

Inside View



What Did Rabbi Lichtenstein REALLY Say...

By Yehuda Schwartz



A "prominent lawyer" sought to minimize the potential damage which would have been wrought upon the halachic community by Rabbi Lichtenstein's tacit overture towards the legitimization of the Conservative and Reform clergy in Israel.

All he wanted to do was to seek a resolution to the problem of "gerus," the "prominent attorney" charged, and everyone jumped on him in the press and media.

"Everything would be done (conversions — Ed.) by an Orthodox Beit Din," he said. "And only thereafter, somehow, there would be an involvement with the others."

Well, either the "prominent lawyer" knows nothing of the details of this problem in Israel, or conveniently he seeks to degrade the Chief Rabbinate itself, who in fact officially disassociated itself from any such "involvement."

Just for the record, the

thodox rabbis, he said, Orthodoxy should 'perhaps pay a certain price in the form of legitimization and recognition.'

"Religious Affairs Minister Hammer, head of the National Religious Party, pursued a similar line of thought, calling for 'isolating the extremists' — those who advocate recognizing the children of Jewish fathers as Jews or who condone intermarriage — 'by continuing to talk to the

no answer; so they wound a scarf round his neck and tortured him.

"When R. Abbahu came and found him in that state he said to them, 'Why do you torture him?' Said they, 'Have you not told us that he is a great man? He cannot explain to us the meaning of this verse!'

"Said he, 'I may have told you that he was learned in Tannaitic teaching; did I tell you he was learned in

Orthodoxy should "perhaps pay a certain price in the form of legitimization and recognition."

others' in American Jewry."

Despite all the "defense attorneys" for the Har Etzion Rosh Yeshiva, alleged denials of such statements, or charges that the media was misquoting what was actually said in public (not

Scripture?"

"How is it then that you know it?" they contended. 'We,' he replied, 'who are frequently with you, set ourselves the task of studying it thoroughly, but those of Babylon do not study it as carefully.'

"Said they, 'Will you then

"Thereupon the prophet came and reassured him: 'Say ye not a confederacy, concerning all of whom this people do say, A confederacy' (Isaiah VIII:12). It is a confederacy of the wicked, and as such cannot be counted for the purpose of a decision."

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There seem to be those who consider Rabbi Lichtenstein "a great man" as well (judging from some of the letters I have received on this series).

But it seems he does not know the explanation of the Gemara in Sanhedrin 26a, judging from his willingness to "pay a certain price in the form of legitimization and recognition" of non-Orthodox rabbis.

Tell us, Rabbi Lichtenstein, how do you explain the Gemara just quoted? What does it mean when it says "Keshar reshaim einu min haminyan?" — a confederacy of wicked men may not be counted...

The great love for a



Demjanjuk Trail

The Demjanjuk trial is now taking place in Jerusalem. Until now I did not devote any article to this trial, because I am certain that it is being followed by everyone. However, since I look upon my column as a diary of what happens in Israel, this subject should not be passed by without comments.

Listening to the trial hearings, we are continuously shocked. We thought we had heard everything, only to be surprised with more unbelievable tales.

This trial undoubtedly means a lot for many reasons. First of all, it means a lot about Demjanjuk himself. It is difficult to comprehend how a person with the features of a human being could be able to do what he is charged with having done.

It is also of utmost importance that our youth listen and read about the Holocaust. They must know what we lived through. For too many in the young generation, all the stories we have told them appear as legends. Witnessing this trial and listening to that which Ivan the Terrible has done, enables them to visualize it more clearly.

The trial is also important for the non-Jewish world. There are all too many who are ready to forget about this sordid chapter in the world's history. If, already in our generation, while there are still individuals who saw with their own eyes how thousands upon thousands of people were gassed, burnt, and cremated, and still there are people prepared to deny the Holocaust, what will happen when the witnesses are gone? There are already people who write that all this never happened. In only a few generations there will be many who would like to say that the Holocaust was only a legend.

This trial is therefore very important for the whole

Just for the record, the "involvement" that the "prominent lawyer" sought to dismiss so eagerly, eventually would have permitted the Conservative and Reform rabbis to sign on the conversion, according to insiders. This would constitute "approval" of their "judicial" status as "rabbis." And such a possibility was always unacceptable to Torah people and "dayanim" in Israel, and shall always remain so.

Rabbi Lichtenstein knows it.

The lawyers knows it.

All honest Torah people know it.

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But just to lay to rest once and for all what Rabbi Lichtenstein reportedly did or did not say, I will quote from the February report by the *Jerusalem Post* foreign service, printed in a recent edition of the *Jewish Week*:

"In a related development, a suggestion that Orthodox Jews might have to recognize the institutions of Conservative and Reform Jewry was made by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, head of Har Etzion Yeshiva, the largest 'hesder' yeshiva in Israel.

"Lichtenstein was speaking at a National Religious Party conference dealing with the issue of 'Who is a Jew.'

"To solve the problem of thousands being annually converted by non-Or-

ally said in public (not meant!) — there still has not been a definitive DENIAL of these statements, and a Torah position by Rav Soloveitchik's son-in-law against the alliance of Torah people with those who do not believe in "Torah min Hashamayim."

There is a Gemara in Avoda Zara 4a as follows:

"R. Abbahu commended R. Safra to the 'minim' as a learned man, and he was thus exempted by them from paying taxes for thirteen years."

The Soncino explains that the term "minim" was used generally as a designation for the early (Jewish) Christians. From many places in the Talmud it appears that to taunt rabbis, particularly about difficult Biblical passages, was a favorite practice of the "minim."

His exemption was given as honorarium for his work either (a) as teacher to the "minim," or (b) as assistant collector of imperial revenues, or (c) simply as a scholar.

The Gemara continues:

"One day, on coming across him, they said to him: 'It is written: 'You only have I known or loved from all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities' (Amos III,2); if one is in anger does one vent it on one's friend?' But he was silent and could give them

"Said they, 'Will you then tell us the meaning?' 'I will explain it by a parable,' he replied.

"To what may it be compared? To a man who is the creditor of two persons, one of them a friend, the other an enemy; of his friend he will accept payment little by little, whereas of his enemy he will exact payment in one sum! So does G-d punish Israel only by intermittent visitations."

Even though R. Yochanan reproached Resh Lakish for his intolerance, R. Yochanan did not retract.

The Gemara continues:

"What is the reference to 'a confederacy of wicked men?' It is as follows:

"Shebna expounded the law before thirteen great men, whereas Hezekiah expounded it only before eleven.

"When Sennacherib came and besieged Jerusalem, Shebna wrote a note, which he shot on an arrow into the enemy's camp, declaring: Shebna and his followers are willing to conclude peace; Hezekiah and his followers are not. Thus it is written, 'For lo, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string' (Ps. XI:2).

"So Hezekiah was afraid, and said: 'Perhaps, heaven forbid, the mind of the Holy One, blessed be He, is with the majority; and since they wish to surrender, we must do likewise!'

The great love for a Rebbe demands that the student quote accurately and not take out of context some of his Rebbe's words to suit given political situations.

When the "prominent lawyer" assumed that Rabbi Lichtenstein "only wanted to seek a modus vivendi with Conservative Judaism" he was going against his own Rav who said, "There are not always solutions to agonizing problems."

The Rav, in connection with the "mamzerim" case in Israel many years ago, said specifically, "Many problems are insoluble; you can't help it." It would seem that this is the case with the conversion issue as well, and the lawyer should know and respect the halacha as defined by HIS Rav!

The Rav continued:

"We are opposed to 'shinuiim,' changes in the halacha... We cannot historize, psychologize halacha, or rationalize halacha, because this is something foreign, something extraneous..."

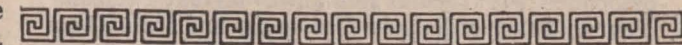
"When it comes to Torah, which is from the Kadosh Baruch Hu, all the instruments of psychology and history and utilitarian morality are being used to undermine the very authority of Torah... Instead of complaining against the inflexibility of halacha, let us explore its endless spaces and enjoy

the Holocaust was only a legend.

This trial is therefore very important for the whole world that they dare not forget or deny. Our young generations must see the truth made clear to them, when we bring an example of one of the terrible devils who committed those dastardly acts. The world should know and remember — especially those who want to say that the Holocaust never happened — by seeing the truth before their very own eyes. By recalling the past, we attempt to insure that this should not happen again, G-d forbid..

Therefore, one cannot underestimate the importance of this historical trial. It will serve as a reminder to those that wish to forget. It will serve as an historical lesson for those that know not yet about the full tragedies our people suffered. It will confront forcibly those that wish to deny and falsify history. It is only proper that the trial take place while there are still living accusers.

Our duty is not to forget this terrible Holocaust.



Talmud Torah, and to find in Talmud Torah a redemptive, cathartic and inspiring reality."

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How can Rabbi Lichtenstein even suggest the inclusion of those "rabbis"

"dayan" in Israel.

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It is fitting to end with a sentence from Pirkei Avot. Chazal spoke of other things beside "peace," as for example, to know when to keep quiet.

Rabbi Lichtenstein! Where is your PRINTED denial of what is being quoted in your name?

who are halachically categorized as "apikorsim" in a Beit Din, even if their "din" on the conversion was according to halacha. This would be equivalent to one who is "tovel" with a "shoretz" in his hand. Such a person is called a "rasha" and cannot be included as a

Shimon, the son of R. Gamliel says: "All my days I have been raised among 'talmidei chachamim' and I found nothing better for oneself than silence ... one who talks excessively brings on sin."

How appropos!