

*An Inside Look at the Upside
of the Ultra-Orthodox Society*

One Above and Seven Below

*A Consumer's Guide to Orthodox Judaism
from the Perspective of the Chareidim*

by
Yechezkel Hirshman



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One Above and Seven Below

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Email: cm@mazopublishers.com

Contact The Author

Yechezkel Hirshman

1a7b.author@gmail.com

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Rabbi of Moshav Matityahu

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ז"ד

Dear Friends,

I have read portions of the manuscript "One Above and Seven Below" by Yechezkel Hirshman.

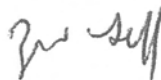
Although I generally shun labeling Jews and so defining them, this book seeks to define chareidim not by any external or nonessential criteria but rather to define what a true serious Torah Jew is, transcending all grouping and labeling.

I recommend this book for all those who want to consider and examine what being a Torah Jew entails from a serious and essential perspective.

I commend the author on his bravery to tackle such a sensitive issue and for his insightful understanding of the essentials of true Torah Judaism. I have found the book inspiring, informative and entertaining – presenting at times very serious and biting mussar with a healthy sense of humor. May Hashem grant him the ability to continue to merit the community with further works.

With Torah blessings,

Rabbi Zev Leff



Moshav Shitufi מושב שיתופי

d.n. modiin 71917 ד.ג. מודיעין
tel. 08-976-1016 טל
fax 08-976-1124 פקס

מתתיהו
matityahu

Excerpts of a letter to the author from Rabbi Mordechai D. Noigershall – (Translated from Hebrew):

**Rabbi Mordechai Noigershall, Director
Judaism from a Different Angle, Ltd.
Public Relations and Publications
P.O. Box 50159 Jerusalem 91501
Tel/Fax +972-2-5816573**

B”H Kislev 5767

To the Honor of R’ Yechezkel Hirshman, N”Y

I have leafed through pages of your upcoming book, [One Above and Seven Below], which is geared to contend with sensitive questions that challenge the uniqueness of life within chareidi society.

There are numerous concepts that carry a need for clarification for, even among those who are believers of this way of life and who adhere to it, it is not always the case that they are sufficiently versed as to how to articulate them and, when they are flung into a dialogue concerning these and similar issues, they may at times come across to appear disoriented. Thus, you have done well in your approach to touch upon the heart of these issues based on the ideology of the Torah and with using an easygoing style. In the course of dealing with the issues themselves, you also point to an avenue of how to contend with them: with charm, with lightness, with a sense of humor, and with a small measure of sarcasm where it may be called for.

May Hashem grant that your work may achieve favor among all those for whom these matters are relevant, and may it increase forces for Torah and a proper ideology.

Blessing you with affection and with a full heart,

Mordechai Dovid Noigershall

FAQs About This Book

What is this book about?

This book is about the ideology of authentic Torah Judaism, otherwise known as chareidi Judaism, ultra-Orthodox Judaism, or Talmudic Judaism, although we think of it as just plain Judaism. It is what we call *hashkafa*. This book is unique in that it applies the principles of hashkafa to the cultural (what I call the socio-political) landscape of Orthodox Judaism and deals with many of the pertinent issues. As such, it is a blend of Torah hashkafa and socio-political debate.

Why did you write this book?

This question is addressed in detail in the Introduction. Nevertheless, the short answer is to help people deal with questions that I have heard again and again for years; questions that start with:

“Why don’t yeshiva guys...?”

“Why can’t chareidim be...?”

“Where is it written that...?”

“What could be wrong with...?”

“Isn’t it a *chillul Hashem* (sacrilege) to...?”

What do you expect this book to achieve?

This book is meant to help people understand and come to terms with basic Torah hashkafa, based predominantly on Rashi’s commentary of Chumash, and with those who endeavor to put it into practice.

The aims of this book are:

- To promote better understanding of the chareidi world in the eyes of Orthodox Jews who do not consider themselves to be chareidi. Hopefully, to build bridges.
- To help one who is searching for a clear religious ideology to see the benefits of being chareidi – I call this: Comparative shopping.

Important Note – The intention is to promote the conventions that the chareidim uphold. It is *not* meant to challenge the conventions of

FAQs About This Book

those who are not chareidi, although in some cases, it is an inevitable cause-and-effect. Although to some readers – who do not [yet] wish to identify themselves as chareidi – parts of this book may inadvertently seem patronizing or antagonistic, be assured that this is certainly not its purpose. I apologize in advance should this occur.

Who is this book for?

Anybody who can benefit from it.

Okay. So who can benefit from this book?

Lots of folks, such as:

- Mainstream chareidi yeshiva students who are fully knowledgeable in Torah *hashkafa* but need help in articulating the hashkafa and in presenting it to others.
- Seminary girls who need a concise guide (in plain English) to understand the hashkafot that they are being taught to embrace.
- Chareidim who are struggling with their sense of identity and/or may have been “turned off.”
- *Baalei teshuva* (newly religious) and converts who are newly entering the Orthodox world and are confused and disparaged by the apparent discord within the various factions of Orthodoxy.
- Non-chareidi parents who have difficulty dealing with their offspring who have turned “black.”
- My wife’s cousins in Great Neck.

And finally:

- Non-chareidi Orthodox Jews (NCOJs) who are sincerely interested in getting a clearer and more accurate understanding of the people who are closest to them, yet from whom they feel so distant.

Who is this book not for?

This book is definitely not for everyone!

I wrote earlier that this book is for anyone who may benefit from it. If you don’t believe that you can benefit from it, *do not read it*.

- This book is for religious Jews who are chareidi and seek *chizuk* (encouragement) or who are non-chareidi and seek *hadracha* (guidance). While this book aims to help a chareidi who may be having “second thoughts” or a non-chareidi who is “undecided,” it is not out

to convert anyone who is “not interested.” It is not targeted for “anti-chareidim.” If you are one, don’t read this book. It is not for you.

- This book is meant to reframe common perceptions of what constitutes a *chareidi* and will present a definition that may differ from your preconceived notions. If you are already certain about what constitutes a chareidi and are not open to new definitions, this book will not work for you.
- This book draws its premise from the writings of Rashi and the sages of the Talmud. This book will be of no benefit to one who does not consider Rashi and his sources to be authoritative and who, likewise, holds little regard for the perspectives of those who may actually consider these sources to be authoritative. If you meet this description, please read something else.
- As this particular volume places an emphasis on Torah ideology, it deals heavily with Jewish ethics, what is commonly called *mussar*. In some places, it emulates the techniques of some of the classical works of Jewish ethics. You might say that this volume is in part a “neo-mussar” book, albeit with a light touch. Readers who are not receptive to concepts of mussar will, very likely, not appreciate these parts of the book.
- This book must be read thoroughly, it cannot be skimmed through. If you are not a thorough reader, this book is not for you.
- This book presents ideas on intellectual, ideological, and academic (scriptural and textual) grounds. It makes no attempt to deal with issues on emotional grounds. If you are an overly sensitive or passionate person, do not read this book.

Can irreligious people benefit from this book?

This book is not meant to “convert” non-observant Jews and does not target the irreligious. Despite this, I purposely wrote the book in my best Queen’s English (partly because my wife is from Queens) and used King James names for the books of Torah (Genesis, Exodus, etc.) and used the standard Modern Hebrew pronunciation for my transliterations so that the book should be accessible to those who are not so well versed in chareidi expressions and terminology. Many parts of the book will be of interest to irreligious people who are genuinely interested in the subject. Nevertheless, there are numerous intricate theological segments that can only be fully appreciated by those with a strong Talmudic background.

Can this book be taken into a restroom?

Absolutely not – too religious.

Can this book be taken into a Beit Midrash?

Absolutely not – too sacrilegious.

Please explain Book One and Book Two?

It is all clearly explained in the Introduction, but I will summarize it. This project follows the logical sequence of (1) state the theory and (2) apply the theory to real-time situations. In our case the theory is chareidi ideology (hashkafa) and its application is the basket of social issues. This volume covers the ideology segment and is sub-titled *Consumer Benefits*.

What is the sub-title of the volume that deals with the social issues?

Consumer Relations.

Why are you releasing the book in two installments?

It may certainly be preferable to put out the book in one complete publication but, as you probably suspect, the second segment is far from ready. In light of that, owing that this volume is in and of itself an independent unit and that it is ready for publication, I strongly felt that it is worthwhile to publish this volume by itself. I sincerely feel that this book can benefit many Jews and I would like to enable those who can benefit to do so. Besides, the expenses are half the price.

So what issues are slated for Book Two?

All the usual suspects – economy, national service, zealotry (those flying stones), stringencies and kashrut, technology (internet and cell phones), social interaction (*chillul Hashem*), Beit Din and *agunah* issues, deviancy, fallout (Children at Risk / Off the Derech), and more.

Sounds like quite a bit?!

It is.

So, when should that be coming out?

With G-d's help and if we don't yet merit the true redemption (which will render such books obsolete), some time in 5769 (2009).

I have never heard of you. Are you a Rabbi or educator?

No.

Are you somebody famous?

Not yet.

Are you a Baal Teshuva?

Also, not yet.

So, who made you the spokesman for all the chareidim?

Nobody in particular, so you are free to reject everything that I have written. Notwithstanding, I did write the Author's Foreword, which includes a concise autobiographical narrative, to establish my credentials as to what qualifies me to write such a book.

Having said this, I need to be very clear that I do not officially represent the chareidi community or any recognized body or organization that calls itself chareidi. Doubtless, there will be many of my co-religionists who may disagree with some of my views and certainly with my cavalier, candid, and oft-times cynical approach. I take full and sole responsibility for the contents of this book.

As long as you are already making disclaimers, what else do I need to know?

I am happy you asked. Yes, there are a few more things that I would like you to know:

- This book contains many discourses with exegeses (*drush*) of Scriptures and Talmudic passages. Most of the material is based on discourses that I have heard and read from renowned Jewish sages and thinkers, yet I have not shied away from embellishing these discourses with thoughts of my own. Since I do not rank among these renowned Jewish thinkers, the reader may evaluate these discourses at his or her own discretion.
- I am not qualified or ordained to issue Halachic rulings. Anything presented as a Halachic precept is a reflection of my (or my mentor's) personal understanding and interpretation of the Halacha and is subject to dissenting opinions, interpretations and errors. The reader is encouraged to verify all Halachic issues with their personal Halachic mentor.
- Many anecdotes that are presented for the purpose of characterizing

FAQs About This Book

a situation or delivering a message are word-of-mouth stories and folk legends. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of any such anecdotes nor, in many cases, can I be certain if they ever happened at all.

- This book may contain some scattered references to marital issues and is not recommended for readers below the age of 16.
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Do you really expect me to buy this book?

Certainly. Plus some additional copies for your sister-in-law in Long Island and for that young guy who is working for your accountant.

How can I get answers to questions that you haven't raised?

I can be reached through my publisher or emailed at 1a7b.author@gmail.com

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Acknowledgements

This book represents my first full featured writing project and, needless to say, it has been an exhilarating and enriching experience. For being privileged to be at the receiving end of something so valuable, I must say “Thank you.”

One aspect of writing that has amazed me above all else is that when one sits down at his keyboard to write, regardless of what he intends to write when he starts, there is no telling what he will find on his screen when the session is done. Countless times I have reviewed passages and chapters that only I have written all but looking around to see who is truly formulating the ideas that seem to materialize out of nowhere. It may be blasphemous and narcissistic to claim that these insights are Divine inspiration yet I have no doubt that they are “divinely inspired”. And with this, I must thank the *Chonen L’Adam Daat* – the “Bestower of Intellect to Man” – the true One Above who instilled within me the brains, the heart, and the courage to write this book.

I am likewise indebted to numerous Torah scholars, some of whom actually read all or part of the manuscript, who gave me either words of advice and encouragement or plain hard criticism. These include¹ HaRav G. Rabinowitz, Shlit”a, HaRav Asher Zelig Weiss, Shlit”a, HaRav Mordechai Noigershall, Shlit”a, HaRav S. Kamenetsky, Shlit”a, HaRav Zev Leff, Shlit”a, and, most notably Rabbi Berel Wein, Shlit”a, whose tapes and books on Jewish history served both as an influence and as reference material for many of the historical assertions that are presented in this book. In a similar vein, I wish to express a deep appreciation for the lectures of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, ZT”L. I maintain that there is much of his analytical and candid approach to the essence of Judaism reflected within these pages.

Many thanks to Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblum who lent me his annotated copy of *Real Jews* before I ordered a copy for myself and to Rabbi Moshe Grylak who provided me with a complimentary copy of his book,

¹ The appearance of one’s name on this list is *not* to be construed as an endorsement for this book.

Acknowledgements

The Chareidim – Who are We Really? Likewise to Rabbi Lazer Berger who alerted me to the existence of Rabbi Noigershall's book before I actually met Rabbi Noigershall (and received a complimentary copy).

Much gratitude goes to my study partners Rabbi Michoel S. and Rabbi Yehoshua B. along with so many guests at my Shabbat table who served as the sounding board (or the soundly bored) for my obscure theories.

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Navigation through the jungle of the world of Jewish book publishing would not be possible without the assistance of the experts. For this I am indebted to Rabbi Moshe Dombey, OB" M, and Mrs. Miriam Zakon of Targum Press, Rabbi Dovid Kahn of Feldheim Publishers, Yaacov Peterseil of Devora Publishing, Rabbi Moshe Kaufman of Israel Book Shop, and Rabbi Dovid Rossoff of Guardian Press, all of whom have given me direction even if they did not manage my project. Likewise, a note of thanks to fellow author and neighbor, Rabbi Don Roth for sharing his resources and experiences.

At last, we come to my publisher Chaim Mazo and his staff at Mazo Publishers. With the patience of Hillel the Elder, Chaim stood by me revision after revision (after revision...). He seemed to be always available and gave my work his personal attention.

Likewise, a note of thanks to Moshe Handel whose handiwork in graphic artistry adorns the cover of this book.

I am literally indebted to those people who cooperated to sponsor this project. At the head of the pack stand the officers of the Ezras Yisroel Charitable Fund whose generosity made this publication possible. They have taken a very personal interest in this project and their support goes far beyond the scope of this work. I likewise gratefully acknowledge the generous contributions of Mr. and Mrs. Heshy Schechter, Mr. and Mrs. Nissim Louzoun, Mr. and Mrs. Zvi Rosen, Rabbi and Mrs. Avraham Miller, and Mr. and Mrs. Allen Rubin.

Mere words of gratitude are never adequate for the truly important people. To my parents who have always known what is best for me and to my in-laws who know even better.

To my wife, my *bina yeteira*, who has kept the ship afloat through many a storm. If I have any sanity left, it is she who preserved it.

To my children for whom, thank G-d, I need more than two hands to tally them up. I cannot be assured that this book will sell a single copy, but it does not really matter – I wrote this book for them. A special note of recognition goes to my oldest son, Yaakov, who inspired me to the main

Acknowledgements

premise of the One Above and Seven Below.

In the Author's Foreword I talk about a convoluted autobiography chapter, the surviving parts of which appear in an Appendix as an anthology of excerpts. The main purpose of that chapter was to explain how I got from point "A" (All-American Jewish boy) to point "B" (Black-hatter). It goes without saying that all of the people mentioned therein have played some significant role in the journey. As a result, every individual has in some way contributed to the insights that this book comprises and each one has earned my heart-felt gratitude.

Did I forget anybody? Oh, yes – many thanks to Zero Mostel.

Zero Mostel?

When I was a toddler, I used to love listening to musical phonograph records. So, to keep me occupied, my mother used to put a stack of phonograph records onto a record player and seat me in a wooden rocking chair to listen to them. Naturally, I soon knew the lyrics of all of the songs by heart. One of my favorite records was the sound track from the original Broadway version of *Fiddler on the Roof* starring Zero Mostel.

And so, many thanks to Zero Mostel who, in his role as the legendary Tevye, was the first to inspire me toward my two primary goals in life – "learning from the holy books seven hours every day" and "becoming a rich man". May at least the first one come to be. No, Zero Mostel wasn't a chareidi but at least he knew how to act like one.

Y.H.

My Three Uniforms

Over the course of this book, I consistently juggle three distinct roles. Or, as the cliché goes, I alternately don three hats – although, I prefer to say three uniforms.

The first uniform is the academic cap and gown of the university professor as I set out to deliver a series of lectures to the uninitiated about the sociological and ideological makeup of the chareidi entity. Yet, I am not a sociologist or anthropologist nor have I ever attended university. I do not hold any proper college degree.

The second, and most pretentious, uniform is the tall skull cap and black frock of the Rabbi and preacher as I expound on the words of the Scriptures and the sages and pretend to convey the “Word of G-d”. Yet, I do not have *semicha* (Rabbinic ordination) and I have never served as a Rabbi or educator or an outreach professional.

The third uniform is the powdered wig and the black robes of the advocate, the defense attorney, in my efforts to fend off the criticisms and accusations against the chareidi community that I consider to be unjust. Yet, I have never attended law school.

So, in what way am I qualified to wear any of these three uniforms? (This question may not be nagging you, but it is definitely nagging me.)

To start with, there are two claims that I believe that I can assert with confidence:

- I am a chareidi – at the very least, based on the definitions that I present in the coming chapters which are my standards for determining chareidiness.
- I wrote this book.

So now, let me pose a new question:

Why did I write this book?

No-no. I am not asking “Why did I *write this book*?” After all, that question is fully addressed in the upcoming introductory chapter. The question I am asking is “Why did *I* write this book?”

I mean, shouldn't somebody else have done it – like, people who actually *are* qualified to wear these uniforms?

Author's Foreword

Obviously, the reason that I wrote this book is that I felt that a book such as this should be written for the English speaking Orthodox public and nobody else seemed to be doing it. Evidently, all of the more qualified people have other priorities. Moreover, it is not a simple task. A book such as this demands of its author a high level of motivation, perception, and idealism, not to mention adequate time flexibility, financial resources, perseverance, and writing and language skills, the sum total of which is what we call *siyatta d'shmaya* (Heavenly assistance). Being that, with regard to this work, I find myself a rare beneficiary of this comprehensive package of gifts, I can attest to having been granted an inordinate measure of Heavenly assistance over the duration of this project.

Is this sufficient to make me qualified?

I don't think that I can answer that (I am not qualified to).

This is a question for the reader to determine, and, in order to help the reader make an informed decision, I initially set out to write a succinct autobiography chapter and put it between the introduction and the pilot chapter. One purpose of the chapter would be to provide the reader with a bit of background information about myself to understand where I am "coming from." This much can be accomplished with a few dry paragraphs such as these:

Both of my parents were raised in homes that can be characterized as chareidi. My father's family was Chassidic and my mother was enrolled in Bais Yaakov when Bais Yaakov was a novelty. Notwithstanding, circumstances led them to set up shop in an out-of-New York Orthodox community that did not promote chareidi ideals. As a result, not only did certain tenets of their chareidi'ish upbringing fall by the wayside in their own ideology but, in addition, they brought up their children to fit in with the prevailing local culture. Consequently, I was brought up with Religious Zionism in the foreground and chareidiism in the background. I grew up totally detached from my paternal grandparents as they were no longer living and predominantly detached from my maternal grandparents because they lived so far away. As such, they were unable to have much direct influence on my early development.

Still, I always felt the background beckoning to me and I was inspired by my more chareidi East-coast relatives when I chanced to see them. After my bar-mitzvah, I eagerly forsook the comforts of home life to cast my lot in a prominent, high intensity, sleep-in, East-coast Yeshiva. After four years of high school I stayed on for three more years of post high school study and then moved on to the chareidi strongholds of Yeshivat Mir in Jerusalem (one year) and Lakewood, New Jersey (five years). I never went to college.

It was virtually on the final day of those five years in Lakewood Yeshiva that I chanced upon my wife and, by that time, I had already made a commitment toward the family business. As such, my dream of spending my newlywed years as a Kollel fellow never materialized. After two years of working in New York, we returned to my hometown where I officially joined the family business and assumed the status of a *yeshivish baalabus* (working man who looks like a Rabbi). About nine years later, my wife finally prevailed upon me to make aliya to Eretz Israel which we accomplished with remarkable success.

Here in Eretz Israel, I succeeded in every aspect except in maintaining my status as a businessman. I attempted other occupational endeavors one of which was in the field of writing but even that was devastated in the high-tech upheaval of 2000 and 2001. In the absence of full time employment, I found myself spending more and more time in the study halls and, in effect, reclaimed the missing Kollel life that eluded me fifteen years earlier. Currently, I study in the mornings and evenings and am writing this book in the afternoons and I am sneaking in some schooling toward yet another mid-life career.

Now, this certainly brings us up to date but I was not convinced that it would suffice to establish my credentials. On one level, it does indeed point out that I “did time” in some of the most prominent Lithuanian-style yeshivot. But I really felt that I needed this chapter to do more. I needed it to explain not merely where I come from but what forces converged to qualify me and motivate me to write this book.

To accomplish this, I expounded on all of the elements that were touched upon in the above synopsis. I wrote all about my ancestry and upbringing to illustrate that nobody is truly born a chareidi, no matter what his family background may be; one must become chareidi. The narrative goes on to discuss my environs, yeshiva background and passage to adulthood, my courtship and marriage, my career(s) and our move to Eretz Israel in an effort to convey the way I perceive G-d’s providence in becoming as “chareidi” as I have become and to proclaim how one who allows G-d to orchestrate his life can be blessed with the three most precious gifts that any truly Orthodox Jew could long for: the wisdom of Torah, a virtuous wife, and a portion of Eretz Israel. Hence, it comprises, in great detail, a growing up story and a *shidduch* (courtship) story and an *aliya* story which together serve as components of a *hashgacha pratis* (guiding hand of G-d) story geared to explain how I, of all people, come to be the one who is sitting here typing these words.

It was in too much detail. Before I knew it, it was upwards of 60 pages in 11 point book print – anything but succinct. This was no concise biographical blurb; it was almost its own book. I initially considered

Author's Foreword

merely relocating the chapter and including the complete text as an Appendix to the book, but then I thought better of it. Clearly, it would be counterproductive for me to distract the reader with my entire life's story. After all, this book is not meant to be a storybook and, besides, are you really that interested?

My next inclination was to condense the chapter to a more palatable length while preserving it as a coherent narrative. This means to cut out most of what I wrote and to patch up what was left in a way that the reader could not discern that anything is missing. This turned out to be too daunting a task for me. Aside from a dearth of the required time and patience, it was like trying to make a car lighter by taking out parts of the engine – what parts can you do without and expect the same performance?

My final recourse was to take the lazy man's way out. That is, to extract a compilation of the most relevant and interesting segments and present them as an anthology of excerpts which basically meet my goals albeit at the expense of leaving numerous holes in the narrative. And so, the curious (and, perhaps, bored) reader can find some snippets of my memoirs tucked away in an Appendix at the back of this book.

Of course, this left me with a hole up front. I still needed to write something at the beginning of the book to serve the basic purpose of introducing myself and establishing my credentials. After all, I am single-handedly and voluntarily assuming the mantle of chareidi public relations in a format that – to my knowledge – nobody else has done (Jonathan Rosenblum notwithstanding) and that is a mighty broad-shouldered mantle to bear. Some of the Rabbanim that I consulted quaked in fear (as true chareidim do) when I proposed my project. Will I do the cause justice or make things worse?

To fill the hole, I wrote this foreword and cleverly snuck in that brief biographical blurb which you have already unsuspectingly read. Well, that's a start. At least I can boast a solid yeshiva background even if I didn't spend a day in Kollel. But what more can I say for myself? I even launched this chapter with a confession that I am not a sociologist, I am not a Rabbi, I am not a lawyer, or an educator, lecturer, journalist, or accomplished writer. I do not hold all that much in the way of higher education, titles, degrees, or positions.

While I was attending yeshiva, I undertook to study the renowned philosophical work, *Chovot HaLevavot* by Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pakuda. One spiritual advisor who took note of my endeavor urged me not to skip the author's introduction. I heeded this advice and have not regretted it. The introduction is no less inspirational as is the main body of the work.

In his introduction, Rabbi Bachya recounts his train of thought as to what motivated him to compose his magnum opus (I actually offer a brief

summary of this account in Chapter 7). Essentially, what it boils down to is that he felt that a book such as this should be written for the Arabic speaking¹ Orthodox public and nobody else seemed to be doing it. (Okay, so call me a plagiarist!). After he tells us this, he writes that he engaged in a bit of soul-searching. Perhaps he shouldn't write the book after all – for “a man such as me is certainly not qualified to write such a book”.

He concludes that he had to dismiss these thoughts as thoughts of indolence. He writes, “I said to myself, if every man who engages in a good work or wishing to teach the right and proper way were to hold his peace until his full desire [to perfect himself] will be fulfilled, not a word would be uttered by anyone after the Prophets...”. In plain English, his message is that if everybody who sets out to do something constructive will say, “Who am I to do this?” not a whole lot will ever get done.

Spiritual guidance I get from spiritual giants such as Rabbi Bachya. Pragmatic guidance can come from some more mundane thinkers, even non-Jewish ones such as Thomas Edison. One of Thomas Edison's most famous quotes is: “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.” The problem with this formula is that, taken at its word, it is only meant to relate to geniuses. What does it say for the rest of us?

I, not being a genius, have to measure this work using a more primitive unit of measure: It is the result of two years of inspiration and more than forty years of perspiration. My hypotheses and conclusions are not the result of two or three years of intensive research but are actually the culmination of perspectives, insights, and experiences that have accumulated over decades.

All of my life, I have been, to myself, an observer and critic of the socio-political and socio-religious conventions of my environs. I have continually analyzed and meditated on the merits of the tenets of Torah Judaism (chareidiism) in relation to secular, non-Jewish, or non-Torah schools of thought and analyzed the observable ramifications of employing Torah precepts versus non-Torah ones in real life situations.²

Virtually all chareidim – especially, but not limited to, those like myself who hail from or circulate within non-chareidi circles – experience dialogues wherein they are called upon to explain or defend chareidi dogma. We all have friends, relatives and acquaintances who are either curious or critical (or both). No doubt, I have encountered my fair share.

¹ Chovot HaLevavot was originally written in Arabic. The Hebrew versions that we have are translations by the author's disciples.

² One notable example was the first of a short series of study sessions that I held when I was a youngster (about ten years old) with a local householder who I

Author's Foreword

One phenomenon is universal – all such acquaintances are uninformed or under informed with regard to basic Torah ideology. The sages tell us that we chareidim are all responsible to be proficient in public relations.³ I have taken this charge very seriously and have resolved to be “up to the task”.

It is argued that most human beings conceal a bit of a Walter Mitty⁴ tendency – to imagine themselves as trailblazers when they are merely trailers. This can certainly apply to me. I have privately thought of myself as qualified to be an advocate or spokesman for the dissemination of chareidi ideals to the secular [minded] world. This is something that an authentic practitioner could manifest by becoming an educator, lecturer, *askan* (activist), journalist or outreach professional. We are blessed with capable models for all of these roles but I am none of them; G-d has not led me down that road. Yet, when the occasion has presented itself in a one-on-one setting, I have been able to debate the issues in a manner which appear to me to have been effective. In the aftermath of these isolated episodes, I have sometimes imagined myself presenting the same arguments to a large-scale audience. You might say that I have frequently imagined myself as a noted personality – a Yechezkel the Prophet – who champions the lost honor of Torah Judaism and who conveys its message to the masses. Whether this self-aggrandizement is realistic or grandiose may never be determined. Perhaps this book is the test.

Yechezkel Hirshman – Jerusalem, 5767

will call Mr. Gibber. Mr. Gibber could most likely be “categorized” as a sincere “modern Orthodox” (I disfavor the term “modern Orthodox” – you will not find it in the main body of this book) working class Jew. He is not noted as an accomplished Talmudic scholar but is, in fact, a brilliant criminal defense attorney. He introduced tractate Bava Metziah to me as the Jewish perspective of property law. We were discussing that, as an attorney, he is familiar with both the Western secular and Judaic legal systems. I asked him how he would rate the modern system against our ancient one. His immediate response was, “Oh, the Talmudic system is far superior, vastly superior.” In my mind the logical extension was that if this worldly individual can assure me that the Talmudic legal system is far superior to the Western system, then the spiritual and philosophical aspects of Talmudic Judaism ought to be vastly superior, as well.

³ Pirkei Avot 2:19; Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 30a

⁴ Walter Mitty is the lead character of a James Thurber short story about a man with grandiose delusions.

One Above and Seven Below

*A Consumer's Guide to Orthodox Judaism from
the Perspective of the Chareidim*