

Yom Kippur War Doctor

■ The article dealing with the doctor's experiences during the Yom Kippur War was superb. It touched the hearts of *Jewish Action* readers. The detail with which he depicted the events, the persons, the available facilities, were all in such detail, and so warm-hearted that the stress under which he labored amidst the pressures of the war were adequate to evoke tears of sympathy.

Jewish Action was enriched by this contribution.

Bernard W. Levmore
Jerusalem, Israel

Religious Zionism

■ With great interest I read the article, "Reordering Priorities" by Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein in the Fall 5760 issue of *Jewish Action*. It is with a feeling of chagrin and dismay that I contemplate Rabbi Lichtenstein's proposal to shift the religious Zionist focus to "spiritual achievement." I find especially perplexing his comment, "The fate of Har Habayit will be decided by the amount of *yirat Shamayim* and *ahavat Torah* in Tel Aviv and Har Adar and not by political or physical confrontation..."

I respectfully suggest that we do not retreat from our long *mesorah* of love and political "confrontations" and if need be physical actions for achieving a complete return of all *Klal Yisrael* to an intact *medinah* comprised of its complete halachically determined boundaries. While political verities demand acceptance of whatever treaties and tradeoffs the Barak government makes, let us not make peace with the pull back from active involvement in the political dynamic. No one needs *ruach hakodesh* to see the tenuousness of the current political arrangements in the Middle East. We

must be as capable as we were in 1945-'48 to fight for our concept of the *Medinah al taharat hakodesh*.

While our determination must include greater activity in *limud haTorah*, developing more and clearer applications of *halachah* to modern life and government, and yes, the publication of *chidushei Torah* by our own *talmidei chachamim*, we must not limit the Modern Orthodox Zionist sphere of activity to this dimension. We must continue in the tradition of being active in academia, the military, business, politics and government. If we cannot approve of handing Hebron back to Arafat, then let our people strive to become Knesset members, portfolio holders and prime ministers and conduct the affairs of the state *al pi ruach hakodesh*. I would assert that a *yirat Shamayim* that retreats to the inner sanctum of the *beit midrash* is not really worthy of its name. *Yirat Shamayim* validates itself in the *Kiddush Hashem* it generates in the continual confrontation with others and the glory and honor it brings about for Torah and its learners.

Giving up the ideals and dreams of a greater *Medinat HaTorah* is to disgrace the memory of Yosef Burg *a"h* and the pioneers of Religious Zionism and will cede Orthodox Judaism to its most radical anti-Zionist protagonists. Let's not do it.

Dr. Morton Summer
Monsey, N.Y.

Rabbi Lichtenstein responds:

*I am myself somewhat perplexed as to why Dr. Summer considers my comments regarding the relationship between *yirat Shamayim* and *ahavat Torah* and the realization of the Religious Zionism vision perplexing. The idea that there is a correlation between our religious commitment and historical success or failure is one of the most fundamental teachings of Tanach, a principle that is often*

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repeated and emphasized as a basic tenet of our spiritual life, as our twice daily recital of the second parshah of Shema makes quite clear.

However, in addition to this metaphysical perspective, there is an additional consideration, inherent to Religious Zionism's historical endeavor, that must be taken into account. As its name implies, Religious Zionism attempts to integrate two elements that have been separated in the modern era by other movements, i. e. secular Zionism and non-Zionist Orthodoxy. This obviously requires the inclusion of both political activity and spiritual achievement in the Religious Zionist agenda to realize the prophetic vision of the establishment of a Medinat HaTorah in Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, since activism and involvement in society and history are part of the Religious Zionist credo, the question still remains as to what actions to take and which directions to pursue. It is regarding the content of Religious Zionist policy that I am advocating a reordering of priorities, not an abandonment of involvement with the Medinah and the issues facing it on various fronts.

Moreover, the issue that I addressed was the question of our priorities, both on the absolute a-historical level and in regard to the current state of affairs in Israeli society. Indeed, I do believe – and seem to sense that Dr. Summer disagrees on this point – that the spiritual world of the beit medrash is of greater absolute value than possession of the land and that our priorities must be accordingly arranged. There is a qualitative difference between the two that must be recognized. Our attitude in this respect should be as that of Ya'akov Avinu who acknowledged Menasheh, the man of action, yet insisted that Ephraim must be accorded the primacy. [Parenthetically, I would remark that although the assertion that a "Yirat Shamayim that retreats to the inner sanctum of the beit medrash is not really worthy of its name" would presumably not include someone who closed his Baba Metzia (on 37a) to participate in the Shalom HaGalil campaign and still

periodically leaves the beit medrash to serve as a reservist in the armored corps of Tzahal, I nevertheless must take offense in the name of thousands upon thousands of committed and God fearing Jews (with whom we may have our disagreements on certain basic issues) whom are characterized as unworthy by the writer.

However, even if we should do the unthinkable and put aside the above consideration of the absolute value of the spheres, there still remains the question as to which of these two elements requires greater effort and attention so as to maximize the realization of the Religious Zionist dream of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, given the current state of Israeli society. It is not only the Land of Israel but the Jewishness of the state that will result in the state of affairs that both Dr. Summers and myself yearn for. As stated, "the return of all of Klal Yisrael to an intact medinah comprised of its halachically determined boundaries" is totally insufficient for the realization of the Religious Zionist dream. It is not only to where or how much you return, but primarily in what spiritual state do you return. The acute crisis of Jewish identity within contemporary Israeli society demands an immediate refocusing of priorities to concentrate upon the spiritual state of affairs rather than the exact boundaries of the medinah. If Dr. Summer dreams of the ideal of "a greater Medinat HaTorah," it is beyond me how this can be achieved without placing much greater emphasis upon Torah and spiritual activity; otherwise, there may be an illusion of a creating a greater Israel, but a Medinat HaTorah is certainly unattainable under our present circumstances without devoting all of our efforts to endearing Hashem and His Torah to the people. The upshot of this is that all our activity, political and otherwise, must be assessed as to their impact upon ahavat Torah and whether they serve to increase or decrease the level of Jewish identity of Israeli society and acted upon accordingly. An Israeli society shorn of its Jewish tradition and identity is certainly not the

fulfillment of the Religious Zionist vision, yet it is precisely this issue which is at stake in Israel at the moment.

Moreover, let me emphasize that neglect of the spiritual state of the nation or the impact that other positions may have on it will also directly result in forfeiting any hopes for preserving our territorial achievements. This statement, regarding the need to take into account the spiritual state of the nation and to focus upon its improvement is meant on a dual level; metaphysically, in respect to our accountability to the Master of the Universe and politically as well, since a divided and torn society cannot muster the necessary inner strength, cohesion and conviction to ward off the threats facing it.

Having telegraphically restated the position advocated in the article, I would also add that I found many of Dr. Summer's statements perplexing. What exactly is meant by "physical actions for achieving a complete return of all of Klal Yisrael to an intact Medinah comprised of its halachically determined boundaries"? What sort of physical actions does Dr. Summer have in mind? Who is supposed to perform them and under what authority, if any? What are the boundaries that are being hinted at and who is determining them? Is it Rav Ovadia Yosef or is it Rav Avraham Shapira? How does all this square with his acceptance of Barak's treaties and tradeoffs?

Especially puzzling was the call to conduct the affairs of state "al pi ruach hakodesh." Is Dr. Summer assuming the return of prophetic revelation and/or the use of the Urim veThumim, anytime in the near future, to members of Knesset and prime ministers from the Religious Zionist camp? If not, I have no idea how ruach hakodesh could be invoked in such a context. [Even Agudath Yisroel claims only da'at Torah and not ruach hakodesh.]

In sum, Dr. Summer's comments seem to me to confuse the issue of involvement in the political dynamic with the content of the policies that are advocated. The essential point of my article was not a retreat from political activity but a

reordering of the priorities that political and historical activity seek to advance, based upon the relationship between the worlds of action and spirit, both in absolute terms and in reference to the needs of contemporary Israeli society.

■ Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, I would submit, has missed the major reason for the success Shas has enjoyed in *Eretz Yisrael* in affecting meaningful *teshuvah*. Unlike much of the *Mizrachi* movement, which has become bogged down in the very narrow agenda of realizing Jewish sovereignty over the territories in *Yesha*, Shas has striven to change individual people. Its network of outreach has given a new sense of Torah-centered hope to many Israelis who until now had felt very disenfranchised. Shas' strategy is reminiscent of remarks the Protestant religious leader Charles Colson once made. He said, "In the final analysis, it's not who leads us or what great things we do as a nation that makes a difference, but rather the power of God working in all of us!"

David L. Blatt
Chicago, IL

Rabbi Cherlow responds:

The question of baalei teshuvah within the Religious Zionist movement is a subject requiring lengthy clarification. However, I will briefly address myself to the points raised in the letter.

It is totally incorrect to say that the Religious Zionist movement has placed Eretz Yisrael as the only item on the present agenda. To the contrary, this movement has increased tenfold its Torah learning, its acts of kindness and charity, its aliyah absorption, and other matters. I know of no other movements in Eretz Yisrael that accomplish these matters with the intensity of Religious Zionism.

One should remember that for every door that Shas opens, ten more doors are shut. I greatly value Shas' focus on the individual and its success in the teshuvah movement, and I maintain that we have much to learn from it. However, their success exacts a heavy price in turn-

ing off to Judaism many who are not receptive to their simplistic approach.

Shas has not succeeded in reaching the intellectuals, those who set the political tone, and its established strata of Israeli society. The teshuvah movement needs to be evaluated also by its ability to impact on the public agenda and not only on the individual.

All these are accomplished by religious Zionism from a fundamental conception of "Et haElokim yura v'et mitzvotav shmor" ("Fear the Lord and Observe His mitzvot"). They are not performed on the strength of a nationalistic mandate, but from a profound faith that this is the will of Hashem.

The Price of Chassidut

■ Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum's article, "The Powerful Teachings of Reb Nachman" (Fall 1999) referred to the annual pilgrimage to Uman by thousands of like-minded co-religionists from all over the Jewish world. I would have welcomed a more serious explanation as to why these numbers are increasing every year. No offense meant, but didn't our rabbis teach us that *Moshe Rabbeinu* was buried by the Almighty in an unknown location so that the grave of our greatest prophets should not become a place of worship? I refer readers to Rabbi S.R. Hirsch's commentary on the pertinent verse in *Chumash*.

Is traveling to Uman for *Rosh Hashanah* a *mitzvah*? After hearing privately of the hundreds of thousands of dollars of protection money paid to the local Ukrainian Mafia, and the extreme indignities suffered by travelers while passing through customs and immigration, it occurred to me that perhaps this phenomenon should be discouraged rather than encouraged.

Consider, if you will, the penny that Reb Nachman is said to have suggested one give to charity, and the 10 psalms one should say at his grave. Does it appear that almost two centuries ago, Reb Nachman was speaking

to his local *Chassidim*, who might walk or ride a wagon to visit his grave? I am fairly sure that with his great emphasis on simplicity, Reb Nachman might have asked his *Chassidim* today the following question: Would it not be a greater *mitzvah* to stay home with one's family, say one's prayers with concentration and sincerity to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, while facing *Yerushalayim* and donate the travel money to the many excellent programs furthering *Torah* and *mitzvot*...

S.L. Fordsham
Toronto, Canada

Rabbi Greenbaum responds:

I too regret that within the confines of a short article it was impossible to bring out the true meaning of the Uman Rosh Hashanah gathering and its profound significance not only for Jewry, but for the entire world. It receives great emphasis in Reb Nachman's writings, but in the last analysis it is not susceptible to rational explanation since it is bound up with faith in the sages — Emunat Chachamim.

The expenses can certainly be burdensome, especially for those struggling to bring up families under the difficult conditions faced by many bnei Torah. Of course it hurts that the expenses of going to Uman include stiff visa fees and a Ukrainian government levy to cover the heavy security presence at the event. Unfortunately, security has become a necessity almost everywhere in the lawless world in which we live. Should Jews in Los Angeles and Toronto similarly refrain from gathering in their synagogues and community centers because security is so expensive?

Most of those who choose to return to Uman year after year have spent many Rosh Hashanahs elsewhere. They simply know that the joy, awe, fervor and inspiration of Rosh Hashanah in Uman are completely unique, while the rich blessings that accrue to them and to those they left at home justify the few days' absence and the sacrifice involved.

The overall cost of the annual Rosh Hashanah gathering in Uman is tiny in

(comparisons with the massive sums needed to provide meaningful Jewish education and outreach. The real reason why these are so hard to fund is because those in our communities who are shouldering their fair share of the tzedakah burden are in the minority.

The grave of Moses was hidden away because of his unique stature. Praying at the graves of other tzaddikim is a Jewish custom that dates back to biblical times, as when Caleb went to pray at the tombs of the Patriarchs (Numbers 13:22; see Rashi ad hoc and on Genesis 48:7).

Rebbe Nachman clearly specified the benefits of visiting his grave. He said nothing to suggest that his promise might be subject to some kind of expiration date. The Nazis and the Communists tried to destroy his grave, and for over 40 years it was indeed more or less concealed from the world. The fact that today thousands of Jews stream there fearlessly to deepen their Yiddishkeit is a great Kiddush Hashem and a sign of God's power to save His people from persecution.

Give Credit Where Due

■ For the last few years, I have been receiving *Jewish Action* magazine. I find it informative, current and bold, often dedicating an entire issue to sensitive issues. Most of all, I am quite impressed by the emphasis towards activism and outreach.

Having paid tribute where merited, allow me to take exception with remarks made by Dr. Mandell I. Ganchrow in his "President's Message" (Fall 5760/1999). Returning from an extensive trip abroad, he shares with the reader the state of Jewish affairs in the Ukraine, southern France and Italy. Reporting the meager infrastructure in Venice, he takes a swipe at Messianists "offering to place *tefillin* on visitors, but who are not helpful in building the local community." While I may not appreciate the messenger's tactics, I take strong exception with the blatant disregard for the most successful outreach program ever enacted.

Ever since the Lubavitcher Rebbe

o.b.m. launched this initiative in 1967, during the "Six Day War," hundreds of thousands have been exposed to *Yiddishkeit* and untold numbers have embraced *Yiddishkeit*. The *tefillin* brigades, whether they be in the streets of Toronto, Toledo or Tasmania have been the link to a Torah lifestyle for countless people.

Dr. Ganchrow goes on with his concern for Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union, specifically the Ukraine. No mention is made of Chabad which has established a presence in some 30 cities, maintaining over 100 educational facilities, under the aegis of young Chabad *shluchim* (emissaries) who have graciously elected to dedicate their lives to *tikkun olam* and hasten the arrival of *Mashiach*.

**Rabbi Zalman A. Grossbaum
Chabad Lubavitch
of Southern Ontario**

Letters regarding articles in the Winter issue will appear in the Summer issue.

Letters to the editor should be succinct and concern recently published JA articles.

All letters must be signed and include the writer's telephone number or email address, for office use.

Letters selected for publication may be edited for space and/or clarity.

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