

Revisiting the Campus

■ There are always many thought-provoking articles that make for good discussion and much reflection in *Jewish Action*. However, the summer 2003 issue also pulled at the heart and soul of the reader. I refer specifically to the wonderful coverage of the important issue of how college life affects our youth.

I know of a young man who was valedictorian of his Modern Orthodox high school class and attended an Ivy League college in the Midwest. In college, he became infatuated with the daughter of a Baptist minister. That infatuation, despite the best efforts by many, was irreversible. It was my responsibility to try and pick up the pieces of his broken family who made the decision to collectively boycott this boy's graduation. The reason they did so was because the following day, his wedding ceremony was to be held, officiated by his future father-in-law.

Chazal instructed us not to blow the *shofar* on Shabbos so as not to chance that a Jew would take his *shofar* and go to a "*baki*" (professional) for a training session, thereby violating the prohibition of carrying on Shabbos.

I'm not sure that *Chazal* were concerned that a significant percentage of Jews would violate Shabbos. Yet it is worth doing away with this great mitzvah for one day rather than risk the violation of Shabbos.

The only thing more precious to a Jew than Shabbos is the Jew himself. Why isn't this halachic principle employed by our educators and par-

ents in choosing a college for a Modern Orthodox child? Why can't we apply the rationale that even if one out of a hundred or one out of a thousand can be affected by attending today's college campus, then we, as a community, have to proclaim these campuses off-limits to our youth?

This should not be understood as an anti-college message. It is to encourage attendance at Modern Orthodox colleges such as Yeshiva University, Touro or places where Orthodox youth live off-campus under the watchful eye of the local Orthodox rabbi, and are part of the Orthodox community (as is the case at Boston University).

While the proliferation of *kiruv* programs on the campuses (such as those described in the summer issue) are wonderful, maybe the time has come to rethink our priorities for our children; and in the spirit of the law of the *shofar*, at the risk of losing even one *neshamah* (soul), we have to make drastic changes in the ways our children enter campus life.

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Thinking of Therapy

■ I am writing in response to the article entitled *Unorthodox Therapy: Should Your Therapist Be Orthodox?* (fall 2003).

I strongly believe that, whenever possible, Orthodox clients should have Orthodox therapists.

Dr. Lob wrote:

Selecting a therapist who is not Orthodox becomes more of an issue if the purpose of the therapy is directly related to religious conflicts. It is obviously less of a problem, or even no problem at all, when the issues have nothing to do with Judaism.

Living a Torah life is all encompassing. Therefore, *there are no issues that have nothing to do with Judaism.*

A Torah-true *hashkafah* can be internalized only by living a life dedicated to Torah. Therefore, the depth and beauty of the Torah way of life cannot be understood and appreciated by non-observant people. For example, how can a non-observant person understand the issues of the case mentioned by Dr. Lob of a well-intentioned woman who is in conflict with her husband because she wants to do the right thing regarding family purity? How does one balance the two Torah principles: *taharas hamishpachah* (family purity) and *shalom bayis* (peace in the home)? Only a competent halachic authority can determine how she should handle the situation.

It is not that non-Orthodox therapists are disrespectful of Torah values (though some are), or that they lack compassion and respect for religious life (though some do). They simply cannot understand the joy experienced by serving Hashem. They cannot understand the profound inner peace that comes with *emunah* and *bitachon* (faith and trust in Hashem), and with feeling *hashgachah pratis* (God's intervention in our lives). Therefore they cannot understand the mental health benefits to what seems to them like a rigid and self-denying lifestyle.

A personal example: While training for a therapeutic specialty using imagery with an internationally renowned (non-Jewish) therapist, I was required to experience the therapy. In one training session I talked about a wrenching conflict. My husband and I very much wanted to make *aliyah*, but it meant leaving behind family members. The therapist told me about the developmental stages of a woman's life and that I had reached the stage called Sophia, where a woman has completed

the period of giving associated with childrearing and has to go on to the next stage of self-fulfillment. The image for this stage is a woman whose journey of fulfillment requires her to cross a bridge. As she is about to step onto the bridge, she hears the cries of someone drowning in the water below. She pauses but realizes that she has to keep going because there will always be someone who needs her, and if she carries she will never reach her goal.

This is not a Jewish way of thinking! (In fact, it is like the classic case of the *Chassid shoteh* [righteous fool], the man who will not save a drowning woman because he cannot touch women.)

Another example: A clinic staff is discussing the case of a child diagnosed as having ADD (attention deficit disorder). The child attends a Jewish day school and has Jewish studies in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon. All too often the knee-jerk response of non-observant professionals is to attribute the child's difficulties to the demands of a dual curriculum and to recommend taking the child out of the morning program. In rare cases this might be the best solution, but almost always there are other modifications that can be made.

I agree with Drs. Friedman and Lob that there are times when it might be advisable for an Orthodox person to see a non-Orthodox therapist. However, having an observant therapist not only avoids the problems above but also adds the possibility of a therapeutic experience that is emotionally and spiritually healing and uplifting. There are many excellent, highly trained Orthodox therapists available now, and, with Hashem's help, every troubled Jew can find appropriate help.

Yehudis Mishell, Ph.D.
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For nearly a century the myth was promulgated that psychotherapists are

neutral, non-judgmental professionals. In the past decades, however, there has been a growing awareness that *some* therapists do influence their clients in areas of their lives for which the therapist has no mandate, like the client's religious beliefs. It is time to hammer another nail in the coffin of the "neutral psychotherapist"—*all* therapists influence their clients in areas other than those they have been asked to deal with.

The therapist is in the business of influence peddling. His job is to *influence* his client in a way that will lead him to the desired therapeutic goal. The client comes to him in a most vulnerable state of mind. The therapist may be perceived as possessing magical powers necessary to help the client out of his distress.

Will this influence be negative? Certainly it can be. There are no rules nor certainties when it comes to what goes on behind the therapist's door. Therapists, as other mortals, cannot be counted on to police themselves.

One apparent solution would be to search for a "qualified therapist." In my experience, the likelihood of a therapist's success—in any particular case—is not a function of his academic qualifications. The most well-known psychotherapists are respected not because of their success at helping people but because of the books they write or the talks they give.

Those most vulnerable to being negatively influenced by therapists are teenagers or those who are not firmly anchored in a religious milieu, such as singles and divorced individuals. In such cases, I would be very selective in referring a therapist, and religious counselors should be preferred.

In light of the above, community rabbis should be given "in-service" training to sensitize them to the qualities one should look for in a therapist. These rabbis should meet with the various therapists who service their communities. This would create a situation whereby the therapist is aware that someone "is looking over his/her

shoulder." In addition, the client would know that he can seek the advice of a rabbi conversant with these issues, should the need arise, and the community members would know where to turn for qualified and sensitive professional help.

Avigdor Bonchek, Ph.D.
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Thank you for your articles by Drs. Friedman and Lob. I found both to be informative and well balanced. Rav Moshe Feinstein, *z"l* (*Iggerot Moshe, Y.D. 2:57*) ruled that one should not seek a "talking cure" from a non-Orthodox therapist. However, Rav Moshe added:

If they are expert doctors, and they promise the parents that they will refrain from speaking against Jewish beliefs and mitzvot, maybe it would be possible to rely on them because since they are experts, they wouldn't lie. . . . Therefore if an Orthodox therapist is unavailable, one can use an expert non-Orthodox therapist, providing one gets his assurances that he won't discuss religious issues with the patient.

While it is almost always preferable for an Orthodox client to be treated by an Orthodox therapist, the unconscious wishes and hopes involved when a client specifically requests an Orthodox therapist (such as those mentioned by Dr. Friedman) have to be addressed in therapy.

I would like to add one more observation. When an Orthodox client specifically requests a non-Orthodox therapist, it is usually because he fears a critical and judgmental reaction from an Orthodox therapist when revealing his religious infractions. What these Orthodox clients don't realize is that getting a non-critical, accepting response from someone whom they perceive as not even understanding the significance of the infraction is of little or no emotional value. A sympathetic and understanding response from someone who *does* share their religious values, in contrast,

has a powerful therapeutic impact.

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Dr. Lob questioned, "Isn't it spiritually dangerous to be seen by a non-Orthodox therapist?" I believe the question was left unanswered. He says, "There are highly respected rabbis on both sides of the question."

I have been in this field since 1961 and have discussed this issue with many halachic authorities including Rav Moshe Feinstein, z"l. There was no question in his mind that it was truly dangerous for someone to be seen by a therapist who is not Orthodox, no matter what the presenting problem.

Therapy, by its very nature, when successful, develops a strong bond between therapist and patient. In many cases, this leads to the patient seeing the therapist as the "guru" for all his needs. Many times the most innocuous psychological treatment leads to an attitude of "I want out, I need freedom," et cetera, which non-Orthodox therapists usually see as the way to go. In fact, when faced with no Orthodox therapists around, it is often preferable to go to a non-Jewish therapist, especially a religious non-Jewish therapist, to avoid this pitfall. Certainly in large cities with hundreds of Orthodox psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists, there is no need to go to a non-Orthodox therapist.

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The wife of a rabbi, and the mother of four school-age children, I made the decision to enter therapy. Living in an out-of-town community where opportunities for finding an Orthodox mental health professional are limited, the choice to see an Orthodox therapist was hardly mine to make.

I can think of three times that my non-Orthodox therapist made statements that clearly reflected her preconceived notions about Orthodoxy. When I raised the issue, she apologized and stated that it is her job and

that of every therapist to discuss counter-transference in peer review and/or supervision sessions. Inquiring whether a prospective therapist is in a peer review group or has adequate case supervision should be something that all patients do.

I agree with Dr. Friedman that the role of a therapist is not to act as a spiritual advisor but rather, "to look for recurrent patterns without projecting his own preferences and beliefs." However, how realistic is that? As Dr. Lob states, "In this vague, unspoken place"—which is the interaction all good therapists have with their patients—it is very difficult for the client not to sense and react to the values and beliefs of the therapist. I think that it is the responsibility of both parties to question, understand and work through these issues.

Dr. Lob states that it may be no problem at all to select a therapist who is not Jewish when addressing issues that have nothing to do with Judaism. I don't think there is any facet of my life that has nothing to do with Judaism. It is naive and dangerous to enter into a therapeutic relationship for an anxiety disorder (which is what I did) and assume that religion will not be a focal point in therapy.

Much of the feelings of abandonment and despair that Dr. Lob attributes to anger with God, and which are manifest in an inability to connect to God in a meaningful way, are actually a manifestation of a reworking of an early-stage abandonment. The transference that takes place—if therapeutically effective—will allow the patient in therapy to work through these core issues.

I think that when one's pain is rooted in a lack of Divine connection, he warrants an Orthodox rabbi to guide him through the process of rapprochement with God and a skilled therapist to guide him through the sometimes rocky road of resolution of whatever complex issues lie ahead.

Malkie Schick
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Dr. Friedman responds

Jewish Action received a number of letters in response to my article. A superficial analysis of this correspondence reveals a curious bias. Four letters, written by psychologists/providers, strongly warn Orthodox persons in need of therapy about the spiritual dangers of working with non-*frum* mental health practitioners. Each author, referring to many years of professional work, emphasizes that no therapist is a blank screen; no psychotherapy is ever value-free. Further, emotional distress renders potential patients uniquely susceptible to the "influence peddling" inherent in psychotherapy. Orthodox patients should be matched with co-religionist therapists who can be counted on to share fundamental life principles and to safeguard vulnerable clients on slippery slopes of inquiry that might lead to an attitude of "I want out, I need freedom."

The fifth letter, written by a layperson, comes from a more personal point of view and a plea for competent therapists of any persuasion who will guide *frum* individuals through "whatever complex issues lie ahead." The letter describes a *rebbetzin's* profound experience in psychotherapy/psychoanalysis with a non-Orthodox therapist whose values and beliefs inevitably infiltrated their work. This author maintains that a key aspect of treatment is "the responsibility of both parties in the relationship to question, understand and work through these issues." She was fortunate in having a therapist committed to such investigation. The *rebbetzin's* psychotherapeutic explorations helped her to discriminate between religious and psychological dimensions. She writes:

"Much of the feelings of abandonment and despair...attributed to anger with God...are actually a manifestation of a reworking of an early-stage abandonment."

According to Schick, an effective working through of the transference projections of such feelings can allow the Orthodox Jew to resolve such conflicts. She concludes by establishing appropriate and different roles for rab-

bis and therapists in helping *frum* individuals struggling with a lack of connection to the Divine.

My point of view comes from personal experience as a patient and from over two decades of work as a psychiatrist. Like many of the letter writers, I cannot pick out sequestered areas of my life that have nothing to do with Judaism. Torah tradition and Jewish history permeate all. Both of my therapists were professionals with demographic profiles quite dissimilar to my own. Both were older men, Freudian analysts and secular Jews born to American parents and raised in New York City. In contrast, my parents are Holocaust survivors, and I was born and brought up in a rural area remote from conventional Jewish culture. Many times I felt a keen sense of alienation—was it their maleness, their urbanism, their secularity, their adherence to classic psychoanalytic doctrine that was to blame? Or was it my own struggles with anger and trust? Possibly some measure of distance was due to the unavoidable yet necessary realization that no person can magically understand another completely. Each of these may hold some truth, but what I know for sure is that this now long-ago exploration of my own anxieties and conflicts helped me to live a psychologically freer and ultimately more deeply religious life.

In summary, I advise *frum* Jews in need of a psychotherapist to search out an individual with a reputation for excellence. While it is difficult to know what goes on in the privacy of the consulting room, word of mouth often spreads a reputation for empathy, respect and clinical success. I charge rabbis and educators with becoming more familiar with psychological processes and resources. Jewish leaders are crucial gatekeepers for community mental health. They can screen, advise and, perhaps most important, destigmatize emotional distress. For some of their congregants/students/advisees, a *frum* person may be just the right match, for others, that will not be so, whether

due to preference or availability. While several of the psychologists who wrote in optimistically predict that there are ample numbers of qualified Orthodox therapists to service this community, I have not found this to be true. Thus, I suggest that young *frum* people looking for rewarding careers consider the mental health spectrum of professions.

Former or current Orthodox psychotherapy consumers who want an avenue for sharing their perspectives on therapist selection and the psychotherapy experience overall—and who wish to enhance the community's understanding of these areas—may want to participate in a study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation in clinical psychology.

The purpose of the study is to learn what steps *frum* clients and their psychotherapists can take to promote a more effective psychotherapy experience. The study entails confidential, one-on-one interviews conducted by the study investigator, and participant anonymity is guaranteed throughout. Interested individuals are invited to call Rivka Starck, Psy. M., at 732-445-6111, ext. 925 or e-mail starck@eden.rutgers.edu.

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