
The leader welcomes those who share his dreams, but is not deterred if he is alone. The validation of the goal is not its popularity but its intrinsic quality.

Consensus is not the cause of leadership but its product. Religious leadership, if not in other fields, does not involve poll-taking, adjusting to shifts in the wind.

Of course, such leadership is not common, until suddenly such a man appears.

The Rebbe had his vision of what a Jew can be, what a Jewish community or State must be, and when these are deflected from their course, or don't seem to have a course, the Rebbe sees his responsibility to call attention to the peril involved. Decades might pass before he was vindicated, and at the risk of being controversial, here are a few instances.

After the Six-Day War, a pernicious War of Attrition began, picking off a life here, another there, slowly mounting lists of casualties. A cease-fire was demanded by Israelis and foreign governments, to halt these killings. The Rebbe pleaded not to accept a cease-fire, a lone protestor defying universal logic and love of peace. On Yom Kippur 1973, Israel paid the price.

On the Edge of Controversy

Another instance. When the gates of the Soviet Union were opened, the Rebbe urged a careful screening to prevent non-Jews from claiming they are Jews. The attacks on him were virulent, unrestrained but literally, as I write, the media describe growing fears among Israelis untainted by religious scruples, that the borders of Israel are too porous, to use the American term, allowing too many absolute non-Jews to enter. The Rebbe insisted on a standard, a *halakhah*, warning about the consequences of this permissive situation. Many opposed the Rebbe, insisting that not a jot or a tittle in the Law of Return as it exists be changed. Are they embracing his stand? They are far closer to his stand than to their original one, and more stringent standards are called for.

Another example is the *baal teshuvah* movement, the alienated returning to Judaism, a development that no one foresaw. Here the attacks on the Rebbe came from the religious as well. He sent his *shluchim* to the vast Jewish wastelands of the planet, and turned the irreversible current around. No one disagrees with working to attract Jews back to Judaism today, but having been there at the creation, I testify that there was hardly a murmur of support to counter the bitter criticism. The Rebbe was, if you please, controversial.

"Controversial" has a negative tone, but what idea was ever meaningful or demanding and not controversial? The Rebbe provoked controversy constantly, because in

calling for a change in direction individuals and institutions are challenged, and whoever graciously accepts challenge or admits error?

He was the Rebbe for every Jew, for every human being for that matter, because he reasserted and taught the obligation to teach all humanity the Seven Mitzvot of mankind, as the first Jew did forty centuries ago.

He addressed the mind of the Jews and his emotions. He never said it but he taught how to honor your mother by the way he treated his mother. My mother--and everybody else's--was well aware of this. The childless, the mortally ill, the desperate searcher, the prominent and the forgotten, scientist and artist and businessman--they turned to him and often found he had already turned to them first, responding before the question was asked.

One last and inadequate word. Women. Every *shliach* goes to his assigned post but never alone. His wife is with him. In fact it's not really a *shliach* and his wife but two *shluchim*. Lubavitcher women know their value because they know how the Rebbe regards them.

The Rebbe. He needed no further identification. Who can picture another like him? □

Controversy: the measure of leadership-- a reflection on the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rela M. Geffen

Two years ago, I was introduced to a new British Jewish glossy magazine called *New Moon*. To promote the publication, the magazine was selling sets of 6 "Rabbi" mugs at a reduced rate to those who subscribed. To my surprise, in this British set, one mug had on it a picture of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. At second thought, I wasn't surprised at all.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe was a world Jewish statesman, though he hardly traveled outside the *daled amot* (four ells) of the Crown Heights neighborhood in Brooklyn. A master of Rabbinics, he was also a genius at public relations, and taught the whole Jewish world how to reach out effectively to modern Jews and motivate them

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to engage their tradition in a serious way. However, his style, his rhetoric and his actions were far from being universally acclaimed by a wide gamut of publics in the Jewish world.

First, from within his own *hareidi* world, he was the subject of attack by leaders of other Hasidic sects, and by opponents of Hasidism and Sephardi *hareidim*. They opposed him for several reasons. First, he asserted his own autonomy and definition of *Daas Torah*--the prevailing opinion of *gedolim* (preeminent Torah scholars). Rabbi Alan Yuter, in a forthcoming paper, notes that "While sharing much of the *hareidi* world view, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, was unwilling to submit to the discipline of *Agudas* sages, and this proclivity drew the ire of Rabbi E. Schach, a leading spokesman of the Yeshiva world."

Internecine Rifts

Second, he believed in outreach to non-observant Jews and, unlike leaders of the other Hasidic sects, sent his followers around the world to actively engage them in debate and try to lead them to observe *mitzvot*. Finally, the messianic movement which surrounded him, particularly in his later years, was anathema to other *hareidim*. In fact, after his death, the eulogy for him in the *hareidi Jewish Observer* did not merit inclusion in the Table of Contents for the issue, and according to Yuter contained unflattering references which included the following sentences:

It must be noted for the record that many segments of the Torah camp had deep differences with various aspects of the *Chabad* movement during his tenure as Rebbe, particularly with the tragic rise of the misplaced Messianic fervor that surrounded him and consumed so many of his *Chassidim*. The separatism and isolation of Lubavitch from the large mainstream *Chareidi* community was also a source of pain and frustration for many Torah leaders.

Within the Centrist/Modern Orthodox camp, there was admiration and even envy of the Rebbe's ability to engender fervor in his adherents and to build institutions all over the globe. However, this was tempered by questions concerning his attitude toward sharing official platforms with Jews of other movements, his lobbying efforts both in the American political arena and in Israel, and his implicit denial of the complete legitimacy of other forms of Orthodoxy. When push came to shove in 1988, Centrist/Modern Orthodox leaders joined the coalition of the organized American Jewish Community in urging Israeli

leaders not to amend the Law of Return--a change that was not only advocated, but orchestrated by the Rebbe.

Meddling?

In 1990, two years after the crisis over the Law of Return, the Rebbe told his allies in the Knesset not to support an attempt by Shimon Peres to form a government by letting it be known that he would oppose any government that would compromise Israel's control over the territories. Many Israeli, as well as Diaspora, Jews were incensed over what was perceived as direct interference in the government of the State. In an earlier election period, the Rebbe had urged *Chassidim* who were citizens of Israel and currently out of the country to fly to Israel for the election, so that they could vote. In fact, the movement was rumored to have chartered planes to facilitate their travel. His followers built a replica of his home in Brooklyn for him in Kfar Chabad, but he never visited Israel and this fact exacerbated the ire of those who thought that he interfered too much in internal Israeli politics.

Grudging Admiration

Closer to home in the United States, Jews debated the Lubavitch *minhag* of lighting large menorahs in public squares of major cities at Hanukkah time. And then there was the tragic incident when the Rebbe's car, returning from one of his weekly visits to the cemetery to visit the graves of his wife and of the former Rebbe, struck and killed a child in Crown Heights. For whatever reason, the Rebbe chose not to speak out about this incident or to visit the family of the victim, though days of violent rioting followed.

Meanwhile, his continued advocacy of the change of the Law of Return was seen as an implicit denial of the legitimacy of other interpretations of Judaism. The leaders of the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative movements decried the tendency of their own adherents to support Lubavitch financially as a kind of nostalgic insurance policy for their places in the world to come. Public advocacy of not contributing to Lubavitch accelerated after the 1988 battle over the Law of Return.

And yet, there was always that grudging admiration--for the man himself as a model of charismatic leadership and vision in an age that lacks leaders; for the devotion of his followers who would go to the ends of the earth to help other Jews on the strength of an oblique mention of a need in one of his many speeches; and for the extent and vitality of the educational and service institutions which he caused to be built and to flourish around the world. □

Book reviews

THE HOLOCAUST AND THE WAR OF IDEAS

Edward Alexander. Transaction

The trenchant critic continues his battle against intellectual wishy-washiness when it comes to antisemitism in general or the Holocaust in particular. Astringent as always but for that reason stimulating and instructive.

JEWISH LAW

Menachem Elon; trans., Auerbach and Sykes. JPS. 4 vols, \$300

Magnificent! The three vol. Israeli classic is most felicitously translated and not only updated by Elon but supplemented with a volume on Jewish law in Israeli law. The overview of history, sources and principles of traditional Jewish law is extraordinary. A must for serious Jewish booklovers and a perfect gift for a lawyer, law school or synagogue library, or thoughtful Jew.

PRESENT AT SINAI

S. Y. Agnon; trans., Michael Swirsky. JPS. \$40

The fiction Nobel laureate was also a master anthologizer, here concerned with the most critical experience in Jewish history. Dip anywhere and relish how gifted Jews have long reinterpreted the event as Agnon now subtly does for us.

🍷 Endthoughts 🍷

Shabbat, in translation

Avi Rockoff

"Of course all the hotel keys were electronic," said my friend, recalling last year's family vacation. "But try explaining that in Japanese."

Electronic keys, which have swept the hotel world in recent years, are the bane of Orthodox Jewish travel. In the old days, we could leave the old-fashioned metal kind over the lintel or under the mat. Now hiding keys doesn't help, because inserting the modern ones completes a circuit and lights a small green bulb on the door we are trying to open. When Orthodox friends recommend hotels to each other, they note the key system. There is no need to elaborate, as both parties understand that high-tech locks mean *Shabbat* confined to quarters. Try explaining

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the problem to an innkeeper in Japanese, though. Try explaining it in English.

Accommodation Strategies

Electric-eye doors pose a similar problem. When my mother had knee surgery at a Manhattan hospital three years ago, my father and I spent *Shabbat* in a residential facility across the street, which lacked stairway access to upper floors from the first. This made avoiding the elevator impossible without help. Also, the only way to the street was to trip an automatic door. Getting past that required an old trick: we feigned intense interest in the lobby wallpaper until, sensing another guest walk by, we nonchalantly fell in behind and exited.

Every trip across the street was thus an adventure, but getting out wasn't half as bad as trying to maneuver back to our room. This meant explaining to a skeptical New York security guard why we needed his help to bypass the elevator. He had no idea what we were talking about and little interest in finding out.

Minor annoyances like these multiplied during what began to feel like *Shabbat* from hell. The worst moment came just when the coast looked clear. We spent the late afternoon in my mother's room chatting with her and her roommate, an elderly Chilean woman. Elena was the kind of person whose problems makes one's own, whatever they are, seem trivial. Over the past few years, doctors had replaced both her arthritic hips, one knee, one shoulder, both elbows, and a wrist.

As she now recovered from surgery on her cervical spine, they had encased her head and fixed it to her torso with a spiky metal contraption which looked like something de Sade would have devised had the good marquis been an orthopedist. With slow and painful steps, she made her way from her bed to rest in a chair by the opposite wall. No sooner had she sat down when across the room, her bedtable phone began to ring.

Tongue-tied

I knew at once that I had several seconds to explain to Elena the concept of *muktzeh*, one facet of which bans moving objects whose main use is forbidden on *Shabbat*. Ten seconds--perhaps fifteen--to limn Sabbath sanctity, describe our weekly act of communal harmony with the Creator Who rested on the seventh day, and explain the legal concept of *melechet machashevet*, purposeful work akin to what our forefathers in the desert did to build the *Mishkan* tabernacle. In the time remaining, we could go on to cover subsidiary legal concepts like *muktzeh*. Meanwhile, as Elena took in these matters of faith, history, and law, she might wonder why instead of