

SIMON JACOBSON'S COMMENT

In Jewish history and tradition, the concept of a *sofer*, a scribe, has particular significance. When a true Torah scribe writes a *sefer Torah*, *mezuzah* or *tefillin*, he writes it with particular sanctity because — as Jews always knew — through all the ups and downs of life, the preservation of *emes*, truth, is through the word.

The first word spoken by G-d at the beginning of the Ten Commandments which we just read on Shavuot, is *Anochi*. According to the *Talmud*, the four letters of *Anochi* are also an acronym for *Ana nafshi kasavis yahavis*, that G-d imbues His spirit, His soul, in the words. Therefore when we recreate those words, we don't just print or fax them, but write them with exacting sanctity. It's one of the most fascinating and underestimated eternal powers that every *sefer Torah* all over the world is exactly the same and hasn't changed for 3278 years, from the time the first *sefer Torah* was written by Moses.

The sanctity of the word in our times, *l'havdil*, you have to say, has its own unique challenges because of the easy dissemination and distribution made possible today through the Internet, radio and TV. Words have unfortunately become very frivolous, and we have to make an extra effort to recognize and respect the sacred power of the word.

Since I was a little child, and I speak now on behalf of my entire beautiful family — my mother Tzivia, life partner of my dearly beloved father Gershon, and my siblings Freida, Boruch Shalom, Chani and Yosef Yitzchok — I recall, from the youngest age, my father as a man of the word. And though he wasn't a *sofer* in the traditional sense, his typewriter and his pen and his pads were his sacred tools. (Many of you have no doubt seen him carry these around; he never let go of his pens and pads, even in the hospital.)

Kierkegaard wrote that "Life must be lived frontwards, but could only be understood backwards."

We live in the moment; seeing neither context nor perspective. When we look backwards, we see the *hashgacha pratis*, the Divine providence, the bizarre mysterious twists and turns of G-d leading our footsteps. *Hashem mitzaddei gover k'ananu*.

I can only appreciate now in retrospect how my father recognized the moments as the story of history unfolding. And we are witnesses today to literally the most dramatic and powerful period in our life history, our Jewish history. From the brink of the abyss of disaster just 60-70 years ago — which many of you here tonight experienced personally — we came to an unbelievable renewal, like the moon as the Jewish people have been promised. But to see and witness it is a living miracle.

My father had the honor and privilege to document it. So yes, he documented it piece by piece, as the picture unfolded. But in the last year, when my family and I were looking at the Algemeiner archives and all my father's writings, we were amazed that he saved it all in an unbelievably organized way. Though at the time they were just fragments, when

you look at it, it's the unfolding story of my life, your life, our lives, in a most fascinating way.

He understood the sanctity of telling the story, of staying away from personal bias and political interests, because the story is not about him or any individual, or any particular interest. It's a story that has to be preserved, because it's the story of the Jewish people and the story of G-d, of which we are witness. *Atem eidai*. And to me, of all the *zechusim* my father has, besides being a father and all that comes with that, his ability to document history in such a powerful way is perhaps his greatest merit.

This is why we decided, as a family, right after my father passed a year ago to make the absolute commitment not just to preserve all that was written, but to perpetuate it, to continue it. When you have such a powerful archive of documents, such a powerful legacy, it is simply unheard of — a sin — not to capture it in the fullest sense.

It's been a very difficult year as you can imagine. But at the same time holding on to this legacy was extremely consoling and extremely powerful.

I want to first begin with a personal thank you to all of you here, and all of you who couldn't make it tonight because of traveling out of town or for other personal reasons. It was with your help that we were not only able to maintain, but to allow, the *Algemeiner Journal*, my father's baby, child, to grow and develop into something of which we've only seen the beginning.

I want to personally thank my youngest brother, Yosef Yitzchok Jacobson, who has stood at the helm of the editorship; all the writers, some of whom are here; and all the people working to produce 52 quality issues from the week that my father passed away until this very day. With your help, we make a pledge to continue to do so.

So I want everyone to give a round of applause to my brother and his staff at the *Algemeiner*.

In studying this past year all that my father accomplished and worked on and all the different people that he met, from 1934, the year he was born, until his sad passing last year, we realized that we're sitting on an unbelievable wealth of material. And so I want to announce here that we've determined to launch five major initiatives in honor of my father that will continue to tell the story of the Jewish people in this powerful and hopefully unbiased fashion.

One is the continued publication of the *Algemeiner Journal* and its development into something that speaks to our times that addresses the challenges ahead of us. The *Algemeiner*, which means "all inclusive," will be a vehicle to build bridges between the many fragmented and partisan Jewish communities.

The second thing is to utilize modern technology, the power of the Internet, to capture the importance of this endeavor for an international audience. And so we have established the

website Algemeiner.com to disseminate what can't always be captured in the pages of a newspaper.

The third thing is what we're calling "Preserving Legacies": digitalizing all these archives and making them available to the public. When we look at the organizations, the individuals, the people, in these archives, it's an unfolding story. Each of you may know it in your heart, but when you see it in print, it comes alive in a completely different way.

The fourth thing is to publish documentaries, films, books, and periodicals. There is a taste of it here in the materials we've prepared for this evening. You'll also see at the end of the evening a not-to-be-missed powerful ten-minute video of my father's life and legacy.

And finally, the fifth thing is the annual Gershon Jacobson lecture, which was suggested by close friends. How better to capture, honor, and celebrate a man who put important issues at the forefront. Shlomo Shamir, a distinguished journalist and colleague of my father for many years, wrote right after my father's passing that one of his major contributions in journalism, one that will go down in history, is that he was the first to take Yiddish journalism from light journalism (romances and poetry), to hard news about Israel and other political and traditional issues.

A few weeks ago, Hirsch Katz, another writer at the *Algemeiner* wrote that my father's contribution will be that he was the first Yiddish journalist to bridge Yiddish culture and religion. As we know, the Yiddish culture writers either cut out religion or they saw it as insignificant.

This annual lecture will be addressed by a prominent leader and speaker on vital issues that face the Jewish community. And there are many issues today: issues that didn't exist in 1972 when the *Algemeiner* began; issues that didn't exist when we were trying to rebuild our lives after the Holocaust.

Today complacency, apathy, and divisiveness are major problems facing the Jewish nation. The meaning of Zionism has to be revisited as well. The Zionist dream was a dream of a homeland. And now that we have a homeland? Now what? What is the future of Israel? There are hundreds of such issues that some people shy away from addressing due to political correctness and their controversial nature. We hope to be able to address something powerful every year that can be published and stimulate dialogue. Above all, we hope to offer suggestions, suggestions that individuals like you and me can implement to shape a better and more powerful Jewish future.

In that spirit, to launch the first Gershon Jacobson lecture, we chose a family friend, a Rabbi, to address you tonight. There aren't many today who are able to bridge different worlds and who represent different segments of the Jewish community. Tonight's lecturer, the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, is such a man.

If the word “former” sounds a little strange, it’s because when you’re a rabbi you’re a rabbi forever. Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau Shlita is now the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, considered to be the bastion of probably the largest group of secular Jews. But he is a person beloved by all communities and therefore it is not surprising that he has risen to be the prime candidate for the Israeli presidency. Being able to represent so many different segments — which in itself is historic, being able to talk about culture, politics, and true Torah Judaism — Rabbi Lau recently published a best-selling book in Israel, *Al teshlach yado el ha’naar (Do not Touch (hurt) the Child)*, which will be translated into English.

In it, he documents his own story: how he was saved from the clutches of the Holocaust. How his brother Naftali, may he be well, lifted him on his arms and saved him. Though the family perished, they fulfilled the promise to their father to perpetuate the Rabbinic chain that has been in the Lau family for so many years. It’s an extremely moving book and a powerful documentation.

But you see something more impressive. It’s one thing that Rabbi Lau was lifted by the arms of his brother, but instead of just repaying that kindness to his brother, he in turn has lifted many Jews on his arms through his inspirational talks, writings, personal counseling, weddings, and *l’havdil* and *rachmana litzlan*, funerals. He has lifted the hearts of many, many Jews. A person who has gone through what he has gone through has a particular credibility, and he has imbued tens of thousands with strength and *bitachon* (trust).

It’s rare to find someone who’s a Torah Jew with a vision who is not afraid to address relevant issues. We therefore felt it appropriate that tonight, honoring my father’s first yahrzeit, Rabbi Lau, who is a dear friend of my father as well, would deliver the first annual Gershon Jacobson lecture and on a most befitting topic: The Future of Judaism.

What will Judaism look like twenty years from now? How will we deal with the challenges that we face ahead of us and what can we all do about it? We have an incessant alienated youth, and there is a terrible divisiveness here and in Israel between the *hareidim* and the *chilonim*, as they call them – the religious and secular – and among the religious themselves. Divisiveness is one of the plagues of our time.

So we asked Rabbi Lau to address us on a topic of this nature, which will hopefully not just inspire but educate, and above all motivate us to make a move. When it comes down to it, *hamaaseh hu ha’ikar*, the deed is the most important thing.

I’d like everyone to give Rabbi Lau a proper welcome. He came especially from Israel to deliver this lecture, and to give *kavod* to my father. HaRav HaGaon, Chief Rabbi, Rabbi, Yisroel Meir Lau, Shlita.

Kavod Rabbonim, very dear friends, ladies, gentlemen, the Jacobson family, headed by Mrs. Tzivia Jacobson, good evening, and all the best to all of you.

There are four words near the end of the book of *Vayikra*, at the end of *Bechukosai*, that if I want to give a description of Gershon, ז"ל, a close friend and a wise one, I would use these four words. Perhaps they say more than everything: *Vehoya erkecha lifi zaroi*. Says the Torah: If you want to know the value of a human being, *erkecha*, how important he is, what is his personality and what does it consist of, the answer, according to the Torah, is always *lifi zaroi*, according to his children, his descendants.

Look at the children, the family. If you look at who the children are and how a person brought up a family, then you have the answer to who was the man. And I am looking at the children of Gershon and *l'chaim aruchim* of Tzivia.

B'gadol heichal, I start with the oldest one, Simon, whom you heard just now, and then with the youngest, Reb Yosef Yitzchok, the editor of the *Algemeiner Journal* of today, and in between, the brother and the sisters. Then there are the grandchildren... *Vehoya erkecha*, to know the value, the real one, of Reb Gershon ז"ל, *lifi zaroi*, look at his children.

This is what brought me here today. Because as Simon said, Reb Gershon traveled in many worlds. In a very difficult and critical period of time in the Jewish history — the Holocaust, the wandering, the establishment of a Jewish state — he lived in many worlds, and worked to bridge the gap between *hacha* and *hatam*, here and there. He lived so close with the Lubavitcher Rebbe and all the Jewish personalities of the United States of America, Europe and *Eretz Yisroel*. He quoted them so correctly. He brought things, personalities, memories, news, thoughts, and emotions into the minds and the knowledge of *klal Yisroel*. He was the real *shofar* to blow in the old Jewish voice and this modern time of life.

Yehi zichro baruch v'nishmato tzerura b'tzror ha'chaim, Amen. Continuing the *Algemeiner Journal* is his monument, his *ner neshamah*. That's what he wanted; that's what he wished. I remember him in the hospital. This was his dream, his vision. If you want to build a statue, a monument, to the memory of Reb Gershon, if you want his candle not to be extinguished, you have to support the very continuity of his *Algemeiner Journal*.

As for my topic tonight, a Rav must start with the Torah portion of the week. In *Eretz Yisroel* we are already in the *parsha* of *Behaalotecha*, because the day after Shavuos we were already reading *Naso*.

Here in New York, where there was *yomtov sheinu shel galios* — a second day of Yom Tov — we are in the week of *Parshas Naso*. We find in *parshas Naso Birkas Kohanim*. In *Eretz Yisroel* we have it daily. The *Kohanim* come up and bless us. We say it daily in our prayer, *Birkas haShachar* in the blessing on the Torah. And for the blessing not to be in vain, we bring the verses, the *possukim*, of *Birkas Kohanim*.

In *Midrash Rabbah* of this week, the sages ask a question: How and why are we privileged to have it? The *Ribbono Shel Olam* says to Moshe Rabbeinu, “Tell your brother Aharon and his children, ‘**Koh severachu es bnei Yisroel**’ and if My children, the children of Yisroel, will come with a complaint — *Ribbono Shel Olam*, why do You send messengers to bless us and not You Yourself, *V’Ani avarchem* — I Myself will put my seal on the blessings that the *Kohanim*. There is a reason I have chosen the *Kohanim*, Aharon and his sons, to be the *shluchim*, the messengers, to give the *brochah*, but the *brochah* is in My name, on behalf of the Almighty. *V’Ani avarchem*.

It’s a great merit to have Birkas Kohanim every day. There were congregations that the only time they heard Birkas Kohanim was once a year, on Yom Kippur.

B’zechut mah? In the merit of what? The sages ask: What is our privilege? To have it, it’s a fortune. Why are we fortunate to have it? Reb Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemiah had a debate. Reb Yehudah says: *b’zechut* who? *B’zechut* Avrohom Avinu. We have a *zechut* always from Avrohom Avinu. He was close to 100 years old when the *Ribbono Shel Olam* took him and told him *v’haya zerako v’kochavai hashomayim* — look at the sky and count the stars — can you count them? No. *Veyomar lo, koh yihiye zerecho, v’hehemim b’Hashem*.

In this age, to have such faith, such *emunah*, that we will have children who number the number of stars in heaven? Because of *koh yihiye zerecho* which was told to Avrohom Avinu and he believed, *koh yihiye zerecho* comes to parallel *koh severachu es bnei Yisroel*. **Koh** because of **koh**.

The other says, “No, this is not enough. It is in the merit of Yitzchok, who at the age of 37 joins his father at Mount Moriah. All of a sudden he asks his father, “Here is the fire and the wood, where is the lamb that you want to sacrifice?” And his father tells him, “He will find it, if not, you are the sacrifice. You are the victim.” And they traveled together. Yitzchok didn’t hesitate, he didn’t refuse, he didn’t escape. But he could have escaped... he wasn’t a baby at 37 years old. The father came on behalf of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, and *b’lev echad k’ish echad*, the son followed his father.

What is written there in the *Akeidah*? Avrohom says to Ishmael and Eliezer, “Stay here with the donkey and I and Yitzchok will go (*neilcha*) *ad koh*. The *koh* of that *neilcha* was *mesiras nefesh*. This walking together to Mount Moriah was a kiddush Hashem, *b’chol nafshecho*. Yitzchok was ready to give all his soul.

Says Reb Nechemiah, “You ask what is the merit of *Birkas Kohanim*?” *Ani v’hanaar neilcha ad koh*. And the son agrees, accepts it. It’s in the merit of that *koh* that *koh severachu es bnei Yisroel*.

But the Rabbanan conclude the debate and say, true “Avrohom Avinu *koh, koh yihiye zerecho*. Yitzchok: *v’hanaar neilah ad koh*, but we have *Birkas Kohanim* in the *zechut* of Yaakov Avinu.

At Mount Sinai, at *Matan Torah*, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* says to Moshe Rabbeinu, “**Koh somar l’veis Yaakov**. The **koh** of *Birkas Kohanim* according to Rabbanan is in the merit of **koh somar l’veis Yaakov**.

Avrohom Avinu is chessed, Yitzchok Avinu is *avodah, mesiras nefesh, kiddush Hashem*, but they were individuals. Avrohom ha’ivri was on one side and the whole world was on the other side, opposite to him. Yitzchok was the only one: *k’b’Yitzchok ikarei l’hazara*. But Yaakov Avinu built a community. He was the builder of the nation. When we speak about the future of Judaism, here starts the past. Here are the roots. Without him, we have no issue to discuss. There is no topic.

Yaakov is the first one who had twelve sons, twelve tribes, surrounding his bed at his very last hour. He looked at them, with no words, but gave a deep look at each of them. Who is not loyal to his way, to his concept of life? “Because my father had an Esav. My grandfather had a Yishmael. Who of these twelve sons is not following in my footsteps? I’m a *yeshivah bochur* from Shem and Eber. Maybe someone is following the way of my grandfather, Lavan, the Arami, G-d forbid.” And all the twelve sons say to him together: “*Shema Yisroel*, listen our Father, *Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*.” And spontaneously he reacts: “*Baruch Shem kavod malchuso l’olam vo’ed*.”

That is why we add this sentence inside *kriyas Shema*. This is the first time that you have *beis yaakov, bnei Yisroel* – a phenomenon that never existed before. So Rabbanan ask, what is our *zechut* of **koh sevarcho es bnei Yisroel**? In the merit of Yaakov who founded this *bnei Yisroel, koh sevarcho*.

It is this week’s *parsha* that gives us the background to the topic I want to discuss with you: the future of Judaism.

Now we have the combination of these three fathers: Avrohom Avinu, Yitzchok Avinu and Yaakov Avinu. Once we have the twelve tribes, we have to ask ourselves: “Who was the first one to give us the title ‘Am’? With Yaakov you have “*beis Yaakov*,” “*bnei Yisroel haba’im mitzrayma, es yaakov ish o’beis ibo*”: Reuvein, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah. *Beis Yaakov. Bnei Yisroel*. Who was the first one to give us the title “Am”? A nation. Where did it start? The first one was Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And he was trembling. What did he say? In his first Wannasee conference, “*Hava nichachma lo*” — let’s find a final solution to stop this multiplying and flourishing of the Jews. Let’s find a way to stop it.

“*Hinei*,” he says, “*am Bnei Yisroel, rava v’atzum mimenu, hava nihachma lo*.” The first one to give us the title used this combination: “*Am Bnei Yisroel*.” Until this point they were *Bnei Yisroel*, the children of Yaakov. *Am Bnei Yisroel*.

When I asked someone who is far from Torah and *mitzvos* — not only does he not observe the Torah but he’s anti, there are very few of this kind — I asked him at a symposium/debate, “What makes you a Jew? No *Shabbos*, no *Yom Tov*, no *tallis*, no *tefillin*. Neither of this kind nor of that kind. You are my brother.”

“Yes I am,” he replies. “I am Jewish. A proud Jew.”

“How do you express Judaism in your own life?”

He says, “We share the same destiny. *Kesher gorol*, we are connected by the same destiny. You are a Jew, I am a Jew.”

I said, “This is exactly the definition that Pharaoh gave. By in his mind what were we, *am Bnei Yisroel*, that our blood was *hefker*? That our honor is nothing? That our property does not exist? That our freedom – forget about it. That we have laws different from the others. We are a minority in Egypt with no rights at all. And discrimination was the festival of Egypt.

The command was officially “*Kol ha ben...* that all the boys born in Egypt are to be thrown into the Nile.” *Kol ha ben hayilud*? We could think that this is a demographic problem, that there are more boys than girls, and in order to balance the population you have to take all the newborn boys and throw them into the Nile.

But Onkelus, the first commentator of the Torah, before Rashi, paid attention to these words: *Kol haben hayilud...* And how does Onkelus translate this *possuk*? *Kol bar ... lir yehudah ai...* There was a Written Torah and an Oral Torah.

For the UN, for UNESCO, we’re a demographic problem. Boys, girls. But *m’peh ha’ozar*, to the police of Egypt, to the officers, to the *noxim, (??)* to the *shotrim*, to all the guards, there was a very special definition. Only boys who will be born by the *Jews*. *Kol bar d’italit...* This was *kesher gorol*.

Around 62-64 years ago, we had the same *gorol*. That’s right. Jews from *Sananikim (?)* and Jews from Warsaw had the same *gorol*. Chassidim, misnagdim, Ashkenazim, sefardim, *baal kaan (Balkan?)*, Bulgaria, Greece, we shared the same destiny. Who will define who is a Jew? Adolf Eichman? Adolf Hitler? Julius Streicher? Alfred Rosenberg? Will *they* answer the question who is a Jew?

In opposition to Pharaoh who gave the first definition of *am bnei Yisroel* of *hava nihachma lo, pen yirbu*, the final solution, eighty years later came Moshe Rabbeinu to help them. And said one unforgettable *possuk*: *Hayom hazeh, nihiyeh soleh am l’Hashem Elokecho*.

Pharaoh says we are a nation because he can take our rights and can throw our children into the Nile. “I am one of the survivors,” says Moshe Rabbeinu. And I tell you, my people, you became a nation not in Egypt because of destiny, not even in the Exodus, not even at *Kriyas Yam Suf*, but today, now, here, *hayom hazeh, zeh v’lo acher*, where was it? At Mount Sinai. When was it? At *Matan Torah*. Now when you have *emunah*, and you have Torah, and you have the Ten Commandments, and you have the 613 *mitzvos*, your culture, your concept of life, Judaism. When Judaism was given to the Jews, the Jews

became a nation. And whose definition of “am” do we have to accept? Pharaoh’s or Moshe Rabbeinu’s?

Who is our teacher? Who is the Rabbeinu? Who is our guide? Moshe Rabbeinu. He is our guide, and he told us very clearly and very sharply, that our nationality is being born at *Matan Torah*. The same slogan was given by Rav Saadiah Gaon, *ein u’mateinu u’mah ella b’Torahtecha*: **Our nation is not a nation but (Better: Our nation is only a nation)** because of the Torah – the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

It’s not that we are a nation who *has* the Torah, a nation who *has received* the Torah, as we say in Hebrew, *am haSefer*. It’s not a nation who has a book – the book of the books. *Am haSefer* means the Jewish nation was born and created from the power of the book. Our nation was born in the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

And these are the words of Moshe Rabbeinu: *hayom hazeh ... ha’am*. Until that point we were *beis Yaakov, bnei Yisroel*. Pharaoh will not be the one who will define the past, present and future of the Jewish nation. Moshe Rabbeinu will define it.

In Ottawa, many years ago, there was a debate on the radio between the Israeli ambassador to Canada at that time, the late Rav Doctor Yaakov Herzog, son of Chief Rabbi HaRav Yitzchok Isaac haLevy Herzog, *ztzl*, brother of the late President Chaim Herzog, *s’gola*, _____ **something** Zalman Meltzer. He was an ambassador in Canada.

A very famous historian from Great Britain, Profession Arnold Toynbee, came to Canada for one year to lecture at the university. He didn’t like us too much. Toynbee had a concept that we are not a nation. We are not allowed to be a nation. If we declare ourselves as a nation and demand a state for ourselves, it’s a crime against our messengery(??) We were born to be spread out in the Diaspora, to guide mankind in monotheism, morals and ethics; a religious sect. We have a mission. We are not a nation.

They had a long discussion on the radio. I want to develop only one point made by Dr. Yaakov Herzog, *z”l*. Permit me to develop that point with a bit of imagination. But the point and principle is his, not mine.

Imagine an Olympic aircraft arriving at Athens airport. An old man from the aircraft has received permission to leave the aircraft and sightsee in his home city. This old man has permission from heaven to come and see Athens.

One of the workers at the airport climbs the ladder and asks if he can be of help. “Who are you?” asks the worker. “I am Socrates, the philosopher of Athens.” The worker starts to speak to him, but they have no common language. Oh, they speak Greek, but it’s not the same Greek. It’s not the same language at all. The classic Greek of Socrates and the Greek of today are not the same language.

There is a translator. Socrates asks, “Where is the Acropolis?” Ruins. “The Temple of Zeus?” There is no Temple of Zeus in Greece. There is a church. A Greek Orthodox Church. But it belongs to Christianity. There is no Neptune, no Mars, no Aphrodite, no Helen. Nothing of this kind. Only Christianity.

How many countries are under the dominion and control of Greece? NonE1 Today they are a small country in NATO? One of the Allies. Headed by the United States of America. What are we number one in? Sports? The Marathon? Olympia? Number one?

No field of speciality. It is not the same language, not the same religion, not the same power, not an empire at all. The Greece of Caramalis (?) and Papandrayo (?) is not the Greece of Socrates, Aristotle or Plato. There is nothing in common. Nothing in common except geography.

An Alitalia flight stops in Fiumachino airport near Rome, and an old guy deplanes. The worker climbs up the ladder. “May I help you? Who are you?”

“Julius Caesar. Veni, vidi vici.”

“May I help you?”

He doesn’t understand the question. The Latin language of Caesar and the Italian language of today are not the same language. Not the same at all.

“Will you take me to the Temple of Jupiter?”

“Who is Jupiter? We have a Vatican here.”

“What is a Vatican?”

“It’s a church. Another religion. Catholicism. There is a Pope from Germany. Yesterday he was from Poland. Not an Italian. No Jupiter. The Coliseum is in ruins.”

“Galia — later on France — still belongs to Roma?”

“Not at all. France is Chirac. Rome is Parodi. Yesterday Berlusconi.”

“What are the countries that are under our control? Abyssinia? Angola?”

“None of them. Italy is also a state in the Allies of NATO. Constitution? We don’t give the constitution for the world. What are we number one in? No field of expertise. The Rome of Caesar and the Rome of Fellini are not the same.

So these two personalities come to visit their own home cities. But it was not the home as they knew it.

Near Tel Aviv an El Al plane lands. An old man stands up and waits at the door. A worker from Ben Gurion Airport sees a man with a white beard. He climbs up the ladder. “*Shalom Aleichem*,” the worker says. The man answers, “*Aleichem Shalom*.” Same language. Word by word.

“It’s an honor to meet you,” says the worker.

“I am Moshe,” the old man says.

“I am also Moshe,” says the worker. “I was born in Tibilis, in Georgia.”

“And I was born in Egypt.”

“Did you visit Israel before?”

“Unfortunately never.”

“So it’s not your homeland.”

“It is my homeland. I received a promise from the Almighty to give it to you. Are you Jewish?”

“Of course I’m Jewish. *Ani Mosheke m’Gruzia*.”

“May I ask you a favor?”

The worker says, “Whatever you want.”

“I have come to sightsee. I have 24 hours to visit Israel and I didn’t have a chance to take *tefillin* with me. Do you know where it’s possible to get *tefillin*?”

“*Tefillin*? I’ll give you mine.”

“You have *tefillin*?”

“Of course I have *tefillin*,” and he shows them to him. **Signs.** (don’t know what this means) Only half an hour ago I finished *davening Shacharis*.

“An Orthodox Jew? And you also have a *tallis* with *tzitzis*?”

“Of course.”

“*Tallis*? *Tefillin*?”

“Here we have a synagogue. Even three. In the new airport. Three synagogues in the terminal. You want to *daven nusach sefard, ashkenaz, chassidim, misnagdim*? All the words that Moshe told us 3,300 years ago are here before our very eyes.”

And the old man kisses the *mezuzah*. He wrote it.

Yaakov Herzog said to Professor Toynbee: “Same religion. Same language. Same homeland. Same commandments. Same faith. This is not a nation? So who and what is a nation?”

This is the essence of Judaism – about past and present and also the future of Judaism.

Unfortunately, we now have a phenomenon which happened back in the times of the Second Temple, but not in the present numbers. It’s called assimilation. Now is not the time to discuss if assimilation brought us to intermarriage or intermarriage brought us to assimilation. Both are a threat for the future of the Jew’s existence. 52% intermarriage here. 80% in Scandinavian and in some places in Latin America. 70% in France.

80% of French Jewry came from North Africa. Morocco, Algiers, Tunis. Fifty years ago you wouldn’t meet a Jew on the street of Casablanca, Maknes, or Marakesh, going on Shabbat with a cigarette in his mouth. He wouldn’t dare.

M’chalel Shabba b’farhesya! Fifty years ago it didn’t happen. And today, 80% of French Jewry are North African. And 70% of French Jewry intermarry and the children are lost to the Jewish people.

Behind the Iron Curtain, which was lifted fifteen years ago, the numbers are very unclear. But they are high numbers. In California, in the United States, there is over 52% intermarriage. When we speak about the future, to have a concern about the future of the Jewish people, of Judaism, we have to be aware of this point. I am sure that every intelligent man knows it. But what is the formula to heal this disease?

From my own experience, these are the cities where the percentage of intermarriage is the lowest.

Manchester. Antwerp. Baltimore. Toronto. San Paulo. Cape Town. Johannesburg. Melbourne and Sydney. I don’t speak about *Eretz Yisroel*. What is the common factor in these cities? From Western Europe to South America, North America, South Africa, Australia, there is one city that’s is perhaps number one in success in the Diaspora in its lack of intermarriage. It is Monterey, a city in Mexico. What do these cities have in common?

Jewish education in these cities is close to 100%. Over 75%.

About ten years ago, I visited Rabbi Moshe Kaimon Shlita, who writes in the *Algemeiner Journal* from time to time. I mentioned that 50 years of leading the community of

Monterey about ten years ago, the father of the community, (**fix**) there were 260 Jewish children in Monterey from kindergarten age to eighteen. 260! Except for one, aged 15. *One* of 260. I will not mention the source from where he comes. But 259 studied in the King David school, a Jewish school. When I came there, the first and last time in my life, they welcomed me with *Yevarecha Hashem m'Tzion, u'reh b'tov Yerushalayim kol yemei chaiecha*.

And looking at them I told myself: *u'r'eh vanim levanecha. Shalom al Yisroel*. 260 children in a city at the edge of the world. Monterey. An industrial city over an hour flight from Mexico City. Almost all the children receive a Jewish education. And there are no intermarriages there. They know each other. It's a family.

In Antwerp and Manchester it's the same story. In New York, in spite of having the greatest spiritual giants of the last century, number one educational institutions, and magnificent communities, from two children born to the Jewish people, one of these two is lost to the Jewish people. Dr. Alvin Schiff, who was in charge of Jewish education in greater New York, once told me, "Only 12.5% of the Jewish children in greater New York attend a Jewish school." 87.5% go to public schools or whatever.

The future of Judaism starts in the kindergarten. The school is the answer. If you want to promise Jewish continuity there is one way only: Education. What I'm telling you is not a discovery. It's just to emphasize the issue – to speak very frankly and very clearly.

And now I want to tell you about an episode that took place last winter. I tell it to you with great respect. It was forty minutes before lighting the Shabbat candles on a winter Friday afternoon, in January I think it was. The telephone rings in my home in Tel Aviv. There is a lady on the phone. The Rebbetzin (**can you say "My Rebbetzin"?**) was busy preparing Shabbat. I lifted the telephone and the lady says, "We are calling from the office of the Prime Minister. Can you receive a phone call from Prime Minister Sharon?"

This was after his first stroke. And it was three days before he was to go to cardiologic treatment in Hadassah in Keren Hayesod for one day. Those were the expectations at least. Arik Sharon? "Of course, I said. I have 40 minutes left before Shabbat."

"You know," he told me, "I have established a new party, Kadima. We have declared and decided, together with the Labor party, to have the new elections in the Knesset at the end of March, less than three months from now. I don't want to bother you with these political steps — it doesn't belong to you and it's not relevant to you — but I want to tell you that I have a great concern that bothers me days and mainly nights. I am not speaking about security. We are secure. We are stronger than all our neighbors together. And they know it. I'm not speaking about a concern over international problems. We are good friends with the United States of America. Even the European Union understands that we have no partner for negotiations in the Middle East now. Our position is clear enough. We have a lot of friends. Even the social economic problem, which is a problem, doesn't bother me like the issue I want to talk to you about after I return from the hospital.

“As you know, I am entering Hadassah next week for only one day. It’s ambulatory. A day later I come back home. I want to ask your permission for my secretary Marit to call you to fix a date for us to sit together and have a long discussion about my concern, which is the disconnection between the Jews in the Diaspora and the Jews in Israel, and the disconnection of the youth in Yisroel from our heritage, our tradition. This bothers me a lot. And you are the man to heal these two problems and to bridge the gaps.

“I don’t know how to do it yet. I don’t know what position to offer you to give you the means to succeed. But I will give you one example of what bothers me. I will tell you a secret. I asked a child what *Maariv* is. The child answered, ‘It’s a daily newspaper.’

“I said, ‘And what else?’ That’s all. *Maariv*. Like *Yediot Acharonot*. I see it everyday. It’s a daily newspaper. An intelligent child. Don’t you know that there is a prayer, a daily prayer, called Maariv?

“‘I never heard of it. I don’t know.’ Rav Lau,” Arik Sharon said, “do you understand why I am worried? An Israeli boy. An intelligent boy. I know him. He doesn’t even know what Maariv is. It’s not that he doesn’t *daven*, but at least to *know* that there is a daily prayer. We must discuss this and we must find a solution.”

I am sure when it comes to our Jewish future, because we are an immortal nation, *netzach Yisroel*, our candle will never be extinguished. We see from our history, *B’chol dor v’dor, omdim aleinu v’chalseinu*. So where are they? And where are we? When we came on the stage of international family, we found there Ammon, Moab, Pelishtim, Aram, Edom, Amalek, Ashur, Bavel, Paras u Medei, Yavan, Roma, Cartago. Where are they? None of them exist.

Chaniba? Cartago? What happened? And none of them suffered genocide like we did. More than once. There were battles. There were wars. Thirty years of war. One hundred years of war. Six years of war. Four years, the former war. But not genocide to liquidate a nation.

The only nation of Biblical times against whom genocide was proclaimed was the Jewish people. And they are the only ones who still exist from that Biblical period. Is this not a miracle? And if not, what is? So I am not afraid about the future of the Jewish people or Judaism. But we have to save souls of our brothers and sisters who are under the threat of assimilation. The cause is a lack of Jewish education. And the lack of Jewish values leads to intermarriage and assimilation. Again and again the cycle is a threatening one.

We are confident that *am Yisraeol chai v’kayam*, for immortality, for eternity, for the continuity of the Jewish people is promised by the *Ribbono Shel Olam, l’ad u’le’olmei olamim*.