

One Above and Seven Below

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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 / Mazo Publishers Jerusalem, Israel **One Above and Seven Below** ISBN 978-965-7344-18-7 - Hard cover ISBN 978-965-7344-38-5 - Soft cover Text Copyright © 2007 - Yechezkel Hirshman *Published by:* Mazo Publishers P.O. Box 36084 ~ Jerusalem 91360 Israel Israel: 054-7294-565 USA: 1-815-301-3559 *Website:* www.mazopublishers.com *Email:* cm@mazopublishers.com *Contact The Author* Yechezkel Hirshman 1a7b.author@gmail.com *Cover Photograph by Studio Fisch, Jerusalem Cover Design by Moshe Handel Edited by Zvi H. Starck* All rights reserved. This work is protected by international copyright. No part of this work may be loaded, stored, manipulated, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information, storage and retrieval system without prior written permission from the publisher. Printed in Israel 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 ***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 **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 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 "antichareidim." 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 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. Two copyrighted articles are reproduced in full with permission: *Return of the Rambam* by Elliot Jager, © 2004 by the Jerusalem Post and *Handwriting on the Wall* by Naomi Ragen, © 1998 by Naomi Ragen, first printed in Jerusalem Report Sept. 14, 1998. The author is grateful to the Jerusalem Post and to Ms. Ragen for their permission. All other copyrighted materials are excerpts of larger works and are printed for the exclusive purpose of criticism, comment, or review as allowed under the fair use law - Title 17 Chapter 1 Section 107 of the 1976 US Copyright Code. **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 **Table Of Contents** Acknowledgements

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.....313 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 include 1 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. *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 Michael 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. Many thanks to Rabbi Dovid Solomon for his assistance and expertise in locating Talmudic and Midrashic sources. On a like note, many thanks to Jeff Milgram of Torah Educational Software for providing me with his TES Tanach Plus program. 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 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? 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 *yeshivishe 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 Lithuanianstyle 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 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 singlehandedly 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 speaking 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 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* **The Secret** Legend has it that the renowned Mark Twain had a great grandson who, upon reading his ancestor's writings concerning the Jews, was so greatly inspired, that he ultimately converted to Judaism.¹ Subsequently, he wrote this column in the *Jewish Wayward*:² If the statistics are right, the Hareidim constitute but five percent of the Jewish race. Properly, the Hareidi ought to be hardly heard of; but he is heard of, always has been heard of. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Hellenist the Sadducee and the Karaite rose filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream stuff and passed away; the Maskil and the Yesveksia followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; the Bundists, Reform, and Zionists have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Hareidi saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All Jews are mortal but the Hareidi; all other forces pass but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality? –

Shmuel Langbordt Cleminitz What is the secret of his immortality, indeed? It is said³ that David Ben Gurion made concessions to the chareidim because he fully expected that within fifty years, they would fade to dream stuff and pass away. He didn't know the secret. It is told that when Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman instituted a campaign to build a yeshiva for a thousand-plus students on a dusty desolate hilltop outside Tel Aviv, he was mocked and ridiculed, yet he prevailed. The ~~~~~ 1 I am totally making this up! 2 The original text of these excerpts can be found in the Appendix at the end of this book (page 303) 3 From here on in, I am not making anything up. story goes that one potential benefactor admonished him, "You are dreaming!" He responded, "I am dreaming, but I am not sleeping." That was merely a clever retort but it was not the truth. He was not dreaming. He knew the secret. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai preserved the immortality of the chareidim by petitioning the Roman General Vespasian with a seemingly innocuous request.⁴ He knew the secret. Vespasian granted the request. He did not know the secret. Every year more and more Jews come to identify with the chareidim. They have discovered the secret. A lesser number fall away from the society. They have lost the secret. It is an old secret and it has never been guarded, yet so very few know it. Those who know it are eager to share it. They proclaim it loudly, yet so very few hear it. It seems to have been very carefully hidden, but it is in plain sight, and so few see it. I know the secret. I learned it from my great-great grandfather, Rabbi Shlomo Isaacson. He wrote it down for me. Not only for me, but for all his descendants and students. Almost a thousand years ago. It is time to reveal the chareidi's secret of immortality. Step into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and catch a glimpse of the secret: **"And he shall take from the blood of the bull and he shall sprinkle with his finger on the eastern surface of the covering; and before the covering, he shall sprinkle seven times of the blood in his finger."**⁵ Writes Rabbi Isaacson: **"And before the covering he shall sprinkle seven times"** • Thus we have **one above and seven below.** • ~~~~~ 4 Talmud Bavli Gittin 56b 5 Leviticus 16:14 **A Guide for the Consumer Shimu d'var Hashem hachareidim el d'varo ... Hear the word of G-d, those who are anxious (chareidim) toward his word; your brethren, those who hate you, those who shun you, have said, "It is for my name's sake that G-d finds glory," and we shall see in your rejoicing and they will be ashamed.** (Isaiah 66:5) What should the chareidim hear? What is the word of G-d? Who are the brethren, haters, and shunners? Though we may prefer to assume that the haters and shunners are those who do not observe the commandments, the verse also states "brethren."¹ Malbim explains Brethren: *Brethren in commandments.*² This implies that even Orthodox Jews are the enemies of the chareidi.³ One thing is clear. Chareidim are hated and shunned – by their brethren! Why? Who is a chareidi and who are their brethren?⁴ What distinguishes them? Numerous tomes have been written about the relationship between the secular and the ultra-Orthodox. This book is not meant to be another one. The secular authors of such books devote pages upon pages to analyze the ideological battle within a socio-political framework. As if the chareidi acts the way he does for political reasons and not for religious ones. They either miss or consciously overlook the point. Although these books may not spell it out, the foundation of this struggle is in actuality the great chasm that divides the religious from the non-believer. The debate centers on the existential question: Did G-d create this world and Man? If so, is it not true that there must be a goal and a purpose for this creation, hence, Man is answerable to his Creator for his achievements and failures and is not free to do as he pleases? In short, is G-d the boss or is Man the boss? The religious choose G-d and accept these axioms as truth; the nonbelievers reject them and choose Man.⁵ The war of the secular against the chareidi is a war against [subservience to] G-d.⁶ The secular do not wish to co-exist with the chareidi; they *cannot* co-exist with the chareidi. This is because the chareidi represents and, indeed, personifies the subservience of Man to a higher authority. This concept of subservience is anathema to the secular masses who are driven to define their responsibilities, privileges, and moral ethics as only they see fit. It is impossible to co-exist with such a concept. If G-d exists we must do His bidding. G-d impinges on our sovereignty. Consequently, they must eliminate the chareidi because they must eliminate G-d. This principle is the root of the fierce animosity of the secular toward the chareidi. All else is window dressing. They cry out that the chareidi is to be hated and shunned because he does not serve his country in its army. To be sure, I intend to deal with this issue (and all similar issues) at length. Notwithstanding,

this cry is a smokescreen, for it implies that if tomorrow 40,000 chareidim would report to the recruiting office with their beards and *peyot*, *tzitzit*, *tefillin* bags, and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, love and harmony would descend upon the nation. No more hating and shunning. Such is not the case, for it is not truly the chareidim that they hate and shun, but rather, the beards and *peyot*, *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*. There have arisen a number of spokesmen and defenders of the chareidi (read: *religious* or *Orthodox*) viewpoint in the face of the onslaught of denigration from the non-religious. Some have written books, some are activists and/or journalists who deal with the issues head on, others are outreach professionals and the like, whose comments and rebuttals have infiltrated into the secular press and bookstores. May their work and “those that acknowledge them be blessed.”⁷ I, in a non-professional capacity, have likewise rebutted the denigration on numerous occasions, and I have an observation: as often as not (indeed, more often than not), to my great consternation, the party on the other side of the debate was not a non-observant Jew. The roster of antagonists, it seems, is not confined to the non-believers. The hating and shunning is not limited to the non-observant and uneducated. They are even our brethren. Our brethren in commandments. To what do I attribute this phenomenon? For one thing, we must acknowledge the fact that the G-d who created us and commands us to serve Him instilled in Man a powerful craving for autonomy – to control our own lives and to determine our own morals. This applies to all of mankind. It is every man’s challenge in life to banish this “demon” and nobody is totally successful. Even Noah, who personally heard the word of G-d and spent 120 years preaching morality – i.e., subservience to G-d – to his generation, is labeled as “from the minor believers.”⁸ Consequently, there are numerous Jews who adhere to belief in G-d and observing the commandments who cannot vanquish the serpent of autonomy. But, what is more important, the religious community suffers from an acute affliction, something that I call *consumerist Judaism*. For every commodity there are two parties, *providers* and *consumers*. The provider is responsible for the production of the commodity and for seeing to it that it reaches the market. The consumer demands that the commodity meets specific standards and delegates to the provider the headaches associated with meeting the demands. ~~~~~ 1 I did see one commentary (Abarbanel) that interprets the parties in the verse as non-Jews. “Haters” refers to the sons of Ishmael and “Shunners” refers to the sons of Esau. Both of whom can be called “Brethren” as Esau was a brother to Jacob and Ishmael was a brother to Isaac. In this sense, the “chareidim” can refer to the entire Jewish people. The standard commentators on Isaiah (Rashi, Radak, Malbim, Metzudot, etc.) as well as the Talmud Bava Metzia 33b do not concur with this interpretation. 2 It can be argued that “brethren in commandments” may imply brethren who are commanded, yet do not observe the commandments, i.e., non-observant Jews. It must be noted that modern secularism did not exist in Biblical times. Although not all Jews were learned and righteous, virtually all Jews acknowledged the commandments in general and observed social commandments such as Shabbat, kashrut, and the tithes. 3 See Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 33b ~~~~~ 4 It has been noted that the initials of the consecutive words “*Acheichem, Sonaiechem, M’nadeichem, L’maan*” (Aleph-S’in-Mem-Lamed) when rearranged form the Hebrew word “Sma[o]l” (Left). 5 Despite this, a substantial number of non-observant Jews fastidiously insist that they believe in G-d, thus creating a paradox. In some cases, G-d is redefined as an entity that makes no demands upon Man. In other (most?) cases, people internally acknowledge the reality of G-d and accountability but simply do not have the emotional or intellectual apparatus to deal with it in practice. 6 See Rashi’s commentary on Numbers 10:35 s.v. *Misanecha* ~~~~~ 7 Ruth 2:19 8 Bereishit Raba 32:6 In the realm of religion we are all consumers, primarily for the goods and services which must be *kosher* – kosher food, a kosher *eruv*, a kosher *mikveh*, kosher *tefillin*, *tzitzit*, *mezuzot*, a kosher marriage or divorce. For all these things, the religious consumer exercises his privilege of relaxing and leaving the responsibility of kashrut to the experts. Consequently, the religious Jew loses sight of what is involved in getting the product to market. He or she fails to appreciate the depth of the subject matter which necessitates interminable study, interspersed with myriad intricacies that must be mastered and conflicts that must be resolved, coupled with the compulsory internships that include constant mentorship supervision which are the mandatory prerequisites for being more than a consumer. In some religions there is a marked distinction

between the providers and the consumers, a caste system of sorts. The providers are called *clergy* and the consumers are called *laymen*. Laymen are discouraged from encroaching into the domain of the clergy. Orthodox Judaism does not advocate such a schism between clergy and layman. Every Jew is encouraged to be as knowledgeable about his religion as he can be. We consider it *l'chatchila* (ideal situation or procedure; literally: *initial procedure*) for every Jew to be a provider. Consumerism is deemed *bidiavad* (not ideal but still acceptable; literally: *after the fact*). Many Orthodox Jews are sufficiently content to remain consumers throughout their sojourn on Earth. They do not view this status as *bidiavad*. This stance carries with it numerous hazards, particularly:

Hazard #1 – A lack of faculties to deal with the situation when one suddenly finds oneself in a position where he must be a “provider.” *Hazard #2* – A lack of intellectual capacity to discern between an authentic religious phenomenon and a semblance of one. *Hazard #3* – Vulnerability for allowing concepts (read: propaganda) from non-religious sources to influence one’s position on religious issues. *Hazard #4* – Vulnerability to the erroneous impression that one need not buy all the items in the product line.⁹ *Hazard #5* – A lack of knowledgeable conviction to inspire subsequent generations to remain within the fold. ~~~~~ 9

Some notable examples that I have observed are *Hilchot Yichud* (Laws of Seclusion) and some lesser known or understood kashrut issues such as *Bishulei Nochri* (foods prepared by non-Jews). I wish to bring two case history examples to illustrate the first three of the aforementioned hazards (the fourth is relatively clear – see footnote 9; the fifth one, sadly, needs no example): *Example 1*: I was approximately 20 years old and, having just completed my final year of post high school study at a prominent East Coast yeshiva, I returned home for the summer. That summer, two of my siblings were attending a non-chareidi summer camp in a neighboring state. The coming Sunday would be visiting day and a group of parents from Natwich¹⁰ devised the following plan: Instead of undergoing a long exhausting drive on Sunday morning which would arrive in the later part of the day, the group would drive on Friday to a nearby motor inn and spend Shabbat there. Thereupon, on Sunday morning, the group would continue on to the camp and arrive bright and early. I was urged to come along and I felt compelled to comply despite my apprehension about spending Shabbat out in no-man’s land. I was told that this was not the first year that this plan would be implemented and that the proper apparatus would be in place, i.e., there would be a Torah scroll and the motel would be enclosed by an *eruv* to ensure freedom of movement. The *eruv* was necessary because the motor inn consisted of two buildings. One building housed the motel rooms and the other contained the lobby and the communal areas including the multi-purpose room where we would pray and eat. As each family had brought their own provisions, which they kept in their rooms, transport to the other building would be forbidden without an *eruv*. I came up together with my parents and some siblings. No sooner did we arrive when one of the more learned members of the group approached me – the token chareidi – to discuss how to construct an *eruv*. At that stage I had not yet studied the laws of an *eruv* but, almost coincidentally, I had just finished studying the preliminary laws of the four domains.¹¹ As it turned out, the two buildings were joined by an awning that ~~~~~ 10

Acronym for: **North American Town With Integrated Community of Hebrews** – a pseudonym for my hometown. See Appendix A. ¹¹ To spare the reader from a full halachic discourse on the laws of an *eruv*, I am relocating the discourse to this footnote. An open space that does not contain a substantial volume of human traffic is a *karmelit*. To permit transport in a *karmelit*, the *karmelit* must be transformed to a *reshut hayachid* – a private domain. To do this, the domain must be *mukaf l’dirah* – totally enclosed by solid partitions. When genuine solid partitions are not possible, the Halacha constituted a valid “partition.”¹² As one building was “L” shaped, the campus was well enclosed on 3½ sides; we only needed to contend with one unenclosed stretch (about 30 or 40 feet) from the unjoined edge of one building to the other. This would be an ideal situation for a *tzurat hapetach* (see footnote 11) except that none present seemed to have any beams, nails, string, or tools.¹³ As such, we (myself and two others) stood in the middle of the grounds discussing and weighing our alternatives.¹⁴ Presently, one of the menfolk¹⁵ notices us, strolls over and inquires as to what the conference is about. One of us responded that we are contemplating the most favorable method of constructing an *eruv*. At this, he pointed to the unattached walls and counseled with sagacious advice, “All you gotta do is tie a

string from there to there!" and he strolled away. How simple! Now, why didn't we think of that? Well, for good reason. It wouldn't help. I knew this and, to their credit, the other two gentlemen knew it. But this fellow didn't know it. This is because he is a consumer. And the handicaps of his consumerist status were evident. For hazard #1, there would have been a much slimmer chance of success if he was the one who had to determine how to accomplish the task. As for hazard #2, he understood the concept from what he saw, not from what he studied. When he saw an eruv, he saw a string. He did not see a *tzurat hapetach*. He was not trained to see a *tzurat hapetach*. To him a string is sufficient because it *resembles* an eruv. Evidently, it doesn't have to be an eruv as long as it looks like one. I wonder if he ever bought a diamond. ~~~~~ recognizes certain structural entities as if they are solid partitions. The most common of which is a *tzurat hapetach* – a semblance of a doorway. This is a structure comprising two uprights and a lintel. The lintel can be any material, even a string or wire, but it must conform to the standard design of a doorway in that (a) it must be straight and (b) the lintel (string or wire) must pass directly over the top of the uprights. It is not sufficient to tie a string from one pole or wall to another if it doesn't pass over the top of the pole or wall. A common practice is to take wooden beams as uprights and insert a nail to protrude from the end. Thereupon we can tie a string from nail to nail and this meets the requirements for the lintel of a *tzurat hapetach*. 12 Employing the rule of *pi tikra yored v'sotem*. 13 I haven't the foggiest idea what the organizers of this expedition expected. I had expected that the required halachic instructions and paraphernalia would have been obtained in advance, especially if this venture had been previously undertaken. I had not expected to find myself the (underqualified) halachic authority among people twice my age, but, I suppose that is the point of this whole story. 14 Ultimately, upon my (chareidi) suggestion, we simply picked up a pay phone (no cell phones in those days) and contacted an authority in Natwich. He gave a suggestion using the *lechi* method. I do not remember all the details except that I had a hard time finding and erecting the necessary materials to the extent that I was highly uncertain that the *lechi* met the requirements. That evening it was announced – without my authority – that the organizers with the cooperation of "Rabbi" Hirshman have successfully erected a valid eruv. I did my utmost to avoid any carrying the entire Shabbat. 15 This fellow was a late-thirty or forty-something gentleman, highly intelligent (an attorney), religious from birth, had some sort of yeshiva education, very devoted to and active in community institutions such as the synagogue, the schools, and HaPoel Mizrachi, and is descended from the family of a very illustrious and renowned 18th century sage. What impressed me so much about this is that when he approached the group to inquire the nature of the discussion he did not ask us why there are complications. He did not assume that if three people are conferring on an issue, it follows that there must be some depth to the issue. He had the "solution" in the palm of his hand, and graciously bestowed it upon us (no charge) and promptly went about his business. The consumer does not countenance complications. He does not need to know the details, like they say, "Don't confuse me with the facts." *Example 2:* This is not so much a story but a common occurrence that constantly recurs in typical discussions. This episode concerns my friend, "Morton." Morton grew up with me in Rainbow Beach, went to the same synagogue and school (one grade above me), Bnei Akiva, etc. I used to eat at his house on Shabbat and one Shavuot eve we attempted the "all nighter" at my place (we managed to wake up in time for the regular late minyan). In short, we were boyhood friends carved from the same mountain. From Rainbow Beach we moved to different neighborhoods. I eventually attended an East Coast yeshiva and grew chareidi. He went to the local more modern yeshiva and remained Bnei Akiva. He later went to study in a *hesder* yeshiva in Israel (Kiryat Arba), took immigration status and did *hesder* army service. After release, he returned to Natwich, married, and found his way into the diamond business. He finally made actual *aliya* and now lives a productive religious life in a religious Israeli settlement town. When he was blessed with a financial windfall, he displayed his gratitude to G-d by dedicating a Torah scroll. All in all, a fine Orthodox fellow. Though I had never fully lost contact with him, I renewed a relationship with him as a fellow diamond merchant. We would see each other quite often at the diamond exchange in Ramat Gan. On one such occasion we were having a *hashkafa* (ideology) conversation when he uttered the refrain that I had heard from others, "I don't understand how

the chareidim justify not participating in the army – it's a *chillul Hashem* (desecration of the name of G-d; sacrilege)!" Does this truly constitute a chillul Hashem? Let's check it out. What exactly is a chillul Hashem? To answer that, we consult our sources. The Talmud in Tractate Yuma (86a) defines chillul Hashem. This definition is quoted in Maimonides.¹⁶ Does our situation typify this definition? I don't see how.¹⁷ You don't have to take my word for it. We chareidim have, over the past 60 years (and for always), held the monopoly of erudite scholars fully versed in Talmud, Shulchan Aruch, and Maimonides, some of whom can quote full volumes by heart. Amazingly, none of these scholars have ever ruled that pursuing the lifestyle of a chareidi is a chillul Hashem. Yet, Morton can rule that it is, indeed, a chillul Hashem. Does he know something that they don't? Au contraire, Morton is a consumer. Recall hazard #2 – a consumer has trouble discerning an authentic religious phenomenon from a look-alike. Morton thinks it is a chillul Hashem because it *resembles* a chillul Hashem (just like a string resembles an eruv). That is to a consumer's untrained eye. "Don't confuse me with the facts!" The facts, however, indicate otherwise. And why does Morton think it is a chillul Hashem? Recall hazard #3 – the consumer shapes opinions from non-Judaic (read: secular) sources. Morton perceives a social injustice. Based on conventional thought (what is now called *politically correct*), a social injustice is immoral. Ergo, anything immoral perpetrated by a religious person constitutes a chillul Hashem. I intend to demonstrate that this is not the opinion of the sages of yore. It would be reassuring if the two case history examples that I related above could be considered isolated incidents. If so, there would be no need for a book such as this. Unfortunately, they are all too common. They are actually banal, humdrum incidents and there is nothing dramatic about them, which is precisely the point – they occur all the time. The frightening fact is that my friend Morton is not alone. As I wrote, the viewpoint that he expressed reflects that of countless others of our brethren. Morton has bought diamonds. Lots of them. And he profits from them. He can do that because he can discern an authentic one from a look-alike (which, in fact, barely look alike). When it comes to diamonds, Morton is not content to be a consumer. It wouldn't be profitable. ~~~~~ 16 Maimonides Yad Chazaka, Mada, Hilchot Yesodei Torah 5:10,11 17 I am not going into detail here. I intend to devote a substantial amount of paper and ink to this subject in Book Two. I don't want to reveal the entire plot now and ruin the suspense. Chareidim maintain that it is not profitable to be a consumer for any religious issue. This does not mean that chareidim are not consumers. To some extent, many or even most of us are. It means that the chareidim understand that being a consumer is *bidiavad* and not *l'chatchila*. As Sy Syms always says, "An educated consumer is our best customer." Alas, there is one department where we are not allowed to be consumers even *bidiavad* – being a kosher Jew. And for that I am writing this book. Being a kosher Jew is no less contingent on the opinions of our sages and their writings than are the technical religious requirements of our foods, our religious articles and our rituals. But somehow, a great number of our brethren choose to overlook the philosophies of the sages in favor of the opinions of the Western world, of the secular and non-Jewish thinkers. These perspectives become so ingrained in the mind of the consumer that he loses sight of the fact that a more fundamentally "Jewish" ideology may actually exist. There are those brethren that have gone so far to reach a total state of denial. The pilot chapter of this book explains how this is possible (and, in some cases, inevitable). The rules and regulations of being a kosher Jew are available for the asking, but the confirmed consumer does not ask – for he is content in his knowledge. "Everything I ever needed to know I learned in kindergarten." The typical consumer maintains that the most accurate source of information is by consensus of their fellow consumers. As such, someone who opposes the overwhelming consensus and presents a differing outlook based on more authoritative sources is swimming against the current and is consequentially branded as an outsider. And outsiders are hated and shunned. I contend that many of our brethren would not automatically assume the role of haters and shunners were they not to fall prey to the hazards of consumerism. This is the conclusion that I have arrived at as the result of carrying out these copious futile debates. And so, the dedicated chareidi, among his many duties, must take on the task of combating consumerism. This is not a simple task. As discussions, these debates usually occur during inadequate time frames. People operate under an assumption that a chareidi can explain his entire philosophy in ten minutes. This is never the case. Invariably, time does not

suffice to adequately cover an issue especially if and when it requires a substantial backdrop. In order to understand the issues, it is necessary to understand the philosophies. Most often a conversation begins, escalates into a full-blown debate, and is sustained until the bus reaches the first one's stop. "Of course, we must continue this sometime – do lunch." But lunch never happens. This book is meant to replace the dialog that there is never enough time to carry out. But, it goes further. These debates are not confined to table talk. They also exist in the media. To be sure, the ostensive secular media, particularly in Israel, is inundated with news items, stories, features, documentaries, profiles, etc., ad nauseam, virtually none of it flattering, all of which serves one positive purpose – it confirms the prophesy of Isaiah that the chareidim are hated and shunned. Of course, chareidim do have their own journals and periodicals (and an occasional contraband radio station) to serve their constituents. These two forums exist to disseminate their "for" or "against" perspectives. I am not concerned with either of these. What interests me is the "officially neutral" non-sectarian secular media whose main objective is simply to deliver the news and to sell papers to the widest possible audience – the general public. To that end, they allocate at least some token op-ed space to eloquent representatives of any rational faction of their readership. As concerns the English-speaking Israeli public, the front runner for this distinction is the Jerusalem Post.¹⁸ I believe that the Jerusalem Post holds a unique position in that it is (in my opinion) the only daily paper in English or Hebrew (I do not speak Russian) that endeavors to cater to readers from all shades of the spectrum.¹⁹ Some people call it everybody's paper and some call it nobody's paper. Though it is by no means chareidifriendly, by the same token, it does not champion an anti-chareidi vendetta. I confess to reading the Jerusalem Post regularly over the past seven years for the following reasons: I am a bit of a news junkie so I have to read something. It is very important to me to see news as it is presented to the general public.²⁰ ~~~~~ 18 I am obviously focusing on the printed media and, as the succeeding lines reveal, the Jerusalem Post is my main artery for secular news and, consequently, the primary source of media-based material for the thesis of this book. It goes without saying that this is not the sole source nor am I precluding other media forums (though I do not have nor watch television). 19 I am not overlooking the fact that the Hebrew speaking population is substantially more polarized than the English speakers and such an endeavor is all but doomed from the outset. 20 I likewise have one car radio station set on the BBC ("Brutish" Broadcasting Corporation). Despite the fact that the biased reporting is truly repulsive I do believe that there is some value to knowing how news is fed to the world at large. Besides that, for the most part, it's the only English speaking game in The true Jewish reason – it has always been free.²¹ Besides the news, I am interested in the opinion columns and the letters because they deliver a very accurate reflection of the feelings of the aforementioned "general public." Understandably, I have always taken a special interest in any news item, op-ed piece, or letter that displays an attitude regarding Orthodoxy and chareidim in particular. I don't suppose that I am the only person who has made the following observation: in about 98% of the cases, unless the piece is authored by a chareidi, the attitude displayed is not favorable.²² It is not that chareidim are above criticism. There is always room for improvement. Indeed, "constructive" criticism is mandated by the Torah, subject to a host of stipulations as to the acceptable stature and earnestness of the critic,²³ the esteem and conscientiousness of the recipient and, equally important, the venue of the criticism. One common rule of criticism is: focus on the problem, not on the entity that bears the problem (this means: don't tell the guy that he's a schlemiel, tell him he's a super guy who just happens to consistently mess things up). Regarding what I see in the media, I do not consider this criticism to be constructive because: It does not meet the aforementioned criteria for constructive criticism. A "general public" newspaper is not the proper venue for constructive criticism as it is technically being delivered to the wrong address. It is not intended as *constructive* criticism. ~~~~~ town. I do try to listen to chareidi stations but they are always suddenly disappearing. I wonder why! 21 When I first immigrated to Israel the AACI endowed all new immigrants with a free 6 month subscription which was automatically extended another 6 months after I refused to sign up. That's how I got on to it. Since then, it has been available at the local gas station for a fill-up, second hand from friends and neighbors and, more recently, on the internet (to be discussed later).

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