



RABBI GIDEON WEITZMAN

Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

The Late Rabbi Henkin zt”l

America in the early 20th century was not considered an appropriate destination for those leaving Europe for a better religious life. In fact, many feared that the Jews who moved there would immediately reject religious observance. The saying was that around Ellis Island the water was thick with sefarim, religious books, that the owners had discarded before reaching the Goldener Medina.

This changed radically in the middle and latter half of the 20th century, and was due to a number of individuals who established yeshivot and religious schools. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein had a huge influence over Torah learning and religious life that is still felt today. But before Reb Moshe, Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin was the outstanding voice and authority of Orthodox Judaism.

Reb Moshe and Rabbi Henkin had great mutual respect, despite their disagreeing on a number of crucial halachic points. The former did not accept any marriage as valid except for Orthodox ones, the latter felt that Reform marriages had a halachic significance and if the couple were to separate they would need a form of Get, a religious divorce.

Rabbi Henkin permitted the construction of

an Eruv in Manhattan, whereas Rabbi Feinstein opposed this. Rabbi Henkin did not permit making kiddush before blowing the Shofar, but Reb Moshe was more lenient.

Between these two Torah giants, and several others, Torah was established in America, until the point that Rabbi Sacks writes, in one of his earlier books, that his pilgrimage as a student to discover Torah took him to America. There he met with Rabbi Soloveitchik and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Rabbi Sacks notes that were he to take the same journey today he would have come to Israel which has clearly become the center of the Torah world.

Rabbi Henkin's most famous grandson was Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin who came on Aliyah together with his wife, Chana. They chose to settle in Beit Shean where Rabbi Henkin was the rabbi of the entire region.

Rabbi Henkin published several volumes of his responsa, aptly named Bnei Banim, grandchildren, in deference to his illustrious grandfather. A few years after the tragic murder of their son and daughter in law by terrorists, Rabbi Henkin died at a relatively young age.

Recently, Rabbanit Chana Henkin, the founder and visionary for Nishmat college for women's study, has been translating Bnei Banim to English. I was honored to have been sent one of the teshuvot and would like to discuss it in the next few weeks. ■

Maayan Levy

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