


NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

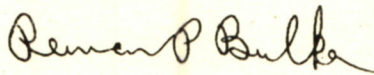
 This issue of *Rabbinics Today* is, as things stand, the final issue. Serving this year as editor of *Rabbinics Today* has been challenging and rewarding. I am grateful to the many people who have contributed so much to the success of *Rabbinics Today*, most notably its publisher, who was also the editor for the first two years, Rabbi Basil Herring.

Elsewhere in this issue Rabbi Herring offers his thoughts on the plight and fate of *Rabbinics Today*.

Special appreciation is hereby extended to Irving Osterer, whose artistic expertise has so enhanced *Rabbinics Today*. To Blanche Osterer, my secretary at shul, goes profound thanks for all her efforts, including coordinating and typing, that have made much of this year's publication into a reality.

This final edition contains a review of the outstanding new book by Rabbi Walter Wurzburger, excerpts from an address to the Yeshiva University Semikhah Class by its President, Dr. Norman Lamm, a book review by our publisher, Rabbi Basil Herring, sermonic quips and vignettes, and of course the full length sermonic discourses.

Be well, have a restful summer, and an invigorating future.



RABBI REUVEN P. BULKA

SERMONIC QUIPS

NOT AS GOOD AS

The doctor greeting a patient on the street got no response. Only when the doctor yelled "Hello" did the patient respond.

The doctor quickly ascertained that the patient, a little bit into the sauce, was hard of hearing, and recommended the patient stop drinking. That way the hearing would improve.

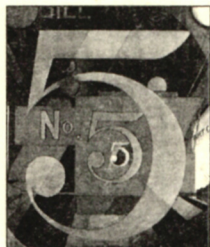
A few weeks later they met again on the street. This time the doctor did not need to holler. The patient responded the the level-pitched greeting of his doctor.

But a few weeks later, they met once more, and the doctor was forced to scream for the patient to hear.

Five Guiding Principles for Rabbis

BY DR. NORMAN LAMM - PRESIDENT, YESHIVA UNIVERSITY
Excerpted from an address to a *Hag HaSemikhah* at Yeshiva University.

(ED. NOTE - This masterful address by Dr. Lamm contains a wealth of insight into the modern Rabbinate. What follows are the culminating final points. It is highly recommended that you obtain the entire text, which is available from Yeshiva University).



First, you who are this day being invested in the rabbinate dare not be discouraged! The *Sefer Chasidim* of R. Yehuda Ha-hasid teaches us that one who composes *chiddushei torah*

(*Torah* writings) and does not publish them is guilty of being *mo'el be'hekdes*, of illicit use of sacred property, because our intellectual achievements in *Torah* are the gift of the Almighty and we dare not keep them to ourselves and deny them to our fellow Jews.

And if this is true of *Torah* novellae, which another *talmid chakham* may well be able to disprove, how much more so is it true of creating *Torah* personalities, of making Jews who will live and support *Torah*? ! You have no moral right to be frightened, no right to abandon your fellow Jews, no right to hoard *Torah* for yourselves and deny it to others - even though you are reluctant and they are unreceptive!

Some of you who are blessed with the gift of leadership may soon rise to be the agents of great, perhaps dramatic, improvements in the relationship between *Torah* and Israel. But each of you can, if you will it, make at least a dent here and a change there, so that together you will have achieved mighty contributions, together with other *musmakhim* of our *Yeshiva* and other *yeshivot* and *benei torah* from all over the country.

The second "negative commandment" is: **do not allow yourselves to be sucked into any of the fashionable extremisms that are tearing our people apart. They are tempting, even seductive. Supporting them can make us feel good emotionally without burdening our intellects.**

Extremism threatens to rip off the thin membrane of civilization that covers the inner volcano of violence. Violence from the mouth of a gun is a cancer that grows from the verbal violence from the mouth of a careless speaker or the pen of an irresponsible writer. And the

oncogene - the cancer's seed - is extremism in dehumanizing your adversary.

There is a special obligation that lies upon all who have influence over the public - especially younger people, who are less prone to make fine distinctions, who are often at the mercy of boiling hormones. You will soon be in such positions in your congregations and classrooms. Remember what King Solomon taught: *hachayyim ve'ha-mavet be'yad ha-lashon*, the tongue has the power of life and death; speech has consequences.

The Rabbis of the *Mishnah* taught:

Sages, be heedful of your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile and be exiled to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who come after you drink thereof and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned. AVOT 1:11

In *Halakhah*, exile is the punishment for manslaughter, unwitting murder, for incurring careless loss of life. The negligent teacher who uses loaded words indiscriminately will thereby arouse the evil waters - the surging waves of hatred - to churn into violence. And younger, impressionable students, bright but still immature young people controlled as much by their glands as their minds, will imbibe these words and cause death and destruction to themselves and others. And the result will be - a terrible, massive *chillul Hashem*.

So I say to you - and to your teachers and faculty and administration and myself - *Hizaharu be'divrekhem*, be heedful of your words!

Beware of carelessly stigmatizing another person. Let no hothead dare call the Prime Minister of Israel a "traitor." Let that same Prime Minister be heedful and think twice before branding all *olim* from the Orthodox community of Brooklyn "a foreign implant." And let all of us be very, very careful not to belittle any adversary as an "*apikores*" - or even as an "extremist" - before thinking carefully twice and three times.

Beware of intolerance, and beware of tolerance for the intolerant. There is a fine line that separates passion from violence and zeal from zealotry.

Beware of the tendency to deny that any other position can have merit, that your one concern takes precedence over every other consideration, that the adversary is invariably demonic, that every means is legitimate to

achieve your end. Those who passionately take strong positions in Jewish life must know that there are unbalanced people who flock to extremes and who can, with what they consider good intentions, subvert the noblest goals.

Hizaharu be'divrekhem. Let us never forget the lesson of this past week or two of dreadful history: extremism begets fanaticism and fanaticism leads to the worst of evils – bloodshed and the desecration of the Divine Name – the most horrific terms in the lexicon of Judaism – all in the name of high principle and noble ideals and love of one's people.

As you grow and gain influence in the rabbinate, do what you can to bring peace and reconciliation and harmony to our harassed community. Reach out to others in the community to cooperate in bringing *Torah* to the masses of Jews who are alienated from it, so that they can join you in staving off the insatiable monster of mass assimilation. And, above all, learn not only to speak and speak out, but also to listen.

Remember that, as King David put it, "Then did the God-fearing speak (*az nidberu*) to one another, and the Lord listened and He heard." Why, indeed, is the Almighty so attentive to us? Because David writes not *az dibru*, that they spoke, but *nidberu*, in the transitive form, that they let themselves be spoken to by others. This means that, unlike our normal conversations where we are interested only in holding forth and declaiming to others, a truly God-fearing person is genuinely interested in listening to what the other has to say; he is as willing to be spoken to as he is to speak – and he is not anxious to invalidate the other as not God-fearing. That is why the Almighty, as it were, perks up, emulates us, and does likewise: *He listens to us – and He hears!*

So, be ready to listen, to understand, to be sensitive and civil and respectful of others. But do so without submitting to ideological demands imposed upon you by others.

The third, and positive, item is – **to continue to immerse yourselves in Torah study; never stop.** Your *Torah* will be your refuge and your strength, your consolation and your joy, and your inspiration to greater aspiration. And it, above all else, will help you help your people. It is our firm belief that, as the Sages told us, the eternal light of *Torah* will lead people to the paths of goodness and holiness, and that "the people" in this case refers both to your congregants or your pupils, and to you yourselves as well. It is inevitable that your long immersion in the world of *Gemara*

and *Rashi* and *Tosafot* and *Rishonim* will inspire you to devote your lives to spreading *Torah* and to the Jewish people.

It is inconceivable that your adventures in the fascinating universe of *Shakh* and *Taz* and *Peri Megadim*, in arguing with R. Akiva Eger and R. Chaim and the *Minchat Chinukh*, should leave you unready and unwilling to bring these giants of the intellect and the spirit to the loving attention of all your fellow Jews. After having been immersed in *Torah* in the sacred precincts of our *Yeshiva*, we expect you to dedicate the best efforts of your life to *Torah* and *am Yisrael*. For you will one day be the Elijahs who will place your mantles upon the shoulders of yet unborn Elishas.

The next positive thing you will need, and in great abundance, is the **love of Israel, *ahavat Yisrael***. Truth to tell, it is a quite difficult *mitzvah* to perform. Not all Jews are lovable, and some are downright unlovable. But we were not commanded to love only those whom we admire or respect or already love. This *mitzvah* applies not only to individual Jews, but also to *Kelal Yisrael*, to us as a people.

Do not be put off by those who are openly antagonistic to *Torah*. We have accepted the burden of responsibility (*arevut*) for all Jews, regardless of the labels they wear. Save your aggressiveness for the battle against *am ha-aratzut* – that and the ubiquitous hedonism and rampant materialism which are so pervasive in our society. Be prepared to fight indifference to Jews and Judaism – by showing love for the very Jews who are indifferent. Work for them, befriend them, draw them close, sacrifice for them – and they, or many of them, will respond.

Jews today, more than ever before, are attracted by spirituality and authenticity, and that means such things as your *kavanah* in your "*davening*," your *yirat shamayim*, your genuine commitment to *Torah* – and true and palpable love of all God's creatures, all humanity. Share these traits with them in true friendship, and you and they together will be prepared to face the greatest odds and wrest victories out of them.

Remember what the *Baal Shem Tov* told a *hasid* who was broken-hearted because his son had abandoned *Torah* Judaism: "*Love him more*"...

Finally, and very briefly, what you will need, after learning and love, is **gratitude**. It is a theme that has been occupying my attention in recent years, probably because it is so rare and I miss it so much. You will be in the position, as a rabbi or a teacher, to do favors

Angry, the doctor demanded to know why the patient had reverted to his bad habit.

The patient responded – True, doctor, you said that if I stopped drinking I would hear better. But frankly, what I heard was not as good as whiskey (good for Naso, and pertaining to the laws of the Nazir).

FROM WHERE IT COMES

A yeshiva student became totally frustrated with his dormitory diet – latkes on Sunday, french fries on Monday, baked potato on Tuesday, potato salad on Wednesday, mashed potatoes on Thursday, potato kugel on Friday night, cholent with potatoes on Shabbat.

He went to his Rebbe and asked – what berakhah should one recite when eating potatoes?

The Rebbe was surprised that this budding scholar did not know such a basic matter, what children in the first or second grade should know.

The Rebbe responded – Everyone knows that for potatoes the berakhah is *boray pri ha'adamah*. In fact, that is the berakhah for anything that comes out of the ground.

To which his prize student reacted with the next question – But Rebbe, what berakhah should I make if the potatoes are coming out of my ears? (Good for Beha'alotkha, and the episode of the abundant meat).

REAL TRUST

Two newcomers to Israel went to the theatre to hear one of the top Israeli comedians. Neither understood Hebrew, and unfortunately for them, the comedian joked the entire night in Hebrew.

One of the newcomers sat in stony silence, but the other laughed hilariously at every joke.

At the conclusion of the evening, the one remarked to the other – I did not know that you were so well-versed in Hebrew.

I am not well-versed at all, replied the other.

Then why did you laugh at all the comedian's jokes? Replied the other – because I trusted him! (Good for Shelah, and seeing the good in Israel).

HERE I CAN!

A recent arrival from Russia was asked about conditions in the oppressive country which he left.

How were your living conditions? – I can't complain, he responded.

How was your job situation? – Again he answered, I can't complain.

And how was your opportunity to take part in Jewish life? – Once again the retort was, I can't complain.

If that is the case, asked the inquiring questioner, then why did you come to Israel. Because, said the respondent, here I can complain! (Good for Korah, and the complaints of Korah and his cohorts about Mosheh and Aharon).

SHORT VIGNETTES on the PARSHIYOT

NASO – REAL POSSESSIONS

Reb Meir Anshel Rothchild, scion of the famous Rothchild family, was once asked about the size of his fortune.

He responded – My possessions are what I have given to charity and to sacred endeavors. That no one can take away from me. "And every person's sacred things shall belong to that person..." (Numbers, 5:10).

As for the rest, today it may be mine, but tomorrow it could easily belong to someone else.

TRUE BLESSING

Concerning the Kohanic blessing (Numbers 6: 24–26), there is an interesting nuance that comes through in the berakhah recited by the Kohanim prior to pronouncing the blessing.

To the end of the berakhah text, *vetsivanu levarekh et amo Yisrael*, the kohanim add the word *be'avavah*, a word not found in other similar berakhot. Why is this word added, and what does it mean?

One suggested answer is that this word is part of the berakhah, that the Kohanim seek for the community of Israel that *avavah* – love and harmony, prevail in their midst.

This *avavah* is the ultimate *shalom*.

BEHA'ALOTKHA IN JOY, NOT IN DISTRESS

The words, "and there shall be no plague among the children of Israel, as the children of Israel draw nigh unto the sanctuary" (Numbers, 8:19), are given an interesting twist by Rebbe Meir of Dzikov.

He observes that the Jew prays with greatest fervor when there is someone in the household who is ill, or some other calamity is in the wake.

The verse therefore reads as an exhortation to the people of Israel, that they should come to the sanctuary not because of a plague, an illness, or a calamity. Rather, they should come to the sanctuary with fervor that emanates from joy.

for people, to help and guide and support people. Do not expect their gratitude so that you will not be disappointed. But for yourselves, remember that it is a criterion of both your *yiddishkeit* and your *menschlichkeit*.

Your gratitude must be extended to all who deserve it, and I here specifically mean our *Yeshiva* – yours and mine – which has given us the best of *Torah*, the only source of *Torah Umadda*, the warmest climate of intelligent piety and, along with it, intellectual challenges and high ethical standards and, not least, a free *Torah* education that has put us on the road to becoming *Torah* scholars.

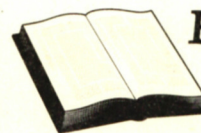
Do this by keeping and nourishing your links to *Yeshiva*. We will always support you. But soon it will be your turn to help support us – by sending students, by rallying supporters to us, by giving of your own substance. And I am proud to say to you that of all our alumni, it is the rabbinic alumni who are, relative to their ability, the most generous to their alma mater. May you continue in this grand tradition of *hakarat ha-tov*.

The world you are entering as you bear the sublime mission of our holy *mesorah* is more complex, more opaque, more hazardous than that of your teachers. At times, and in time, when you will be called upon to wear the mantle of Elijah, it may seem that the sheer novelty of the problems and volume of the challenges you face are so overwhelming, so vastly different from and much more difficult than those faced by your predecessors and mentors that, like Elisha, you will feel abandoned, and perhaps even resent that "Elijah went up in a storm to heaven," in an ivory tower of the *Bet ha-Midrash*, while you must man the front lines, whether in your community or your classroom.

But do not lose courage. Because with the help of the Almighty, you will be granted the request for a double portion of his spirit – *pi shenayim be-ruchakha* – that Elisha made of Elijah as he bade him farewell; a double portion of your teacher's spirit will rest upon you. For our efforts, invested in you, will come to full fruition, and you will add to them your own internal resources of love of God and *Torah* and Israel, of courage and spiritedness.

And then your contemporaries will say of you, as the onlooking fellow disciples of Elijah – the *benei haneviim* – said of Elisha, "the spirit of Elijah now rests upon Elisha."

So may it be His divine will.



BOOK REVIEW

by Rabbi Basil Herring

Sefer Orot Yemai ha-Rahamim, by Rabbi Shlomo Wahrman. No price or publisher stated.

EVERY PULPIT RABBI REJOICES in finding a treasure trove of novel insights focusing on the High Holiday season. How much more so, when such a resource is distinguished by clarity of exposition, a felicitous combination of *halakhic* and *aggadic* sensibilities, a proclivity to quote sources both historic and contemporary, and with all of that, an admirable brevity in presentation.

Mah tov u-mah na'im, therefore, to be able to commend this volume authored by the renowned *talmid hakham* Shlomo Wahrman, which in some 370 pages covers 79 topics, starting with the beginning of *Elul*, and concluding with the night following *Yom Kippur*.

By way of illustration, we can refer to chapter 6, which in less than 2 pages clarifies the question of *ketivah* and *hatimah tovah* on *Rosh HaShanah* versus *Yom Kippur*. What exactly are we to wish each other, and why? From *Rosh Hashanah* 16b, it appears that for all of us not completely righteous or wicked, the *ketivah* in fact takes place on *Yom Kippur*. If so, why does the *Unetaneh Tokef* state that only the *hatimah* takes place on *Yom Kippur*?

Rabbi Wahrman examines the position of the *Vilna Gaon*, among others, and concludes that while the initial judgement is entered (i.e. written) on *Rosh Hashanah*, it can be torn up anytime until *Yom Kippur*, depending on the behavior of the person in question during the intervening 10 Days, in which case the writing as well as the signing occur on *Yom Kippur*.

For this reason, we pray until *Yom Kippur katveinu*, for indeed such rewriting is still in the cards. Accordingly *Unetaneh Tokef* too is understood: until *Yom Kippur* and its final divine insignia, all judgements, for good or evil, are tentative and subject to change. Hence the emphasis of *teshuvah* for the entirety of the 10 Days.

For good measure the same chapter explains the phrase *kol ba'ei olam*, as well as a charming *gematriya* to round it all off. All of this and more, mind you, in the space of 6 brief paragraphs!

So do yourself a favor: acquire this gem and start the year out right.

