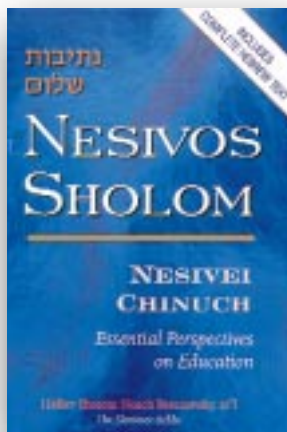


Nesivos Sholom/Nesivei Chinuch

Essential Perspectives on Education

By HaRav Sholom Noach Berezovsky
Translated by Rabbi Moshe M.

Lieber with introduction by Rabbi
Aharon Surasky



Feldheim/Targum
Jerusalem, 2001

211 pages English
104 pages Hebrew

Reviewed by Yehuda Gellman

It was in Cheshvan, 5755 (1994), when I first came across the original two-volume *Nesivos Sholom*, a *sefer* on Chassidic thought¹ by the Slonimer Rebbe, Rav Sholom Noach Berezovsky, *zt"l*.² I was so impressed by the *sefer* that I decided I wanted to meet the author. He lived in Jerusalem, close by to where I lived; by Kislev, I was sitting in Meah Shearim in a little anteroom to the Rebbe's din-

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ing room. The room was filled with people who were waiting for the *gabbai* to emerge from the Rebbe's room and motion to them to enter. After a long while, the *gabbai* summoned me. I entered the room, and found myself alone with the Rebbe. He sat at the far end of the table and motioned to me to sit down close by him, which I did. The Rebbe gave me his hand in greeting and looked at me. Looking at him, and holding his hand, I began to cry, softly, openly, and freely. All the while, the Rebbe held onto my hand and looked at me intently. When I stopped crying, the Rebbe let go of my hand and said, "Yes?" Our conversation began.

William Butler Yeats once wrote, "We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us, that they may see their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer...life, because of our quiet." It wasn't the very idea of meeting the author of *Nesivos Sholom* that brought my tears. Nor was it simply his warmth and receptiveness, the twinkling of his eyes, or his unassuming demeanor. What evoked something so deep within me was the utter stillness of his being, in which I could see reflected a point of my own inner stillness, and, *zot hap'aim*³, a self-clarity seldom possible.

This was the Slonimer Rebbe, who ruled not by striking fear as he entered the *beit midrash*, nor by taking on the regal formalities of a venerated *rebbe*. He "ruled" by the compassion and love that emanated from his inner stillness. How did his love manifest itself? At a celebration marking his recovery from a serious illness, the Rebbe declared that the dinner was thanks to the *Chassidim*, in the merit of whose prayers he survived the crisis, just as the *Kohen Gadol* survived entering the

Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur in the merit of the people's prayers. At a *tish* or other event, the Rebbe never said a word of criticism about anyone, focusing always on ways the *Chassidim* could improve themselves spiritually. Someone I know told me he confessed to the Rebbe to having committed a grave sin and asked what he should do about it. Instead of reproaching the individual, the Rebbe, half-smiling,

*Looking at him,
and holding
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to cry, softly,
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replied matter of factly, "Do *teshuvah*" (repent).

The Rebbe's writings reflect his inner stillness and his love, and, yes, that twinkle in his eyes. His love was in the best tradition of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and frequently, the Rebbe would say, "Whoever thinks that because of sins he has done he can no longer come to God and be received in love, has not even reached the doorstep of Judaism and *Chassidism*." When learning a piece of the Rebbe's Torah, one detects the "twinkle in his eye" through the feelings of joy, peace, and well-being that his writings inspire. The corpus of the Rebbe's writings—which reveals his utter authenticity—is a treasure for those seeking sincere *avodah* (spiritual growth). Indeed, from Yerushalayim to Sharon, Mass. and beyond, groups gather to learn the Rebbe's writings and share in

the *yishuv hada'at* (peace of mind) and *simchah* (joy) that exude from the pages.

Until now, none of the Rebbe's writings, which were written in Hebrew, were translated into English. However, Rabbi Moshe Lieber, a grandnephew of the Rebbe, recently translated *Nesivos Chinuch*. This work is devoted to guiding educators and parents, mostly of boys, but much of it is applicable to girls as well. In his translation, Rabbi Lieber has succeeded in retaining the cadence and mood of the original. The publishers have also provided the Hebrew text in the second half of the book, enabling readers to see the Rebbe's own words as well.

The Rebbe stressed that the goal of *Chassidut* was that the individual achieve inner personal transformation. He used to say that the fact that a person doesn't sin is no proof that the person has undergone such a transformation. Perhaps the occasion to sin simply hasn't arisen! In discussing education, therefore, the Rebbe emphasized the need to create conditions for the child that will foster a path of self-transformation. Thus, we find the Rebbe saying to an irreligious educator that while the latter attends to the student's externals, he aspires to "penetrate to the inner recesses of the [student's] soul" (42-43).

In this work, the Rebbe repeatedly returns to themes of focusing on a child's individuality, respecting his integrity, and imbuing him—from a very early age—with a love of Judaism. He urges utmost sensitivity to a child's feelings and self-image. All of these ideas come through powerfully in the Rebbe's general discussion on education, in his portrait of the yeshivah, and in his principles of elementary education.

Two unusual passages caught my eye. In one, the Rebbe expresses his disapproval of competitions and contests—which are common features of Orthodox education. The damaging effects of competitions outweigh the gains of such practices, according to the Rebbe. The Rebbe was also sensitive to the impact of seemingly small things on a child's personality; in another passage,

he discusses how much weekly allowance parents should give to children. Sensitive to both the need to develop a child's sense of independence as well as the necessity to counter a money-centered culture, the Rebbe advises giving children more money than they need so that they learn how to save.

If a person is to be judged by the fruits of his endeavors, then the Rebbe's success is evidenced not only by his own personality, but also by the deeply spiritual character of the Slonimer *Chassidim*, whom he educated first as their *rosh yeshivah* and later as their *rebbe*.

Rabbi Lieber's translation is splendid in its richness of expression. At a few points, though, the translator seemed to be deliberately softening or under-translating some of the passages. An example is the passages where the Rebbe defends the purity of purpose of the yeshivah, to the exclusion of general studies from its curriculum. I suspect this was done for fear that a wider audience might unjustly shy away from the book because of what some might take to be controversial passages. I can well understand this (even though I believe an author should always remain faithful to a text). However, I thought to myself—if people could only have heard the Rebbe say the words himself, with the authoritative sweetness that was his, there would have been little need to soften his language.

This minor criticism does not dampen my hope that Rabbi Lieber continue to translate many other works of the Slonimer Rebbe, gracing those who do not have easy access to the Rebbe's original writings.

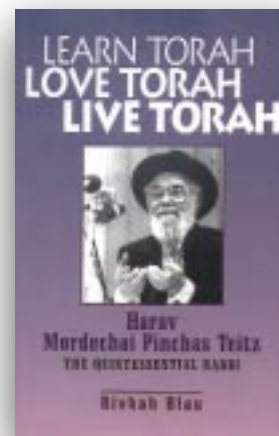
Notes

1. The Rebbe subsequently wrote *Nesivos Sholom* on the Torah as well as the volume on *chinuch* currently under review.
2. The Rebbe passed away last year.
3. A reference to the language used by Adam HaRishon (Gen. 2:23) in "discovering himself" in Chava.

Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah

Harav Mordechai Pinchas Teitz: The Quintessential Rabbi

By Dr. Rivkah Blau



Ktav Publishing House, Inc.
Hoboken, NJ, 2001

371 pages

Reviewed by Victor B. Geller

For a loving daughter to write a biography of her father is a daunting task. When the subject leaves a legacy of manifold achievement, objectivity is even harder to come by. Dr. Rivkah Blau makes a valiant attempt at balancing being a loving daughter and an objective biographer in telling the life story of her father, Rav Mordechai Pinchas Teitz.

Blau's pride in her father is warranted. Rav Teitz (1908-1995), a scion of a distinguished Russian rabbinic family, came to America at the age of 25. But unlike most of his colleagues who crossed the Atlantic but never really left Europe, Rav Teitz was not intimidated by the dynamism and strange benevolence

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of the new country. Where most of his *chaverim* (peers) saw Jewish ignorance and indifference, Rav Teitz saw opportunity. America quickly commanded his respect and Rav Teitz was excited by the prospect of kindling an enthusiasm for Torah among Jews in this democratic and generous country. *Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah* is the story of his success.

Rav Teitz's most lasting victory was his first. He won the hand of Basya Preil in marriage. She was the eldest daughter of Rav Elazar Mayer Preil, the rabbi of the small community of Elizabeth, New Jersey. Though raised in America, Basya shared the values and Torah outlook of her learned father. In her future husband, Basya found a *talmid chacham* who was willing to succeed her revered father as the spiritual leader of Elizabeth. Rav Teitz, in turn, found in his bride a very intelligent, practical young woman, with a strong desire to further Jewish life. Theirs was a happy, fruitful, 58-year-long partnership of hearts, minds and spirits. Blau offers a moving example of the teamwork that characterized her parents' relationship: In addition to his mastery of Yiddish, Hebrew and Aramaic, Rav Teitz also spoke Russian, German, Latvian and Lithuanian. As the new rabbi of Elizabeth, he—unlike many of his fellow European-trained colleagues—was determined to learn English. Blau writes, "To ensure sophisticated, correct expression in his talks during his first year in Elizabeth, he discussed the topic with his wife in Yiddish beforehand. She wrote the speech in English, then transliterated it into Hebrew script, which he read more fluently than English."

The most compelling element in Rav Teitz's character was his commitment to leadership. His respect for Torah scholarship and religious piety were personal absolutes, but they were not sufficient. For him, a *rav* had to have vision, and the courage to pursue his vision. He put it succinctly. "Leadership is not a populari-

ty contest." His tall, handsome appearance elicited respect, while his ready smile and warmth invited trust. In his community, Rav Teitz represented direction, confidence and boundless energy.

It takes courage for leaders to be ahead of their time. Rav and Rebbetzin Teitz had such courage. Deeply committed to women's educa-

Rav Teitz was not made to be a committee member. When something needed to be done, he thought the matter through, came up with a plan and then set upon its execution.

tion, they established fine schools for young women, and all their daughters were graduated from Barnard College.

Rav Teitz was not made to be a committee member. When something needed to be done, he thought the matter through, came up with a plan and then set upon its execution. Some criticized him for his "go-it-alone" policies. His manifold activities on behalf of the Jews in the former Soviet Union—described in much detail in the book—troubled groups that preferred working together. Rav Teitz did his work privately, diplomatically and with total confidence.

Rav Teitz defined himself as a "*shtat rav*," a community rabbi; he was not interested in the more removed role of a "*velt rav*" national rabbi. Nor would he limit himself to the confining role of a "*shul rav*" congregational rabbi. He was the rabbi of a city with a 10,000-

member Jewish community and five Orthodox synagogues. The *rav* and city were a perfect fit. Elizabeth was large enough for him to teach and influence. Moreover, it had supporters who helped him build a viable Jewish education system. At the same time, the community was small and cohesive enough to enable him to exercise his religious and moral authority. Lastly, Elizabeth afforded him the opportunity to sally forth into the broader arenas of Jewish concern. For years, his Torah message was broadcast throughout the NY metropolitan area. This he did without ever forgetting his primary concern: Elizabeth.

One issue, which the author does not mention, is Rav Teitz's ability to raise funds. The long list of projects and programs that he instituted must have required significant fundraising. It would seem that he had little difficulty finding the financial support he needed. His success in this arena would have interested many.

The shortcomings of the book are minor but require mention. The photographs are charming, however, they often tend to confuse. Some photographs have no relationship to the text alongside which they appear. Many are amateur, family snapshots, and not the greatest quality. Similarly, letters and documents, which would be of interest, are difficult or impossible to read.

Furthermore, while the author offers valuable background material about European rabbinic personalities, particularly about Rav Yosef Rosen, the Rogatchover, overall, she mentions too many rabbis and includes too many family trees. Similarly, the author has a tendency to provide excessive detail about the geography (including the street names!) of Elizabeth. In this sense, the book is reduced to an album for family and local "insiders."

More serious is the tendency to omit or fail to credit others for their roles in projects that interested Rav Teitz. In a detailed discussion of Rav Teitz's efforts on behalf of Yavneh, a religious campus

movement in the late '60s and early '70s, there is no mention of the critical role played by Rabbi Norman Lamm, (at the time the rabbi of The Jewish Center in Manhattan) who raised large sums of money for the organization. By omitting mentioning the contributions of other organizations and individuals, the book gives the false impression that Rav Teitz was the only one involved in outreach and youth work during those years. Throughout the book, one finds no reference to the hugely successful, pioneering work of the OU's NCSY and Yeshiva University's Community Service Youth Bureau in outreach, or the leadership role of the National Council of Young Israel in funding and supporting kosher dining clubs on college campuses.

Despite these minor criticisms, the book provides a comprehensive picture of a remarkable Jewish leader who set a standard of communal Torah accomplishment. For those who want to know how to get the job done, Rav Pinchas Teitz is the man to emulate. **JA**

Gray Matter: Discourses in Contemporary Halachah

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter, with Ezra Frazer



Israel Book Shop, Inc.
Lakewood, NJ, 2001
272 pages

**Reviewed by Yosef Gavriel
Bechhofer**

Rabbi Chaim Jachter's intriguing title for his new work on significant

halachic issues remains enigmatic. He does not explain its connotation. We may, therefore, take the liberty of interpretation. *Halachah* often confronts areas that are "gray."* Yet, by its very nature, as a legal system and code of law, *halachah* must strive to be black and white. Rabbi Jachter has selected several such "gray areas" and attempts to show how the absolute world of *halachah* deals with these often ambiguous concerns. In the main, Rabbi Jachter has succeeded. For this accomplishment, he deserves our commendation and admiration.

Rabbi Jachter shows us how the halachic system progresses from Talmudic sources, through the *rishonim* (medieval sages) and classic *posekim* (codes and responsa), to contemporary authorities. We should note that Rabbi Jachter is a practicing *dayan* (rabbinical judge)—which lends him unique knowledge and qualifications, and is a rare accomplishment for a member of our generation. Both Rabbis Ephraim Greenblatt of Memphis, Tennessee, and Mordechai Willig of Riverdale, New York, recognize and laud Rabbi Jachter's acumen in their *haskamot* (approbations) to *Gray Matter*. Readers will undoubtedly come away with a new appreciation for a broad range of halachic issues. These span the gamut from "The Power of Prenuptial Agreements"—with an analysis of the problems facing contemporary *posekim* intent on designing agreements that work—to "Conditional Marriage"—with an overview of the nineteenth-century attempts to introduce condi-

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tions into the *Kiddushin* process—to other issues related to marriage, divorce and personal status (*Even HaEzer*). The *sefer* also covers monetary matters, including essays on economic competition and copyright law (*Choshen Mishpat*) and daily religious obligations, including extensive discussions of the laws of *eruv* and *kitniyot*, the permissibility of eating legumes on Pesach (*Orach Chaim*). There is also a special section on *halachot* pertaining to the Land of Israel.

We should note that, in common with many writers who are *talmidim muvhakim* (major disciples) of a specific sage or school of thought, Rabbi Jachter tends to cite and favor opinions rendered by authorities associated with Yeshivat Har Etzion (Gush Etzion) and Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (Yeshiva University), his alma maters. Readers who readily identify with these schools will be particularly pleased to see the array of their mentors' halachic perspectives presented in *Gray Matter*.

However, Rabbi Jachter has not chosen to include an introductory essay explaining his methodology. This is to be regretted. The halachic decision-making process has evolved over the last half-century. In the past, *pesak halachah* (halachic decisions) were rendered mostly in correspondence, leaving not just accurate records of the *pesak*, but, more importantly, records of the processes by which the *posek* (legal interpreter) reached his conclusions. Widespread use of telephones—even for long distance and transoceanic communication—and the affordability of personal travel enabling one to meet a *posek* in person, have wrought a significant change. We are witnesses to a major trend in the halachic world towards verbal information and anecdotal evidence. This is particularly true concerning authorities such as Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik, *zt"l*, (who is often cited in *Gray Matter*). Rabbi Soloveitchik was famously averse to issuing written decisions. Diverse versions of his

statements transmitted by various *talmidim* compound the problems arising from the dearth of written material. Some analysis of the nature and quality of the oral transmission process is, therefore, essential. Perhaps at some future date Rabbi Jachter will explain how he deals with the complexities inherent in the realm of oral opinions.

To be sure, aficionados of the halachic world have their own ideas and notions as to the hierarchy of authority within that milieu. Some of those perceptions are near universal; some are not. In publishing *Gray Matter*, a work that introduces its readers to many contemporary *posekim* and their differing opinions, Rabbi Jachter bears the responsibility to divulge some idea of the hierarchy of authority within the halachic world. To leave that ranking to those “in the know” avoids controversy. But this book, we must assume, is intended to educate not only the “insiders” but also the laity.

Were Rabbi Jachter to have discussed *every* issue from source to ruling on its own merits (i.e., which positions are solidly sustained by Talmudic and other primary sources and which are not), then the omission of some hierarchy of authority would be less regrettable. This, however, is not always the case. Rabbi Jachter often informs us of the perspectives of various authorities and then leaves us “on our own.” Not knowing their stature, “outsiders” are left to guess if an opinion is authoritative or not. Is there no way to lessen this “grayness?”

Rabbi Jachter, himself obviously an erudite scholar, refers to most authorities he quotes with the honorific “*rav*,” but ordinarily makes no distinctions or gradations in *Gray Matter*. The most blatant exceptions to this rule are Rabbi Jachter’s references to Rabbis Emanuel Rackman and Moses Morgenstern in his discussion of the procedures which the pair employs to annul marriages. Rabbi Jachter accords these individuals only the honorific of

“Rabbi”—in contradistinction to their antagonists (viz., *Rav* J. David Bleich and *Rav* Ovadia Yosef—see, for example, p. 58). The implication is obvious: The pair of rabbis is not “in the same league” (my colloquialism) as the “*rabbanim*.”


The omission of a hierarchy mars the generally masterful *Gray Matter*. A case in point is Rabbi Jachter’s discussion (p. 189) of a leniency concerning “zigzags” of up to 22.5 degrees in the overhead wire of an *eruv*. In my opinion, *eruvim* that contain such “zigzags” are invalid. Rabbi Jachter presents a significant *kullah* (leniency) based on an oral transmission of one of Rabbi

Rabbi Soloveitchik was famously averse to issuing written decisions.

Soloveitchik’s students and the brief citation of a contemporary *posek*. The “opposition” is represented by “hearsay” concerning the practice of a living *posek* (could Rabbi Jachter not simply have phoned him up and confirmed this position?). While this is not the place to discuss this issue in depth, I believe the preponderance of halachic opinion, including that of the Chazon Ish, *zt”l*, (whose opinion, Rabbi Jachter tells us on p. 172, bears unique weight in the area of *eruvim*), is against this leniency. Rabbi Jachter surely realizes that *Gray Matter* may come to serve as a resource for many *rabbanim* in their quest for halachic benchmarks. When Rabbi Jachter presents such a leniency, we might expect him to discuss the matter in light of the sources and discuss the merits of the sources and the oral opinions. It would have been judicious to present the full background of the sources and discuss the authority of oral vs. written

sources of *pesak halachah*, as well as the relative weight accorded to different *posekim*.

A minor quibble with the author is his treatment of certain issues that are not readily susceptible to the black and white of *halachah*, such as *musar* (ethics or morals) and *machshavah* (Jewish thought and philosophy). When dealing with far-reaching ideological matters, Rabbi Jachter should have surveyed the writings and statements of many more great thinkers, and compiled more sources. This applies, for example, to his discussions on “Should Yeshiva Students Serve in the Israeli Army?” and “The Torah’s View of Gambling.” Thus, these discussions are simply not comparable to the wonderful presentation of, say, “Milking Cows on Shabbat.” While Rabbi Jachter is entitled to include whatever issues he pleases in a book that he writes, it seems that in the “gray” area of *hashkafah*, we might expect a broader exploration of the various topics.

Despite these critiques, Rabbi Jachter’s contribution to the field of contemporary halachic discourse is very edifying and easy to read. Readers interested in educating themselves in diverse areas, including some of the most pertinent halachic issues of our day, will find *Gray Matter* an engaging, informative and scholarly work. 

* I realize that “gray matter” might refer to the brain, but the lack of clarification allows for inference.

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