

hem stands head and shoulders above the rest. In the meantime..."

The Law may Permit; the Community Doesn't

Shlomo cut him off again. "I will give you an example of what we are dealing with," he said. "Last year I organized a seminar for teachers, and most of them were from what you would call 'right-wing' backgrounds. The speaker I invited was a brilliant young *rav* from a *dati* kibbutz. I didn't warn him who would be the audience, and he showed up wearing shorts. The teachers were shocked—one of them accused him of *avizraya d'ervah*, you know what that means? Almost indecent exposure, or at least a hint of it. The *rav* jumped onto the platform and gave a long speech, explaining the difference in *alachah* between the kind of indecent exposure that is forbidden in any culture, any time, and *ervah* which depends on the style and fashion they accepted in a particular society. He was very clear, but to the people he was talking to it didn't matter—they knew that from a man dressed like him could come no words worth listening to. So you see that is what we have—teachers who don't see the difference between wearing a topless bikini and putting on a pair of shorts, and who don't understand it when you explain it to them."

In that case," I said, "there are at least some rabbis who do speak your language."

Yes, if you look for them," said Amnon in the accents of his native Long Island. "For instance, I learn once a week with a man from London, a product of the English public schools. He gives a wonderful class, very stimulating."

And no one pressures him to take a particular one?"

Who can pressure him?" said Amnon. "He's only a *raggid shiur*, he just teaches a class, he holds no official position. So what can they do to him?"

It's obvious," I said, "that people like the three of you have an outlook which you didn't learn from the rabbis, at least the official ones. Where did you get it?"

In the army!" they answered, almost in unison. Moshe elaborated. "Every year in *miluim*, in the reserves," he said, "you serve next to people from different backgrounds, with such very different religious outlooks. That can't help changing the way you look at things yourself."

Shlomo suddenly wheeled to face the rest of us. "If the rabbis would have any idea," he said with heat,

"what it means to live in two worlds the way I do, then maybe they would have something to say to me. If they knew anything at all about getting a secular education, or about modern science, or about working with other kinds of people... Look, a rabbi passes by my door at work in Tel Aviv, and he sees me in my office talking with a female colleague, and you know what he says? That I am violating the law of *yichud*, of being alone in a room with a woman! Tell me, what does such a rabbi have to teach me, and what can I possibly ever want to know from him?"

"It's as I told you," said Moshe, in his mild voice. "We are a *dor yatom*, an orphan generation. □

Some missing american rabbis

Edward Rettig

Where were the American rabbis on January 15, 1991? Wherever they were, they were not a presence of any kind in Tel Aviv and Haifa, one of the great failures of American rabbinic leadership in the post World War Two era. For months we knew that this would be the critical date yet not one rabbinic movement in America took any steps to insure that there would be a large number of American rabbis to share the burden with the Israelis. There was an opportunity to make the most powerful kind of pastoral statement, the most meaningful kind of assertion of *shutafut goral*, of shared destiny. Elie Wiesel, four hundred Yeshiva University students, and even the comedian Jackie Mason felt the need to spend the first week of the war in Tel Aviv but American rabbis were rarely to be found.

The inadequate response did not take place in a vacuum. The American Jewish non-response was conditioned by historic perceptions of the Jewish world that are simply out of date. The Jewish world is shrinking and Jewish communities are being thrust closer and closer to each other. Today a rabbi would find it unthinkable not to travel across the continent to participate in a conference or a demonstration to which he or she was committed. In the same way, has it not become unthinkable to be absent when one third of the world Jewish community needs pastoral help in meeting the terrorist Scud bombardment launched by Iraq? Looking back, we should have learned from the world wide agitation on be-

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half of the Jews of the Soviet Union, Syria, and Ethiopia, how small the Jewish world is becoming.

The New Consciousness Aborning

Other issues would also have done so. For example, a British woman who converted to Judaism in Israel in an Orthodox conversion discovered that in a controversial step, the Israeli *Beit Din* conditioned the conversion upon the continued residence of the convert in Israel. When she moved back to Britain with her family, the validity of her conversion and the Jewish status of her children was challenged by an Orthodox British *Beit Din*. She is now asking the Israeli High Court of Justice for a declarative judgment that she is Jewish. Support for her legal effort in Israel, which will hopefully establish her Jewish identity in Britain, is rising among Jews in the United States. Indeed, the case has elicited comment and controversy in Jewish communities all over the world.

For a second example, what seemed to Israeli political operators three years ago to be no more than an obscure bit of horse trading, exploded in the Jewish world as the "Who is a Jew" controversy. Jewish communities were painfully divided at that time. Heated controversy raged between Jewish people from Jerusalem to Sydney to Leningrad to Kansas City. And finally, several years back a Jewish community in the western United States was able to work out a community wide procedure for conversion. This remarkable experiment failed, in no small measure because of negative response from Jewish communities in Europe and in Israel.

Taken together, these events point to a new development. The time has come to recognize that there is no longer a viable possibility of thinking in terms of an insular, American or British or French or Soviet or Israeli Jewish community. The world—and certainly the Jewish world—has simply become too small. On the one hand we should have understood by now that if we are not involved in each other's religious discussions, we have a tendency to implode upon each other's religious worlds at fairly regular intervals. On the other hand, we can actually physically stand by the side of our brothers and sisters in their difficult times. If we do not, we no longer have the excuse that it is not "feasible."

The overwhelmingly positive aspect of our shrinking Jewish world is the ability to achieve *Clal Yisrael* which is in our hands in a new and challenging way. Shaking loose the limitations of a provincial attitude can liberate tremendous energies which lie untapped within our communities. Understanding and dealing with the ramifications of this new

kind of World Jewish Community will be the greatest challenge of the coming generations of Jewish leadership. □

To leave as the gulf war broke out

Israel Zoberman

I was in Israel on that historic deadline of January 15, 1991—and the preceding two weeks—before returning to America on the 16th and learning aboard the plane that President Bush did not bluff nor did President Hussein blink.

As the magic date approached following the failed encounter between Secretary Baker and Minister Aziz on the 9th, there was growing concern in Israel that it would become a target for Iraq's wrath and attempt to split the Coalition arrayed against it. The civil defense authorities were well organized for that eventuality, distributing gas masks (I borrowed one) and instructing the population in their proper use along with the sealing of one room per home. It was an eerie reminder of another time and place, pointing at seemingly persistent vulnerability even in the midst of an independent Jewish state that, contrary to popular opinion is neither a Goliath nor a David but a nation determined and equipped to survive the challenges of a harsh neighborhood.

I watched Israelis gathering to purchase the necessary plastic sheets and tape, my father finally giving in to mother's insistent urging to perform his own civil duty and familial obligation, while I remained subject to her consternation for not planning to depart before my scheduled date of the 17th. How could I leave? After all, there was a principle at stake; I would not flee in the face of a danger confronting my people and wanted to be with dear ones during trying circumstances. Admittedly, I was also rather optimistic that Saddam Hussein, faced with overwhelming odds, would somehow give in and retreat from Kuwait and an obstinate posture. His continued, defiant refusal reflects a blind tempting of reality and the willingness of a victimizer crying "foul" to sacrifice Iraq on the altar of a grandiose stance. Does he foresee holding out long enough to emerge as leader of the Moslem world and a major figure to reckon with?

Looking Back on Our Looking Forward

My El Al flight left Ben Gurion Airport in the afternoon of January 16 instead of later that night, prob-

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