

## East Meets West

*Ish Yehudi: The Life and the Legacy of a Torah Giant, Rav Joseph Tzvi Carlebach*

by Rav Shlomo Carlebach (Shearith Joseph Publications; Brooklyn, NY, 2008)

reviewed by Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer

**[Editor's note: The following essay, a book review of a recently-released Torah biography, serves a dual purpose.]**

**Many of us are accustomed to viewing the history of Eastern European Jewry between the two world wars through the prism of the records of its great yeshivos and Torah giants. There is a paucity of Torah literature dealing with the state of the *Hamon Am*, the great masses that made up Jewish society beyond the walls of the yeshivos. The *Haskalah* movement, ignorance, assimilation and grave economic deprivation all had made deep impressions upon Lithuanian and Polish Jewry. The confluence of these tides of change resulted in mass abandonment of the already struggling *Cheder* form of education. Formal Torah education for girls and young women did not exist.**

**This essay extracts from the book under review – *Ish Yehudi: The Life and the Legacy of a Torah Giant, Rav Joseph Tzvi Carlebach*, by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach – details of the manner in which the educational principles and methodologies of the great German school of *Torah im Derech Eretz* were being employed in the Lithuanian *Yavneh* and the Polish *Bais Yaakov* school networks to combat the problems of the day. As is the case with most of our essays, this review has itself been reviewed by *Gedolei Torah* and *Roshei Yeshivah*, who confirmed the picture drawn by Rabbi Carlebach in his new work, and who encouraged us to put his “new” historical insights before our readership.]**

*The enormous upheaval in the political and social structure of Jewish society throughout the land [of Lithuania], in the aftermath of the war, threatened the stability and loyalty of Jewish youth. Under those circumstances, these Torah leaders felt an urgent need to introduce a similar educational program, on a broad scale, by reorganizing existing schools and establishing new ones, where subjects in Derech Eretz would be taught alongside Limuday Kodesh.*

*(Ish Yehudi, p. 74)*

Legend has it that the *Brisker Rav* said that the last true German *Gadol b'Torah* was the *Aruch LaNer* (Rabbi Yaakov Yokel Ettlinger, 1798-1871). Perhaps. Nevertheless, there arose in late nineteenth century Germany (and even more so in the early twentieth century) a cadre of *Rabbonim* and *Talmidei Chachamim* whose “superior scholarship in many disciplines, coupled with extraordinary personal qualities, convinced multitudes of doubters that those who advocated reform and

abandonment of the Torah way of life were charlatans, exploiting a wave of discontent among the masses to promote their own interests” (*Ish Yehudi*, p. 17). The *sheleymus* of these German leaders more than made up for any possible shortcoming in Torah scholarship.

Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach (1883-1942) was the last, and one of the greatest, of the illustrious line of such leaders that began with the *Aruch LaNer*, Chacham Bernays of Hamburg, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch of Frankfurt, Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer of Berlin and the Wuertzburger *Rav*, Rabbi S. B. Bamberger. Both literally and figuratively, he was the captain who went down with the ship of German Jewry, when the illustrious history of *Galus Ashkenaz* was brought to its culmination.<sup>1</sup>

It is beyond the scope of a brief review essay to capture the greatness of the multi-faceted Rabbi Dr. Joseph Tzvi Carlebach. In *Ish Yehudi*, the author, his son, the renowned *Mashgiach* Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach *shlita* (building on an earlier work by his uncle, Rabbi Naphtali Carlebach), does so in a comprehensive and gripping manner. Anyone interested in the history of Orthodoxy in the first half of the twentieth century (a group that should include the entire readership of *The Jewish Observer!*); anyone interested in the *Torah im Derech Eretz* approach to *Avodas Hashem*; and anyone seeking role models to emulate, should read this biography. In this essay, we would like to highlight one of the major contributions that *Ish Yehudi* makes to historical awareness: Its highlighting of an insufficiently explored aspect of early twentieth century Jewish history: The impact of German Jews and their *derech* on their Polish and Lithuanian brethren.

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is not the focus of this review, one of the many contributions that *Ish Yehudi* makes to our literature is its description of the true role of a *Rav* in times of *extremis*. To take the metaphor further, as captain of his ship Rabbi Carlebach helped save as many passengers as possible – while declining opportunities to save himself. He remained with those passengers that he could not save, looking out for them and serving as a source of strength for them until the very end.

That the encounter of West and East made an impact in the reverse, is amply documented. For example, upon returning from a tour of the East, Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach wrote: “The secret is... the learning of Torah. Young and old, rich and poor, everyone is learning, learning constantly, totally immersed, living a breathing the Torah, be it the written or oral one. Just as their [Eastern European] Yiddish language is interwoven and intermingled with idioms and phrases from the Talmud, so is their very life pulsating and throbbing with the echo of sacred writ. Everyone is learning and drinking from the sources, not from the distilled and bottled excerpts and essences which we spoon-feed our youth, but from the fountainhead of Jewish wisdom, which is always fresh and wide open, rich in spiritual nutrients. For us, Hebrew is a foreign tongue, as is German to a Frenchman, laboriously acquired, fragments diligently patched together. To them, in contrast, it is the mother tongue, every simpleton's talk, as natural to children's babble as to mature people's talk. To them the Torah is not a lesson in religion but the very wisdom of life, the living spirit which penetrates every fiber of existence, and defines the structure of the soul, in which one thinks and forms concepts, which fills heart and mind, is guide and support for the whole spectrum of life, giving creative inspiration, and anchoring the soul” (*Ish Yehudi* pp. 117-118). German Jewish leaders quickly realized that unlike the case in their own country, the entire culture – even the secularist and Yiddishist elements of that culture – of Eastern Europe was grounded in the texts and lore of Rabbinic literature.

Indeed, German Jewry could and did learn much from its encounter with the great Torah centers and the great Torah scholars of Poland and Lithuania. Accordingly, Western spiritual luminaries such as Dr. Nathan Birnbaum penned such lines as this: “To achieve growth [*aliyah*] in *Da'as Hashem* [Knowledge of God] there float before my eyes [the following ideas]:... 2. Festive gatherings of *Charedim*, for spiritual purposes (such as the introduction of the Eastern European *Shalosh Seudos*,

etc.).”<sup>2</sup> The constant flow of German Jewish youth to the great yeshivos of Telshe, Slabodka and Mir during the '20's and '30's was also a manifestation of the influence of the East. In *Ish Yehudi*, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach traces the flow of influence in the opposite direction.

During World War I, the Germans overran Poland and a large part of the Baltic states, including Lithuania. The German High Command was interested in establishing positive ties to the substantial Jewish populations of these areas. To this end, they appointed Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach's older brother, Rabbi Dr. Emanuel Carlebach, the Rabbi of Cologne, as the Chief Chaplain of all the Jewish soldiers in the Polish sector. Their brother-in-law, Rabbi Dr. Leopold Rosenak, the Rabbi of Bremen, was appointed the chaplain for the Baltic sector. The brothers-in-law established close ties with the great *Rabbonim* and *Rebbes* of the occupied areas, and they accomplished much for the Jews in their respective sectors. For example: “He [ Rabbi Emanuel Carlebach] laid the groundwork for organizing the Jews into a political power bloc,<sup>3</sup> established an Orthodox newspaper in modern format, and, together with Rabbi Pinchos Kohn,<sup>4</sup> persuaded the Gerrer Rebbbe... to join the Agudas Yisroel...” (*Ish Yehudi*, p. 70).

One of the issues that greatly concerned the German occupiers was the haphazard Eastern European Jewish educational system **beyond the rarified realm of the yeshiva world**. Following the lead of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's founding of the Frankfurt *Realschule* in 1853, German Jewry had established systematic elementary and secondary educational institutions – both for boys and for

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2 *L'Ohr HaNetzach*, p. 439.

3 As a result, in the years between the World Wars, several Orthodox Jews served as officials of the short-lived Eastern European democracies. For example, my great uncle, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Hodakov, was secretary-general of the Latvian Ministry of Jewish Education. At the time a staunch member of *Zeirei Agudas Yisroel*, for a time he also headed the *Torah im Derech Eretz* Gymnasium in Riga, the capital of Latvia – one the many schools that emulated the Carlebach Gymnasium in Kovno (see below).

4 Rabbi Dr. Pinchos Kohn was the Rabbi of Ansbach, and one of the founder of the Agudah.

girls – that incorporated his principles of *Torah im Derech Eretz*, combining Torah and secular studies.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Jews of Poland and the Baltic states, following centuries old customs, possessed only the informal *cheder* model for the elementary years, and no secondary schools at all. A relatively small number of outstanding pupils, **those destined for *Gadlus b'Torah***, went on to study in yeshivos.

So long as the Eastern European economy remained rural and backward, the absence of high schools did not present the Jews with a problem. To become a craftsman, a young man would enter an apprenticeship, while to join the vast unskilled labor force and become a wagon driver or water carrier, not even that was necessary. To the extent that it was feasible, such young men would often comprise groups who would study in a local *shul* or *kloyz* when the time was available.<sup>6</sup>

By the time of the first World War, however, even Eastern Europe was becoming increasingly metropolitan. The jobs created by the emerging cosmopolitan economy required far more education and greater skills. The problem of properly educating the young men who were not cut out for the rigors of the elite yeshivos of the day had become acute.

If the problem of boys' education was acute, the problem of girls' education (i.e., the lack thereof) was dire. Hitherto, young women in Eastern Europe had very little access to Jewish educational opportunities. Whatever existed was informal and home based.

Yet the world was changing. As general society opened more opportunities for the intellectual

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5 For a detailed description of the program (and the history) of the *Realschule* see *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Artscroll/Mesorah, 1996), Chap. 19. The *Realschule's* program was the model for all subsequent *Torah im Derech Eretz* schools, and remains the model for most contemporary yeshiva elementary and many yeshiva high schools.

6 These groups frequently went by the name of *Tiferes Bachurim*. To go off on a slight tangent, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *shlita's* *shteibel* is called *Tiferes Bachurim*, as one of his early “positions” was as a *maggid shiur* for one such group.

development of young women, Jewish girls were exposed to secular thought and culture. Many families elected to send their daughters to non-Jewish schools rather than to no school at all. As a result, many girls and young women were in danger of losing their religious identity and assimilating.<sup>7</sup>

To deal with a problem of this magnitude, Rabbi Rosenak brought his brother in law Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach to the capital of Lithuania, Kovno (Kaunas). With the approval of *Gedolei Torah*, Rabbi Carlebach founded a “gymnasium” (the European term for an academic high school), based on the German *Torah im Derech Eretz*, model. Rabbi Carlebach brought in highly qualified teachers from Germany to cooperate in the venture. Among them was Dr. Leo Deutschlander, who later became famous for his enormous contribution to the Bais Yaakov school system.

The school became known popularly as the Carlebach Gymnasium. By its third year of existence it enrolled one thousand boys and girls in separate schools. Its remarkable accomplishments made a deep impression on the *Gedolim* in Lithuania, particularly on the *Rosh HaYeshivah* of the great yeshiva of Telshe, Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch. Rabbi Bloch invited Dr. Deutschlander, in collaboration with Rabbi Carlebach, to found the network of similar schools that came to be known as “Yavneh.”<sup>8</sup> The network included separate teachers' seminaries for men and women in Kovno, gymnasiums in Kovno, Telshe and Ponovezh, and approximately one hundred elementary schools – all of which brought the *chinuch* methodology of the West to the East. Yavneh was intertwined with *Zeirei Agudas Yisroel*, and it was mostly the idealistic Agudist young men and women who served as the leaders and teachers of the Yavneh system.

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7 Of course, it was largely in order to address the same issue in Poland that the Bais Yaakov movement was founded – almost concurrently – by Sarah Schnirer.

8 Several of my great-aunts attended Yavneh in Telshe, and my great-aunt's Mrs. Leah Holtzberg's father in law, Dr. Raphael Halevi Holtzberg (Etzion) was the director of the Yavneh teachers' seminary in Telshe. From my extensive conversations with my great aunt, I can attest to the extraordinary breadth, depth and scope of a Yavneh education.

The Yavneh system was the main Orthodox school system in the short-lived independent republic of Lithuania.<sup>9</sup> In the milieu created by this modern state, the old-fashioned *cheder* became extinct.<sup>10</sup> It is with a sense of *deja vu* that one peruses the pages of the Telzer periodical *HaNe'eman* that served as the journal of record for both the *Olam HaYeshivos* (and the closely allied Agudah) and the Yavneh system in the '20's and '30's. The issues that they faced in the *chinuch* of the younger generation in Lithuania read as if they were coming from the minutes of the latest Torah U'Mesorah convention!<sup>11</sup> A report in *HaNe'eman* from a summer teacher training institute held in Polangen in 1930 that Rabbi Carlebach attended,<sup>12</sup> and at which he delivered hundreds of hours of lectures on topics ranging from child psychology to the age of the universe, reads as if it is the record of a seminar that just took place this past summer.

Leafing through the extraordinarily impressive pages of *HaNe'eman* also impresses upon one the extent to which the Lithuanian yeshiva world embraced elements of the German Jewish *derech*. For one, Dr. Nathan Birnbaum was among the most frequent contributors to its pages. Moreover, *HaNe'eman's* columns on news from the Jewish world included detailed reports on the affairs of

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9 **The author of this essay verified this phenomenon in a telephone conversation with Rebbitzin Chaya Ausband *shetichyeh*, the Dean of the Yavneh seminary in Cleveland, Ohio.**

10 Heard from Reb Zalman Alpert *loy"t* in the name of Rabbi Tuvia Lasdun *shlita*. Reb Zalman also related to me in the name of his own rebbe, Rabbi Shimon Romm, that the vibrant young Orthodoxy that flourished in independent Lithuania between the wars was known as "Kovno Orthodoxy." (A similar Orthodoxy existed in Latvia.) It was anchored by the yeshivos of Slabodka, Telshe, Kelm and Ponovezh **and the *Gedolei Torah* that the yeshivos produced, but among the larger community outside the yeshivos it** was dominated by *Ba'alei Battim* and movements such as the Agudah. The Rav of Kovno, Rabbi Avrohom Dovber Kahana-Shapira was recognized as the leader of this Lithuanian Orthodoxy. By contrast, in the part of Lithuania (Minsk, Slutzk, Bobruisk and east) that was annexed by the USSR religion was banned. Only Chabad managed to maintain limited, underground Jewish education. The part of Lithuania (Vilna, Lomza, Bialystok, Grodno and Brisk) that was annexed by Poland was also not as affected by the *Torah im Derech Eretz* influence. By the outbreak of the second world war, with the exception of the *talmidim* of the great yeshivos (and a relatively nascent network of schools founded by *talmidim* of Novardok), the youth of this region had been lost to Orthodoxy. Only the Chassidim of the region – Chabad, Slonim and Karlin-Stolin – fared somewhat better. Indicative of this trend is the fact that in 1936, Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach took a position as *rosh yeshivah* in the Karliner yeshiva in Luninets.

11 Even to the extent of discussion as to how to ensure that boys came to school wearing *tzitzis*!

12 See also the extensive discussion of this institute in *Ish Yehudi*.

German Jews. More significantly, the journal published many essays that were literary – often fictional – which explored historical and philosophical issues. This was much in the genre of the great German Jewish writers, such as Rabbi Marcus Lehman. Finally, when they saw such works as inspirational and elevating, the editors of *HaNe'eman* did not hesitate to publish (in translation, of course) poetry by Goethe and other non-Jewish authors.

Thus, *Torah im Derech Eretz's* influence upon Eastern Europe continued to grow even after Rabbi Carlebach finally returned to Germany to succeed his father as the Rav in Lubeck,. The Carlebach family continued to be personally represented in Lithuania by his nephew, Rabbi Dr. David (son of Rabbi Emanuel) Carlebach, who served as principal of the Yavneh boys' school in Telshe. The influence of the German methodology of education and of German educators on the Bais Yaakov movement – most notably through the offices of the Agudah's “*Keren HaTorah*,” directed by Dr. Deutschlander from Vienna – has been duly chronicled in numerous works.<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Carlebach himself returned to Eastern Europe under the auspices of *Keren HaTorah* to help found and assist more *Torah im Derech Eretz* schools, and, as we have seen, to train teachers.

It is fascinating to contemplate the “What if?” What if the Holocaust had not occurred and turned everything to naught? Would the influence of *Torah im Derech Eretz* continued to grow and **further influence the broader context** of Eastern European Orthodoxy?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, *Rebbitzen Grunfeld* (Artscroll/Mesorah, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Another one of the many contributions that *Ish Yehudi* makes to our literature that lies beyond the scope of this review, yet deserves more exposure, is the openness of *Gedolim* in *Eretz Yisroel* such as Rabbi Shmuel Salant and Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld to inviting the standard bearers of *Torah im Derech Eretz* to replant their unique *derech* in *Eretz Yisroel*. The leaders of the *Yishuv HaYashan* evidently were of the opinion that *Torah im Derech Eretz* was “the way to go” for the *Yishuv HaChadash*.

Thus, *Ish Yehudi* informs us, “...the most prominent Torah scholars and sages of Jerusalem represented by their Chief Rabbi, Reb Shmuel Salant expressed their deep appreciation to Joseph for his blessed work on behalf of Jerusalem's youth.” (*Ish Yehudi* p. 49). What makes this endorsement so remarkable is that the “blessed work” that Rabbi Carlebach had been performing had been instruction in mathematics and natural sciences in the Laemel School (*ibid.*, p. 41) – a school that had been placed by the “most prominent Torah scholars and sages of Jerusalem” (led by Reb

It is, of course, impossible to answer this question. But *Ish Yehudi* puts one fact beyond question: That the *Gedolei Torah* and the *Olam HaTorah* of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and beyond held the institutions and personalities that emerged from the world of *Torah im Derech Eretz* in the highest esteem. It therefore behooves us all to perceive the *shleymus* and *tzidkus* of the person who engendered that esteem to the highest extent: Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach, the individual who in so many ways reminds us of the original *Ish Yehudi*: גדול ליהודים ורצוי לרב אֶתְיוּ דְרֵשׁ טוֹב לְעִמּוֹ וְדַבֵּר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל זֶרְעוֹ.

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Shmuel's father in law, Rabbi Yosef Zundel of Salant, and doubtlessly including Reb Shmuel himself) in *cherem* – on account of its secular studies curriculum – upon its founding in 1856 (see *Guardian of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld*, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Sonnenfeld, Mesorah, 1983, pp. 280-284)! It would seem that by the time Rabbi Carlebach arrived on the scene in 1905, many of the *Gedolei Yerushalayim* has come to the realization that *Torah im Derech Eretz* was the way to educate the *Yishuv HaChadash*.

There is evidence elsewhere that this was not an isolated episode but a trend. For example: “After meeting with Jerusalem rabbis [Rabbi] Chajim [sic] Sonnenfeld and [Rabbi Yonasan Binyamin] Horovicz, [Moreinu Yaakov] Rosenheim arranged in 1909 to dispatch Rabbi [Dr.] Moses Auerbach to found an Orthodox school for the children of the newly-founded Jewish colonies in Petach Tikva... Approval by the Jerusalem authorities was already necessary because non-religious subjects were to be taught for up to two hours per day in the new educational facility, an innovation that was associated with the 'German' TIDE principle.” (*From Frankfurt to Jerusalem: Isaac Breuer and the History of the Secession Dispute in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*, Matthias Morgenstern, Brill, 2000, pp. 46-47; see, in somewhat more detail, *Guardian of Jerusalem*, pp. 316-318). TIDE was also perceived as a bulwark against secular Zionism. Thus: “...the *Gaon* Reb Chaim Sonnenfeld *zt”l* knew what was transpiring, and he sat and waited, with yearning eyes and a pounding heart: 'When will my brothers arrive from the diaspora? When will the disciples of Reb Shimshon Raphael Hirsch *zt”l* come? For we need them.’” (*Moriah* [Hebrew], Dr. Isaac Breuer, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1982, p. 217).

[As if to confirm this direction, we find that in the late 1920's and early 1930's, the Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Society's board members were Dayan Eliezer Posen, Chairman (Frankfurt), *Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld* (Jerusalem), Rabbi Yeshaya Fuerst (Vienna), Rabbi Yitzchak Hirschowitz (Wirbalis, Lithuania), *Rabbi Yonasan Horovicz* (Jerusalem), Rabbi Pinchas Kohn (Vienna-Ansbach), Dr. Isaac Breuer (Frankfurt-Jerusalem), and Dr. Salomon Ehrmann (Frankfurt-Zurich). The goal of the Society was to disseminate the works of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Post-World War II, the Society's main goal became the translation of these works into English. The translated works became the core of the Feldheim publishing house.]