

# Communications

## YAAKOV AND JAY

TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman's artful lament ("Yaakov and Jay: A Tale of Two Worlds," *Tradition*, 26:3, Spring 1992) of the great divide between secular Jews and those who remain within the four cubits of the *beit medrash* should evoke a sense of loss for all who are concerned for the future of contemporary Jewry.

It was a shame, however, that Rabbi Feldman's mail did not bring an invitation to Kobi's bar mitzvah celebration. I forget the paper on which it was printed, but it mentioned that Kobi's celebration would be Sunday morning at his New York yeshiva. Following Rosh Hodesh *davening*, Kobi delivered a *siyyum* (in Hebrew, the language of instruction at his school). It was not very complex, as his parents insisted that he write it himself, rather than have his *rebbe* prepare it for him. Everyone seemed to enjoy the catered breakfast that followed, although the "mitzvah dancing" was a little demanding.

Kobi's yeshiva high school had an exacting program. Talmud, Bible, Jewish History, Jewish Thought, Hebrew Language and Literature—not to mention a series of Advanced Placement courses in math, science, history and English. He wasn't inclined to join the basketball team, but he did participate in the biomedical research club. He also helped prepare the community-wide Yom HaShoa and Yom HaAtzmaut programs sponsored by his yeshiva.

Kobi did well in school, graduating as a Westinghouse Science Competition finalist, a National Merit Scholar, and second place winner in the International Bible Contest. As his senior year came to an end, he was trying to decide between Yeshiva University and the Ivy League college where a small group of dedicated young men and women had managed to maintain a regular Talmud sheur. He had time to make up his mind, though, as he intended to study for two years in Israel before going to college.

The time spent at his Hesder Yeshiva was stimulating. All the Israelis at the school had declined to accept the military exemption available to yeshiva students and instead fused their responsibilities to Hashem and His state by embarking on a five-year program of combined army service and yeshiva study. His morning *havruta* planned to go to medical school after leaving the Hesder yeshiva and his evening *havruta* planned to stay in the yeshiva for many years as he prepared for *semikha* and *dayanut*. Kobi himself earned *semikha* by deferring entry to medical school after graduation from college.

Kobi had a hard time selecting a specialty, as he and his family planned aliya as soon as he completed his fellowship. He traded a very high salary for one not much higher than Yaakov's, but was able to live in the state of the Jews.

He lived close to Yaakov's yeshiva and had a night seder in his *beit medrash*. He had many stimulating conversations with Yaakov and grew close to him and his family. He was puzzled that Yaakov simply dismissed a suggested *shidukh* between Yaakov's son and the daughter of his neighbor, the learned head of a Sephardic yeshiva.

Kobi attended the same medical conference as did Yaakov and Jay. He had shared a residency with Jay, and when he saw an article by him in an important medical journal, he wrote to invite him to the conference. He knew the panel would be stimulating, as for the past month he had been meeting with Yaakov, explaining to him the basics of genetics required to deal with the halakhic issues in reproductive technology that he had been asked to discuss. The discussion went slowly at first,

as Rav Yaakov's formal science education had ended after seventh grade. But he is very bright and caught on quickly.

It's no wonder that invitations were received from Jay's and Yaakov's respective families but not from Kobi's. There are many Jays and Yaakovs, though, unfortunately, not all of them are as accomplished as those skillfully described by Rabbi Feldman. The Kobis are few and far between in our world. But they are worth knowing.

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TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman's essay, "Yaacov and Jay: A Tale of Two Worlds" (Tradition, 26:3, Spring 1992) provides the reader with a powerful and poetic analysis of the polarities and sad lack of communication between Jews today. The author enables us to see how the seemingly inconsequential choices of an individual Jew may eventually render successive generations oblivious to Judaism, or entwined within it.

My question is, why didn't Yaacov grab Jay by the arm and invite him home for a Shabbos meal, instead of allowing him to fly off into the sunset feeling estranged? The author indirectly reminds us that the task and responsibility of bringing Torah home to each Jew can only reside with those who already possess it.

As long as a "Jay" leaves a conference in Jerusalem, a shul in Boro Park or the Upper West Side of Manhattan feeling remote and removed, then how can a "Yaacov" gaze lovingly at stone buildings and bask in their warmth, knowing there are Jews who perceive those stones as cold and unyielding?

Yaacov's reflection is not enough. The Orthodox community must renew its commitment to ensure that it makes each and every Jew feel comfortable enough to approach an Orthodox shul, school, or individual.

Rabbi Feldman's eloquent poetry reminds us that the opportunities to embrace fellow Jews are there, but the moments are precious and fleeting.

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