


**OUTLOOK** › Yonoson Rosenblum

**The World Outside, the World Inside,  
and the Intersection Between**

## No More Suffering in Silence

**A** remarkable event for English-speaking married women took place in Jerusalem on Sunday, 5 Kislev. Over 3,000 women poured into Binyanei Ha'umah's Ussishkin Hall, with many others turned away at the door due to fire regulations.

The sponsoring organization, Tahareinu, only learned two weeks before the event that Binyanei Ha'umah's larger hall (nearly three times the capacity of the smaller Teddy Hall) would be available, after a thousand tickets had already been sold. That obviated any possibility of assigned seating. Nevertheless, the event started on time, in large part due to the presence of more than 100 volunteers eager to show women where to go. And no less remarkably, it ended just after 10:30 p.m., despite the packed schedule.

That the event generated unprecedented buzz in advance is not surprising. It had been advertised since Succos, and featured three speakers well known to the crowd. Rav Yitzchak Berkovits is one of the leading *poskim* for the English-speaking community of Jerusalem, and is intimately involved in Tahareinu, an organization that helps women understand and navigate the various medical issues surrounding *taharas hamishpachah*. Rebbetzin Yemima Mizrachi burst like a supernova onto the scene just a few years back, and has attracted huge audiences around the world with her unique combination of drama, humor, and overflowing Torah content. And the headline speaker Rabbi Yissocher Frand hadn't spoken in Israel for many years.

In addition, four very well-known *rebbetzins* spoke in brief but compelling presentations, around the theme of "Defining Ourselves." Rebbetzin Chaya Levine, whose husband, Rabbi Kalman Levine *Hy"d*, was one of the five *kedoshim* murdered in the Har Nof Massacre, spoke about facing *nisyonos*, without any reference to her own personal tragedy. She talked about the necessity of recognizing each trial as custom-made by Hashem to maximize our potential.

Rebbetzin Dina Schoonmaker explicated the *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (22a) that describes the world as growing dark for a man who loses his wife; his steps shorten and he loses his sense of direction and purpose. Every wife, she explained, potentially holds a candle to her husband that illuminates him; what is unique about

him, what is his potential, in a way that the universal light of the sun — i.e., the way everyone else in the world views him — does not.

Rebbetzin Rena Tarshish related how Rav Meir Shapiro, the builder of the magnificent Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin and initiator of the Daf HaYomi, spoke of his mother at the yeshiva's dedication and how she planted the seed of *ahavas Torah*, without which neither Chachmei Lublin nor Daf HaYomi would have come into being. Rav Meir would share a childhood memory of his mother waiting impatiently for his *melamed* to come and of her tears when he did not. When he tried to console her that the *melamed* would come the next day, she replied, "A day without Torah is a day lost forever." His mother's tears of *ahavas Torah*, Rav Meir would say, were the inspiration for all that followed.

Many of the halachos of prayer, Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller pointed out, are derived from Chanah's prayer. But surely the Avos prayed, too. So what was it specifically that is learned from Chanah about *avodah sheb'lev*? That she expressed her total dedication to a particular goal "silently, from the deepest recesses of her heart," Rebbetzin Heller answered.

The event took place the week of *parshas Vayeitzei*, and Rebbetzin Yemima Mizrachi poignantly portrayed the yearning of both Rachel Imeinu and Leah Imeinu to be the mothers of the Twelve Tribes, and all that they sacrificed to do so. *Tahor* (pure), she noted, is related to *tzohar* (a window through which light shines), and the process of attaining *taharah* is one of waiting expectantly for a new opportunity, as one looks out the window in anticipation.

Before he spoke, Rabbi Frand told me that his female audience would be puzzled by his opening disquisition on military tactics. "People still remember the name General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of the Allied forces in the first Gulf War," he began. "But who remembers the name of the general in charge of logistics, an operation every bit as complicated as the combat aspects? Even Google may not bring up the name General William Gus Pagonis. Yet, as the saying goes, 'an army marches on its stomach,' and but for General Pagonis, the war could not have been fought." Women, he told his audience, are the unsung heroes, the General Pagonises who make everything possible.

And in the DNA of every Jewish woman is an almost unlimited capacity for *mesirus nefesh*. As an example, he concluded with a story from Rabbi Yechiel Spero's biography of Rav Mordechai Gifter. When the Lithuanians who served as the Nazis' willing executioners came to murder the Jewish women and children of Telshe, Rebbetzin Luba Bloch, wife of Rabbi Zalman Bloch and the

mother of Rebbetzin Gifter, offered to show her killer the hiding place of her jewelry in return for granting one request.

And what was that request? That she be murdered after her young children. When the request was granted, she lowered herself into the mass grave of her children and closed the eyes of each one and covered each with handfuls of dirt. And then, as the murderer waited to finish his task, she offered praise to the Ribbono shel Olam for having allowed her to bring her precious children to *kever Yisrael*.

SUCH A POWERFUL EVENING OF CHIZUK needed no justification beyond itself. But Rabbi Yitzchak Melber, the founder of Toras HaMishpacha, which includes two divisions, Tahareinu and Zareinu, did not raise well over \$100,000 only to celebrate Jewish wives and mothers. His goal was to publicize the services of Tahareinu to the widest possible audience. He was engaged in another form of *pirsumei nissa* in Kislev.

Dovid Hamelech proclaimed, "*Chassid ani*," before the Ribbono shel Olam, because while other kings busied themselves with their own *kavod*, he was occupied with permitting wives to their husbands (*Berachos* 4a). In that same spirit, Tahareinu is a holy mission for Rabbi Melber.

Though the Tahareinu hotline staffed by 30 female volunteers and eight rabbis takes over 3,000 inquiries a month from all over the world, there are many more women and couples who could be helped if they knew of Toras HaMishpacha. "There is so much suffering in silence simply because women and couples do not have access to the necessary information," Rabbi Melber said.

The advances of medical knowledge in the area of women's health are so rapid that no rabbi, and not even most doctors, can keep up. "The Ribbono shel Olam is revealing the secrets of Creation," Rabbi Berkovits told the women's gathering. He related how the great *posek* Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach had counseled him not to permit irreversible procedures, except in the rarest and most dire cases, because medical advances today are so rapid. And, fortunately, Israel is at the forefront of many of those advances.

But perhaps the most important point made by Rabbi Berkovits is that today there are medical solutions for a multitude of conditions and situations that can cause great stress to couples and impinge greatly on *shalom bayis*.

The problem is that a lot of players hold some of the information, but not all. Many doctors do not understand the practical implications of the problems patients present because they do not know halachah. The more doctors understand of the halachic implications for couples in their care, the more likely they are to search for solutions.

Rabbis may have vast halachic knowledge, but may also lack information of medical advances. Toras HaMishpacha aims to remedy these large gaps by serving as a conduit of information in both directions. Its annual rabbinical conference in Israel attracts

more than 500 rabbis to hear from leading medical experts in the various relevant fields, and the organization runs many smaller rabbinical conferences throughout the year in the United States and Great Britain. It also arranges courses for *mikveh* attendants and teachers of *chassanim* and *kallos*.

The 30 or so women who staff the Tahareinu hotline receive 250 hours of instruction before they field any inquiries, and attend monthly continuing education courses. Each commits to working at least eight hours a week.

But even the requisite knowledge is not enough. No less important is having the patience to listen carefully to couples who come to consult, and being able to offer emotional support. Even the biggest medical experts often take little more than ten to fifteen minutes to explain their recommendations, leaving the couple confused and in the dark, like subjects on a medical conveyor belt. The rabbis and counselors of Toras HaMishpacha listen patiently to those who come to discuss their difficulties, explain in detail the various medical options, and also the reasons a doctor may have requested certain tests or recommended a particular procedure.

On a visit to the Toras HaMishpacha office in Jerusalem, Rabbi Melber showed me a stack of letters from grateful beneficiaries. The first thing that struck me is that they were not simple thank-you notes, but of *megillah* length in most cases. The constant refrain is gratitude for the patience and support shown by the rabbis and counselors of Toras HaMishpacha.

One example: "We were no longer alone in this ordeal; we had a guiding hand to pull us through the dark days. It was so reassuring to be able to discuss every test and procedure with someone who truly cared and spoke our language."

REGULAR READERS OF THIS COLUMN know that I view the multitude of initiatives by individuals who saw a need within our community and set out to fill that need as one of the clearest indicators of the astonishing vitality of chareidi life. So needless to say, the story of a Talmudic prodigy who grew up in New Square and who could barely sign his name in English at the time of his *chasunah*, who ten years later set out to emulate the encyclopedic medical knowledge of Rabbi Elimelech Firer, in the specific area of women's health, has great appeal for me. Already six years ago, in the early days of Toras HaMishpacha, Rabbi Melber published a seven-volume work on the intersection of halachah and medicine in this particular area. And I have personally witnessed, in several forums, the respect shown him by prominent doctors and medical researchers.

One of the many e-mails received in the days just after the recent event captures my feelings well: "I am just writing to say what a massive *kiddush Hashem* the Tahareinu event made on me and I am sure on thousands of others. I woke up the morning after the Tahareinu event filled with so much joy to be part of a nation that creates things like Tahareinu." ●