I asked once the principal of a yeshivah high school why the standard curriculum does not include the study of Jewish thought, such as excerpts from The Kuzari, Derech Ha’Eishet or Michtav Me’Eliyahu. He answered me quite candidly, saying that the study of such works is likely to provoke students to raise significant questions that the educator is not prepared to answer satisfactorily. Better, he contended, not to raise questions in students’ minds than to raise questions that will remain unanswered.

While we may be disappointed with the principal’s response, we cannot deny the reality of his concern. A standard yeshivah education generally does not equip a teacher with familiarity with Jewish thought. More often, however, one will read the essays and emerge more educated in a broad array of issues, from “Zionism: A Torah Perspective” and “Kahalim” to “Organ Transplants” and “Ecoological Purity.” A vast gamut of issues is presented by Dr. Levi in this work: issues concerning the land of Israel and the State; the relationship between modernity and Jewish culture; and family and sexuality; the interface of Torah, medicine and science and the role of Agudath Israel and kabbalah in Judaism, to mention a few.

It will be evident to any reader that Dr. Levi believes that the perspectives he presents are the authentic views of Chazal, the Rishonim and the Acharonim. To be sure, he admits that there are other perspectives that he explains—respectfully and politely—why they do not reflect mainstream Jewish thought throughout the ages. Not surprisingly, Dr. Levi’s views are influenced by his exposure to the Hirschian philosophy of Torah im Derech Eretz, and his experience in the Lithuanian yeshivah world and by his scientific training. Hereafter, for example, are his views on Zionism:

What is Zionism? Some define Zionism as a love of Zion—an in sight quite a reasonable definition. It does not, however, fit the normal use of the word. If love of Zion made one a Zionist, the extreme anti-Zionist Neturei Karta, who loved Zion to the point that they refused to leave Jerusalem during the War of Independence, would be one of the greatest Zionists of all. Even, however, would classify them as such. It follows that this is not the accepted use of the word (9).

On the topic of nationalism, he notes:

Nationalism, in general, is evil because it turns the nation into an end in itself. Judaism, however, is different; it has a higher purpose—to bring redemption to the world and actually rid it of nationalism. The nationalism called for by the Zohar—Tanhuma nationalism—is secondary. While the Tanhuma confirms the importance of Jewish nationalism, it values it not for its own sake, but because of Israel’s exalted mission (7).

Secular Zionists, on the other hand, in a resolution adopted at the Tenth World Zionist Congress (Switzerland, 1911), divorced themselves from Torah, proclaiming, “Zionism has nothing to do with religion.” It is, therefore, a nationalism that is not rooted in Torah. What, then, is Religious Zionism? Is the term an oxymoron? The author concludes:

What about religious Zionism? There are many views as to what it signifies. Based on the simple meaning of the words, it is Zionism . . . that favors religion and sees in it an important supplement to Zionism. It follows that the religious Zionist will wish to strengthen religion in the nation, because he sees this as being of benefit, even great benefit, to the nation. Even so, as long as he is a Zionist according to the meaning of the term as expounded above, he will view the nation as the supreme value (10).

After noting the incompatibility of this stance with Torah-true Judaism, Dr. Levi writes:

In the religious Zionist camp there are also many who view the Torah, rather than the nation, as the supreme value. When they see themselves as Zionists, they use the term Zionism to mean something entirely different from the accepted meaning. Such usage turns the term into an obstruction to effective communication; beyond this, it may compromise the clarity of thought of those who use it (11).

The above will not sit well with those who identify with Religious Zionism nor with those who reject involvement in advancing the State. But the book’s greatest strength is that it irritates the reader by challenging his preconceived positions. Dr. Levi did not make these assertions in a declarative, bombastic fashion. In the course of the three essays of such, he formulates his perspective on the Land, State and society of Israel, he carefully musters evidence, like the good scientist of the same. He formulates his perspective on the Land, State and society of Israel from his extensive familiarity with clients such as Rabbi Yitzchak Ha’Kohen Kook, Yisrael Chaim Sonnenfeld, Moshe Avigdor Amiel, Eliahu Meir Bloch as well as Acha Ha’am to prove his theses. While a reader may disagree with Dr. Levi, he may have to do a lot of thinking in order to effectively do so.

Similarly, Dr. Levi’s treatment of secular studies will provoke both those who feel that such subjects should be afforded less significance as well as those who feel that they should be accorded...
Thus there education and that complements (see note 2), on New Jersey, 1997); see also (ibid.).

of Rabbis Ovadiah Yosef and with Dr. Levi's is no reliable source of knowledge in this who does not believe that when a per-

Unlike the earlier authorities, the Ba'al Shem Tov promoted the idea that greater weight. He writes:

me that the greatest revolution that Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet once told that the thought of the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rambam and the presents sources that speak for them-

ators on the part of God his book, Rabbi Yisraeli does not address, but it is indeed sometimes necessary to deviate from the Talmud demands in order to save the Torah itself. . . . This was indeed sometimes important after the terible Holocaust that visited European Jews. Rabbi Lichtenstein presents his approach

Dr. Levi presents information that is so novel a reader may doubt its accuracy.

when they do, this is referred to as hash-

awaiting me that the greatest revolution that Rabbi Yisraeli does not address, but it is indeed sometimes necessary to deviate from the Talmud demands in order to save the Torah itself. . . . This was indeed sometimes important after the terible Holocaust that visited European Jews. Rabbi Lichtenstein presents his approach as a viable option to the normative schools of thought (“Torah-only” and, presumably, Torah im Derech Eretz). Dr. Levi, on the other hand, presents his approach as the normative school of thought. He therefore presents the phenomena of mass adhere-

ence to “Torah-only” as a deviation that requires explanation. 7. In this book, Dr. Levi, for the most part, does not deal with Chassidism or Chassidic philosophy as distinct from general Jewish thought.

Notes
1. In 1908, there was a fascinating debate between two great halachic authorities, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Halevi and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook on incorporating the study of humanities into the curricula of a yeshiva that the latter intended to found in Jaffa. Rabbi Halevi was strongly opposed to any adul-

teration of traditional Jewish education, whereas Rabbi Kook believed that "great focus essential. See Igeret Yitzchak Halevi, Halevi 80s and Igeret HaShevat 1:146, 149.

2. Including Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli's Pesukim beMachashevet Yisrael (Pardes Canada, 1975) and Rabbi Avrohom Kaplan's Handout on the difference in the methods used to

on the other hand it is negative, or at least reserved, toward study of the humanities based on non-Torah sources. As we have seen, this distinction is based on the difference in the methods used to formulate principles in these disciplines: whereas man was given senses to help him reveal the laws of nature and to test his findings, he has the course of sand, which follows the thought of the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rambam and the presents sources that speak for them-

The dignity of man is not the ex clusive

by Abraham J. Twerski

Mr. Kornreich has been an Anglo-Jewish journalist for thirty-five years. He is a past editor of Young Israel’s journal and past managing editor of Jewish Life and Jewish Action. He is president of Y.K. Services, Ltd., in New York.

While Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski’s Light at the End of the Tunnel is writ-

en in a form of a novella (too long to be a short story and too short to be a true novel), it is accurately described as a true novel, it is accurately described

Light at the End of the Tunnel

Reviewed by Yaakov Kornreich

Shaar Press

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205 pages
on the book jacket as an “inspirational story” (with the emphasis on inspiration). That should come as no surprise to readers of Rabbi Twerski’s previous books. Those books, which seem to form their own genre of popular Anglo-Jewish literature, relate Torah insights to daily living in an easy-to-read format.

This book is a contemporary morality tale, based on the fictional story of Alan Silverman, a fifty-four-year-old workaholic head of a successful law firm. An irreligious Jew who belongs to an Orthodox synagogue, Silverman is jarred into re-examining his mostly empty spiritual life when he learns that he is suffering from non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

To his surprise, Silverman finds new meaning in the words of his rabbi’s High Holiday sermons and accepts the rabbi’s invitation to visit his sukkah. Silverman then signs up to attend the rabbi’s class in Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto’s Mesillat Yesharim. This allows Rabbi Twerski to devote much of the first half of the book to illuminating Rabbi Luzzatto’s approach to the fundamentals of Jewish belief.

Rabbi Twerski also provides Silverman with a strong Jewish family background, helping the lawyer relate the rabbi’s lessons to his personal experiences and early memories. Silverman soon realizes that his career-centered life, devoted to the pursuit of material wealth and professional status, has been empty of meaning.

Troubled by questions of faith, Silverman is then referred by his rabbi to a Chasidic master who explains the kabbalistic teachings about life-after-death and reincarnation. Once again, Rabbi Twerski demonstrates his unique ability to relate sophisticated Torah insights to the problems of contemporary living in clear, simple language.

At the beginning of the story, Silverman is in denial and deeply resents his medical condition. “The light at the end of the tunnel” that he so desperately seeks is a cure that would allow him to continue living his life as before. But his spiritual search leads him to an appreciation of the light of Torah, which teaches him how to accept his disease and how to get much more out of the time he has left. Eventually, Silverman sees his illness as a wake-up call and realizes that the true purpose of his life is to allow his neshamah to achieve spiritual perfection through mitzvot and gemilat chasadim. This spiritual reawakening also provides him with newfound joy and meaning in his personal relationships. During the two-and-a-half years following his diagnosis, as Silverman pursues newly discovered spiritual goals, he and his wife grow closer to one another through sharing acts of chessed.

This is not a novel in the conventional sense.

and playing a more active role in their community’s religious life. He also learns to savor the approaching Jewish milestones in the lives of his children and grandchildren. As the story ends, Silverman’s medical prognosis is uncertain, but he has accepted his fate and learned to appreciate every remaining moment of his life.

While I found the book to be enjoyable and effective in conveying its inspirational message, a caveat for the prospective reader is in order. This is not a novel in the conventional sense. Rabbi Twerski provides only enough detail to satisfy the demands of his inspirational message which, rather than the story, is paramount. Eventually, we do get to know Silverman fairly well, but the other characters remain sketchy. The wealth of descriptive detail, which one would expect from a work of fiction of this length, is missing. Moreover, this book is not for readers looking for light entertainment. However, those who have enjoyed Rabbi Twerski’s earlier inspirational books will not be disappointed.