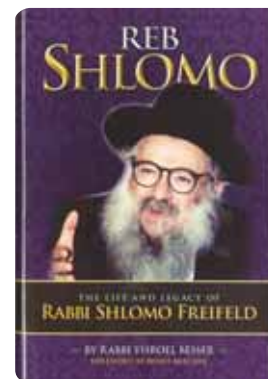
relationships with adult children who chose a different path in life. Change is threatening to all of us and must be processed carefully, with sensitivity and respect, even during times when the feelings of rejection, anger, confusion and guilt may be at their peak.

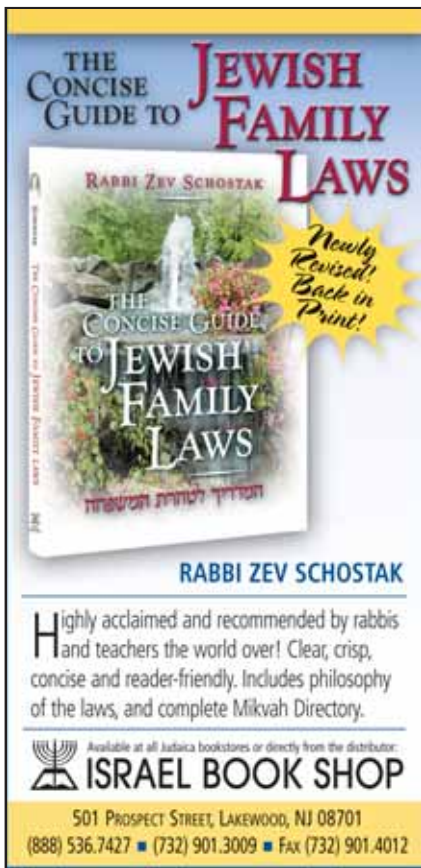
The year in Israel can result in substantial emotional and intellectual changes. Open, honest and respectful communication will help young adults solidify their gains in the context of their own lives, in their relationships with their parents and in their future relationships in the years to follow.

Reb Shlomo: The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld

By Rabbi Yisroel Besser
Judaica Press, 2008
332 pages

Reviewed by Michael Sanders





In the depths of memory, there abides an image vouchsafed to me alone. I see him now as he was then—more than half a century past—a man of stature in the full bloom of life. Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld, my *rebbe*, scrubbing the floor on his hands and knees.

His *rebbe*, Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, had asked him to prepare the building on President Street in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, for the inaugural of Kollel Gur Aryeh of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin. Reb Shlomo asked me to lend a hand, and there we were, all alone on our hands and knees.

Not long ago, I mentioned this episode to a *rosh yeshivah*—and watched his eyes light up. “I always sensed in that *kollel* an overwhelming feeling of *kedushah*; now I know where it came from,” he said.

But that was Reb Shlomo. He could weigh issues that stand *berumo shel*

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olam (at the apex of the universe), and he could also scrub the floor of a *makom Torah*.

When I first heard that *The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld* was being written, I thought: “It can’t be done. How do you capture Reb Shlomo Freifeld between the covers of a book?” I, who knew him for forty years, would have found it a daunting task. It is all the more astonishing to find that Rabbi Yisroel Besser, who knew him not at all, has indeed succeeded in this endeavor—and has caught him to the life. The author’s vast study and research (he has written *Warmed By Their Fire* [Brooklyn, 2007] and is a contributor to *Mishpacha* magazine and to the *Yated Ne’eman*) have enabled him to produce a marvelously broad picture of Reb Shlomo. He has, too, the literary gift: there is not a dull sentence in the book.

The Life and Legacy is replete with instances of Reb Shlomo’s indomitable spirit. He never despaired of a *Yiddische neshamah* (a Jewish soul), wherever it may have been and whatever it may have been through. The most beautiful expression in the English language, he once remarked, is “And yet.” However bleak the prospect, however dark the future, for him there was always redeeming hope.

No book is perfect. Though *The Life and Legacy* is organized in chapters

Rabbi Besser has the literary gift: there is not a dull sentence in the book.

around specific themes, various people and ideas keep returning to its pages. The richness of this work calls for the aid of an index. You could search the book—some 330 pages—for the story of Reb Shlomo and the eggplant, or for what he learned from the Mona Lisa or how he got to wash the hands of Reb Moshe Feinstein; they are all there—but an index would make them easier to find.

We would have been gratified to learn more about Reb Shlomo’s personal history. In our reverence for great men, we tend to hold them immune from the pangs and heartbreaks of daily life. They sail along, in our fancy, trailing clouds of glory in perennial

sunshine. But all life is a trial, and the great are tried with the small. Our *rebbe* was not spared his own tribulations. One of the greatest of these was the search for his *bashert*.

Looking back on that time in his life, he once told me he had been confounded to see all his friends happily married, while he remained alone. One match after another had been proposed, to no avail.

Years passed—he became twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six....He told me he had become despondent, and had despaired of his future. But, finally, at the age of twenty-seven, when he found his *bashert* in Sara, the *tzaddekes* from Yerushalayim, it all became clear: how could they have been wed any sooner, when she was just seventeen?

One of the last chapters in the book is devoted to the *rebbe tzin*. We used to say that her feet did not touch the ground. A moment in her company was a privilege. In *The Life and Legacy*, Rabbi Besser has provided but a glimpse of the *rebbe tzin* from Yerushalayim; she really needs a book of her own.

Another chapter should be titled “The *Rebbe tzin* from Costa Rica.” [Reb Shlomo remarried after his first wife passed away.] Who could have foreseen that a woman from a far-away land, Sarah Etel, would so long afterward ar-

rive, crowning a great life journey of her own, to join Reb Shlomo in his last years, and be for him and for us a rock of strength and devotion? “A woman beyond pearls”—much as *Rebbe tzin* Sarah Etel, *shetichyeh*, would call it nonsense, the phrase fits none more than she.

Talk of the two *rebbe tzins* highlights an aspect of Reb Shlomo’s personality that seems on its face absolutely remarkable. What could be more disparate than Yerushalayim and Costa Rica? They are a world apart. One, an ingenuous young girl of the Old World of the Holy City; the other, a cosmopolitan professor of the new world of the academy. And yet, singular

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as they are, Reb Shlomo found in each a unique life companion.

The wonder is actually to be found in a fundamental aspect of Reb Shlomo's personality. He strove in so many ways to emulate his own *rebbe*. One of Rabbi Hutner's maxims was "We have room in our *beis midrash* for everyone, from [the] *shomer Shabbos* to Eliyahu HaNavi." This broad amplitude was realized in Rabbi Hutner's *beis midrash* at Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, and, as the book attests, was inherited by Reb Shlomo.

His own *beis midrash* at Sh'or Yoshuv Institute in Far Rockaway, New York, had room for everyone too—for *he* had room for everyone. He was broad enough to "talk with crowds ... or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch." And for Reb Shlomo there was no contradiction in finding a life partner in the distinct individuality of each *rebbe*tzin.

It is a striking testimony to the comprehensive vision of the *rebbe*, and to the exhaustive nature of Rabbi Besser's work in portraying it, that the book can serve as a handbook for coping with the ups and downs of daily life. Full of Reb Shlomo's approach to so many varied life problems and crises, *The Life and Legacy* might well have been titled "How to Live a Real Jewish Life." The book recounts the story of one of Reb Shlomo's *talmidim* (students) who suddenly loses his job. Devastated, broken, he calls the *rebbe*, who is already ill at the time. "Stay right there—I'm on the way over," says Reb Shlomo, who arrives after a two-hour journey. He fortifies the *talmid*, giving him much practical advice.

At the time I read this story, I had just heard of someone else who had lost his job. I picked up the phone and read it to him, for which he was immensely grateful. Countless others will no doubt be cheered and inspired as they traverse the pages of the book.

It's always easier to forbid than to permit, and it's common nowadays to call for greater and greater stringency in religious behavior. Our *rebbe*, however, was not named Shlomo—"the wisest of all men"—for nothing. He knew that the path to the Light is a gradual one, and that those new to the path must not lose their way. Which

other *rosh yeshivah* tells his *talmidim* to take a nap *Shabbos* afternoon instead of learning? To break the "nasty habit" of teetotaling and to drink a *lechaim*? To tell a little girl the stories of Jesse James and Little Red Riding Hood? To go on with his college education rather than drop out and return to the yeshivah full-time? To not grow a beard because it might displease his wife? To not give up his career as a doctor in order to learn at the yeshivah? No doubt Reb Shlomo advised each individual according to his needs, but it takes *breite pleitzes* to prescribe such contrarian remedies.

At the same time, it is remarkable to find the *rebbe* berating himself for eating breakfast once without *kavanah*, "without any *chiyus penimi* [inner vitality]." He felt it was "not the eating of a human being; it was more like an animal, lacking in contemplation." One of his hallmark beliefs was that the human potential is without limit; that people have the capacity to be big and that the aim of life is to actualize one's full potential. For Reb Shlomo, to eat a breakfast without *kavanah* is to miss a golden opportunity.

Sh'or Yoshuv attracted all manner of folk who came from far and wide to learn the *rebbe's* secret: how he had managed the marvel of building—and rebuilding—the hearts and minds of a lost generation.

The *gemara* in *Yevamos* cites a verse from Mishlei: "As water reflects the face, so one heart reflects another." This is explained by (what the *rebbe's* devoted *talmid* Reb Yosef Lieber calls) a Mega-Rashi: "If his *rebbe* gives him a smile, the *talmid* grows wise."

Rashi doesn't say that the *rebbe* or *talmid* has an IQ of 160. Nor does he say that the *rebbe* learned with the *talmid* for many years. What counts is the smile; from that, all else flows.

As Rabbi Besser shows in *The Life and Legacy*, Reb Shlomo was the living incarnation of this truth. The ordinary teacher says: "Jump through this hoop, and I will love you." Not Reb Shlomo. He knew the secret of the heart: "I already love you; let's jump through the hoop together." ■

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