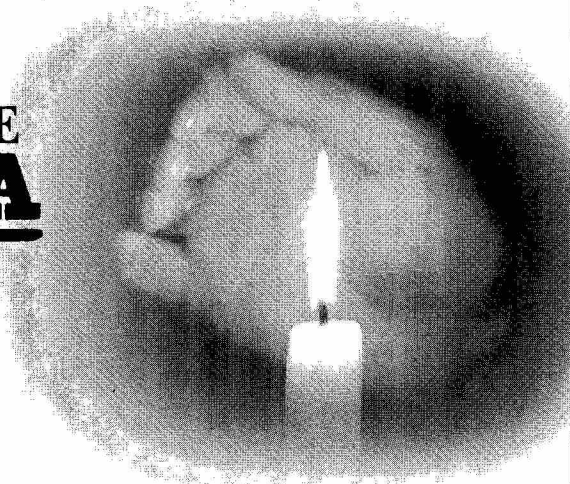


DR. YITZCHOK LEVINE

ON THE AGENDA



Life Insurance — A Necessity, Not A Luxury

TRAGIC ERRORS IN JUDGMENT

The vast majority of Orthodox families today are plagued by financial concerns. With the cost of housing in Orthodox areas, kosher food, camp, tuition, and so on, most families find “there is too much month left over at the end of their money.” Some parents in Lawrence, NY feel so pressed by the thousands of dollars in tuition costs per child per year that they recently proposed sending their children to public school and giving them their Torah education in the afternoon. (See “Collective Tears” by Rabbi Aryeh Zev Ginzberg, *JO*, Sept. '05.) It is hard to understand how any religious parent can even consider such an option, given that this approach was an abysmal failure before day schools and yeshivos became widespread. Public school attendance was often a direct path to the abandonment of religious observance and, ultimately, to assimilation. The parents considering this option must be hard pressed financially, indeed.

Families faced with financial difficulties might decide that they cannot afford life insurance. This is a tragic error in judgment. With all too much frequency, we read of this or that tragedy in

which a relatively young parent dies, leaving a large family of young children. There then follows a concerted effort on the part of friends and relatives to raise money to support the family. Ads are placed in Jewish publications and appeals are made in shuls for funds to support those orphaned. Many do their best to respond to appeals, but more often than not, sufficient funds are not forthcoming to support families devastated by tragedy. One can say with certainty that every family with unmarried children must have sufficient life insurance. Surely, this is a vital issue that must be addressed, as soon as possible.

A TORAH PERSPECTIVE

Approximately forty-five years ago, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, זצ"ל, was asked by a man with a family, “Do I have to buy life insurance?”

Reb Yaakov replied, “Who do you expect to take care of your family if something happens to you, ז"ח?”

The fellow replied in all seriousness, “I expect that the *kehilla* will take care of them.” Reb Yaakov replied, “You *cannot* assume that others will do this. Even if they do, it will be for only a few years at most.” Reb Yaakov then turned to another person who was standing nearby, and said, “To have *bitachon* on someone else’s *cheshbon* is *not acceptable!* You have an obligation to buy life insurance!” The net result was that the listener did indeed buy life insurance for himself and his wife.

More recently, others, as well, have

spoken about the importance of obtaining life insurance. In a responsum given on April 28, 2005, Rabbi Yisroel Belsky, שליט"א, *Rosh Yeshiva* in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, outlined the halachic issues regarding the requirements to purchase life insurance. On May 18, at a gathering entitled “Count Your Blessings,” Rabbi Paysach Krohn stressed the importance of life insurance. At a gathering of about 1800 people held on August 9, Rabbi Aaron Twerski, Dean and Professor of Law at the Hofstra University School of Law, also discussed the issue of life insurance. A recent ad taken out in an Israeli paper by the Belz community makes it clear that the *Belz Beis Din* holds that it is crucial to have life insurance. From all of these discussions, as well as from others, it is clear that both the *husband and wife* in every Orthodox family are required to have adequate life insurance policies.

Close to twenty five years ago, two highly respected mechanchim in Yeshiva Bais Yehuda in Detroit – Rabbi Sholom Goldstein and Rabbi Avrohom Abba Friedman זכרונם לברכה – approached both Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל and Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky זצ"ל regarding the regrettable situation of people in chinuch not having life insurance coverage. Both Roshei Yeshiva strongly encouraged the two to make it their mission to promote the idea of helping yeshivos and day schools underwrite the expense of life insurance for their faculties.

Regrettably, before they could launch the program, Rabbi Goldstein passed away.

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To Heighten the Awareness

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In recent years, a campaign has been mounted by Mr. Albert (Noson) Kahn and Mr. Jeff (Yochanan) Kirschblum to heighten the awareness of the Orthodox community regarding this topic. It should be kept in mind that neither gentleman sells life insurance, nor has any connection with any company that does. Indeed, they have used considerable sums of their own money for advertisements. They have taken the initiative simply because they believe that it is of crucial importance to our community.

The efforts of Messrs. Kahn and Kirschblum include, but are not limited to: (1) taking out a series of ads in Orthodox publications stressing the importance of this issue; (2) contacting yeshivos and encouraging them to participate in a program that will insure that each of their *rebbei'im* has at least \$250,000 worth of life insurance (more than 40 yeshivos have implemented a

program of this kind); (3) organizing campaigns in shuls to raise funds so that members who cannot afford life insurance are able to purchase policies; (4) enlisting the support of well-known *rabbanim*, both here and in Israel, to endorse their efforts (the list is now quite long, and available upon request by calling 845-369-1280); (5) approaching Orthodox organizations and encouraging them to make life insurance a key issue for their members at their conventions and other gatherings; (6) asking *rabbanim* to discuss the need for life insurance with *kallots* and *chassanim*; (7) requesting that *chosson* and *kalla* classes deal with this issue. (They should be made aware of the fact that for less than \$200 a year total each can have a quarter-of-a-million dollar term-life insurance policy.)

While they have had some success, Mr. Kahn told me that there are still literally thousands of Orthodox adults who do not have life insurance or who are underinsured. More yeshivos and shuls need to implement programs like the ones

mentioned above. Those who can afford life insurance should purchase it as soon as possible. This includes both men and women, because if, G-d forbid, either parent passes away, the resulting financial needs have to be addressed. Every Orthodox adult with dependents or who will soon have dependents should have a minimum of \$250,000 worth of term life insurance.

Mr. Kahn suggested to me that people should consider giving life insurance as a wedding gift. (The premiums for people in their twenties are very low and, since the health of the overwhelming majority of young people is excellent, they will easily qualify.) The giver would notify the *chassan* and *kalla* of his or her intentions, ask them to pick the company that they want to purchase insurance from, and then pay the first year's premium for *both* the *chassan* and the *kalla*. Of course, it is a gift that the giver hopes will never be used. However, can you think of a more important and appropriate gift for those who will be building a *bayis ne'eman*? I cannot! ☐