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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Our Readers

Posted Mar 25 2009

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Palestinian Free Speech

Look what happens to freedom of speech under terrorist regimes. According to Bassam Atallah, a Palestinian in Gaza City, Islamist Hamas militants tortured and killed his brother Osama for publicly criticizing them.

Atallah said masked gunmen from Hamas internal security arrived at the family home and arrested Osama. The family was told Osama would be released in a matter of hours. They subsequently received a telephone call from the hospital that Osama was in critical condition. He later died of his wounds.

Arthur Horn

East Windsor, NJ

Et Tu, Blair?

You did not go far enough in last week's otherwise excellent and informative editorial "We Need To Hear From Mr. Blair." It is not enough that Blair renounce "Chas" Freeman. Blair himself has to go to.

It is inconceivable that Freeman's blatantly biased record on Israel, Saudi Arabia and China and his deep business connections to the latter two were not known to Blair. Yet Blair picked him to be the intelligence gatekeeper to the president. He even went so far as to vehemently defend Freeman in the face of questioning by incredulous members of Congress. In the end, his failure to distance himself from the incredible diatribe Freeman leveled at Israel and American Jewish citizens who support Israel in his withdrawal speech suggests that Blair shares his views.

Reuven Mann
(Via E-Mail)

No True Friend

Contrary to the promises he made while campaigning (and which apparently were believed by the 80% of Jewish Americans who voted for him), President Obama has thus far been acting like anything but a true friend of Israel.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has also been a disappointment, chastising Israel for its appropriate demolishing of illegal Arab structures in Jerusalem.

The future for the new government in Israel will be fraught with challenges from a U.S. administration evidently intent on appeasing those who threaten Israel.

Fay Dicker

Lakewood, NJ

Insanity Defined

Closely observing the charade that Benjamin Netanyahu has been conducting leaves one with the definite impression that the man has no red lines. Indeed, it would seem that anyone would be an acceptable addition to Netanyahu's government as long as the general public does not regard that person as an extremist.

Of course, in today's world, pro-Israel has come to mean support for a Palestinian state, and all who oppose it are classified as extreme. Never mind that such a state has no possibility of succeeding, for many reasons; never mind that Jews too have rights; never mind that international agreements are turned on their heads when opportunism reigns supreme. Albert Einstein once said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting

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different results." Does this not aptly describe the Middle East "peace process"?

Alex Rose

Ashkelon, Israel

No Laughing Matter

Rabbi Simcha Weinstein's "Loud, Obnoxious and Shallow: Hollywood's Portrayal of Jewish Women" (front-page essay, March 13) was both cogent and accurate. I have had to tactfully but assertively ask friends to refrain from e-mailing me Jewish women "jokes"; thankfully, I think they got the message. (Not surprisingly, most were from men.)

Leann Sherman

(Via E-Mail)

Orthodoxy, Then And Now

Marvelous, Resonant

Thank you for the marvelous article "Orthodoxy, Then and Now" (Front-Page Essay, March 20).

Dr. Yitzchok Levine articulated in such a clear fashion what our goals in life ought to be, along with some of the positives of our day and some of our current failings. The article resonated so well with me (I was born in 1945).

Simcha Katz
(Via E-Mail)

Needed: Stress On Ethics

I greatly enjoyed Dr. Levine's learned article on how Orthodoxy in the U.S. has changed over the course of the past 50 years. Dr. Levine touched on many of the pertinent issues regarding this change.

Thus, while there has been an increase in Torah study and strictness in mitzvah observance, there has also been an increase in materialism and a weakening of proper behavior toward one's fellow man.

As Dr. Levine points out, cases of *chillul Hashem* are no longer unusual and Orthodox Jews are frequently in the news for reasons that are less than commendable. Perhaps our *yeshivot* need to place more stress on ethics and interpersonal relations, even if it means a bit less text study.

I congratulate The Jewish Press and Dr. Levine for a wonderful article.
Zalman Alpert
New York, NY

Required Reading

"Orthodoxy, Then and Now" definitely mirrored my own experience. I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky in the 1970s and early '80s, and the Orthodoxy of the '50s that Dr. Levine describes is exactly what our community practiced. It wasn't until I went to Yeshiva University in the mid-'80s that I encountered a "right wing" version of Orthodoxy.

To me, the big difference between then and now is the acceptance of *chumros* by so many people. I'd never heard of *Chalav Yisrael*, *Pas Yisrael*, or *mehadrin* until I went to YU. There I met people who took these *chumros* on themselves. I always wondered what their motivation was. To me, milk was milk. If they used only *Chalav Yisrael* products as a *chumrah l'shem shomayim*, fine. I have no problem with that.

What disturbs me is people who take on *chumros* just to "out-frum" other people. I remember a classmate of mine once asked our rebbe about *Chalav Yisrael*, and he dismissed it as *meshugas*, saying it meant "the cow wore a yarmulke when it was milked."

When we lived in Skokie, my wife wanted to start buying *Chalav Yisrael* and *Pas Yisrael* because "what if people eat by us who only consume those products?" I vetoed the idea, saying I was not out to impress anyone, and if they don't like my *kashrut* standards, too bad. That ended that discussion.

Another trend that has affected Orthodoxy, in my view, is the post-high school year in Israel. In many cases, the *rabbanim* inculcate their students with their *hashkofos* and *chumros*, and the children return home with the idea that their parents aren't *frum* enough for them. This ties in to the lack of *derech erez* mentioned by Dr. Levine and which I, sadly, have seen firsthand.

All in all, Dr. Levine's article was excellent. It should be required reading.
Benson Stone
Louisville, KY

Different World

Thank you, Professor Levine, for a most refreshing and insightful article. Having grown up in Cleveland (*chutz l'Brooklyn*), I, too, remember a different social world.

The outward accoutrements were different. *Shabbos* suits and hats were blues and grays and browns. Indeed, women dressed in short sleeves, etc., and many if not most didn't cover their hair. One can look at pictures of early Agudah conventions, yeshiva dinners, weddings, etc., to see more of the same.

The lesson I take away from this is the power of social norms. This power can be for the better and but also for the worse. Many have become lemmings in a micro-society that overvalues conformity. *Chumros* and complexity seem to prevail. The same personality that overvalues conformity also seems to thrive on *chumros*.

I grew up with "Does it have a *hechsher*?" Today it's "Which *hechsher(im)* does it have?"

The most troubling point touched on by Dr. Levine is the inability of today's young men and young women to communicate with each other. They have no opportunity for social interaction - not even in a strictly supervised setting - and are thus thrust unprepared into the *shidduch* dating system and marriage. This manifests itself in all the advice columns in The Jewish Press.

If I had a nickel for every happily married couple of yesteryear who met at a wedding or because a guy invited his classmate to *Shabbos* dinner to meet his sister, etc., I'd retire a rich man.

The anecdote about the child asking whether his grandparents were Jewish is also quite troubling. The way things are trending, I wonder if when our *ayniklach* grow old and gray, their *ayniklach* will ask the same question about them.

Carl Singer
Passaic, NJ

Much Appreciated

R' Yitzchok (I should really say Dr. Levine), if you were here I would give you a huge hug for this article.

Yirbu kamocho b'Yisrael!
Gershon Seif
(Via E-Mail)

Welcome Article

Dr. Levine's sentiments are not only profoundly relevant but allude to even deeper dangers inherent in the current climate of contemporary Orthodoxy. The article was well written, courageous, timely, poignant and very welcome indeed.

Martin I. Dank
(Via E-Mail)

Better Days

I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Levine's article. Since I grew up in Williamsburg and was a teenager in the 1950s, I related so well to what he wrote. His description of how children were brought up during those times is totally correct. Respect for our elders and for others was of the utmost importance.

My *zeide* was an Orthodox man but at weddings and other *simchas* he sat at the table with both men and women. My momma, born in Poland, did not wear a *sheitel* but she was religious. Jewish life was much better in those days. Most religious people today are definitely more materialistic and many have much to learn about how to be a *mensch*.

Rene'e Stanko
(Via E-Mail)

Questions Thesis

I question the thesis of Dr. Levine's article and his yearning for days past. Why does he deride the fact that the *frum* community today has generally taken to dressing differently from the norm found in the non-Jewish world and that so many *frum* Jews are eager to respond to the requirements of halacha as they learn about them? Why can't he accept that Jews are more confident today and less interested in blending in? Perhaps they - we - have finally abandoned the "melting pot" mentality.

I also wonder why it did not occur to Dr. Levine that the rise he perceives in unethical, even illegal, behavior among *frum* Jews is attributable not to a lowering of behavioral standards but to the vast improvements in communications and technology that make it almost impossible to keep things swept under the rug. Years ago we did not have 24-hour cable news channels and the Internet, so the average person just wasn't aware of everything that was going on.

Nor do I understand why he would condemn a whole generation of *frum* adults for a lack of respect shown to others and *frum* young people for supposedly not honoring their elders, all based upon his own observations of how many people?

Shlomo Glassman
New York, NY

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Re: Dr. Levine's Article
Date 02:03, 03-29, 09

To expand on the subject of change in the *frum* community, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the emergence of Lubavitch as a "kiruv" movement which started out with good intentions but has, in one specific aspect of its activities, degenerated into a cult because of its

extreme veneration of its late chief clergyman, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, turning him into "Moshiakh."

Although the aforementioned cleric is no longer alive, leading Lubavitch clergymen continue to preach the bogus messiahship of the deceased "rebbe." (Thus, the overwhelming majority of Lubavitch adherents erroneously believe that the deceased cleric is "Moshiakh.")

As an educational matter, it is important that unaffiliated Jews who are unaware of the real ideology of that group take note of the reality. (Armed with the facts, they then can make an informed decision as to whether to join the group.)

There are two basic problems:

- 1) The belief that the rebbe is "Moshiakh".
- 2) The notion that a dead man can be "Moshiakh".

Such beliefs are anathema to conventional Jewish theology. Attempts to cover them up are both outrageous and ridiculous. Attempts to propagandize in favor of such notions degenerate into mumbo jumbo.

As part of the aforementioned theology one encounters the slogan: "We want Moshiakh now." There is no such dogma in Jewish theology. (Of course, there is a tradition of Moshiakh's advent which many people accept; nonetheless, it is important to know that reputable authorities do not posit the messianic advent as a major tenet of Judaism.) See Rashi's commentary on Kesubos 111a where the great exegete and sage asserts that the Torah teaches us not to dwell on the subject of Moshiakh excessively and therefore it is wrong to request a speedy redemption. We should let HaShem take care of it as we do our part through our sincere and careful mitzvah observance.

For the sake of education, let me point out that in the Talmud, Sanhedrin 99a, Rabbi Hillel--one of my talmudic heroes--clearly states that the final redemption of mankind will not be ushered in by a future Messiah but rather by Almighty God Himself. (Rabbi Hillel cited here is not the famous Hillel the Elder, the latter having lived a few generations earlier.) This opinion is very important since it promotes the pristine and sublime concept of ethical monotheism which constitutes the essence of Jewish theology. In addition, it serves to guard against the emergence of a cult figure--a phenomenon which has often wrought havoc upon society at the expense of true faith in Almighty God.

In addition, I cite Midrash Tanchuma (Acharei Mohs 12) and Midrash Tehillim 107:1. Both sources teach that HaShem Himself will redeem us without any intermediaries. I would also point out that the Hagadah (which is based on the Book of Exodus) also teaches that God Himself delivered the children of Israel from bondage. Thus, yeh-tsee-es mitsrayim sets a precedent for the ultimate geh-oo-leh, which will be directed and effected by HaShem--as we say in Hallel with respect to yeh-tsee-as mitsrayim: "May-ays HaShem hoi-seh zois!" (This was from HaShem!)

Thus, criticism of Lubavitch is based on serious theological concerns. (It is based neither on animosity toward members of the group nor on dislike of the old town Lubavitch.)

The critique is directed at the delusions of the proponents of a false messiahship which is attributed to a dead clergyman.

Such nonsense should not be mistaken for Torah Judaism. May HaShem grant us all peace and a Khag Kosher Veh-Samayakh! Rabbi Chaim Silver

Upsetting Ad - Lubavitch-Messianic Gathering

Date 09:03, 03-29, 09

It was very upsetting to see the full page ad printed in the March 27, 2009 issue of The Jewish Press on page 35, with the Lubavitch-Messianic "Yechi" slogan on it.

If I don't read immediate apologies from The Jewish Press, and from the performers listed as participants, it will be a long time before I buy another copy of your newspaper or play any of their recordings.

How long will you continue promoting the idea of a dead Messiah against the teachings of Torah? Stop it already!

A follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l who is disgusted by all of this insanity being promoted in his name.

Sincerely,
Moshe Friedman

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