

JEWISH GEOGRAPHY

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RABBI EMANUEL FELDMAN

Somehow there was no parade of protest when the targets were four Jews in Israel

LIFE!

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TEN QUESTIONS

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Mishpacha

JEWISH WEEKLY

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HERE COMES

THE BOSS'S SON

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walking on hot coals

reliving primal trauma

Is this the Torah way to emotional health?

THE HIDDEN DYNAMICS OF LARGE GROUP AWARENESS TRAINING

an investigative report

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IT'S

Today's popular large group therapy seminars claim to help us heal from our egocentric thoughts and entrenched defenses that skew the way we relate to the people and situations around us. Is it just more new age mumbo jumbo infiltrating our communities, or should every spiritually conscious Torah Jew on a quest for emotional well-being and personal growth run to sign up?

WHAT YOU

IT'S 11 A.M. FRIDAY MORNING. ABOUT 30 MEN — MOSTLY CHAREIDIM OF VARIOUS AGES AND BACKGROUNDS — ARE SEATED IN A CIRCLE IN ABSOLUTE SILENCE at a retreat outside of Jerusalem. Over half of them are here for the first time, and the anticipation runs deep. The facilitator explains the ground rules for the next three days: no random talking, no watches, and a time limit on Erev Shabbos phone calls. This will help them focus on the experience ahead.

Outside, the midday sun glistens; the scene is rural and serene. Inside, the men are instructed to rise, blindfold themselves and dance to the loud undulating rhythms of electronic music that begins reverberating throughout the room, in order to help them release their inhibitions. Some get into the spirit, waving their hands and dancing freely to its metallic beat. Others barely move their legs.

Minutes later, the music stops and the blindfolds are removed. Then the men follow their designated coaches into private groups, where the real work takes place. By Sunday evening, friends have told them, they will have arrived at an understanding of themselves like nothing they've ever experienced. Some are excited, others are wary — but everyone is prepared to do whatever

it takes to make that happen.


This is "Call of the Shofar," one of several experiential workshops — known as large-group awareness training (LGAT) — frequented by Orthodox Jews in their quest for emotional wellbeing and personal growth. All these programs are based on the theory that as we become aware of the mechanics of how we unconsciously think and act, the more healthily we'll be able to relate to the people and situations around us. After going through an LGAT seminar, participants come to realize that lack of wellbeing is not contingent on circumstances, but on the way we think about and interpret those circumstances, and that this thinking is the result of old, often unhealthy or destructive patterns we've carried around from childhood.

Some of the groups that *frum* Jews are flocking to these days to improve their quality of life include Call of the Shofar, created by Simcha and Ruth Frischling; "The Possible You" (TPY), created by Rabbi Yom Tov Glaser; "Innate Health" (IH), run by the Twerski Wellness Institute in Milwaukee; Tikun IH's program in London, England (all of the aforementioned are geared toward Orthodox Jews); and the more controversial "Landmark Education," a nondenominational movement. Can a weekend retreat where you start out blindfolded really help you have a better life?

Mention LGATs, and some declare their fierce opposition to what they see as new age mumbo jumbo infiltrating our communities, while others passionately defend their value and benefit. What, in fact, are these programs? Are they therapies run by unlicensed amateurs, or are they *mussar vaads*, a kind of peer counseling? What do they purport to offer?

WHAT CONCERNS DO THEY RAISE?
WHAT VOIDS DO THEY FILL WITHIN
OUR COMMUNITY, AND WHY DO SO
MANY REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF THEIR
FOUNDATIONS AND EFFICACY?

THINK



Can You Change? Large group awareness training grew out of the 1970s human potential movement, which maintained that people could tap into untold inner potential and change society for the better. The idea is to retrieve basic but often overlooked wisdom through an intense, emotionally focused group seminar; much of this training mirrors the principles of cognitive and behavioral therapies, stressing the idea that people can transform their lives and level of happiness by making small switches in the way they view external circumstances. In a typical LGAT, an in-house trained facilitator coaches the participants, who feed off each other's stories and learn to recognize their own issues when they see them in others.

How do breakthroughs happen? "LGATs help people dig deeply into themselves to answer their own questions, getting to that 'aha moment,' that 'wow, I feel my life is changing moment,'" says Mordechai Weinberger, a social worker, hypnotherapist, and radio personality, who lives in Lakewood and practices in Brooklyn.

The seminars harnesses the power of large group dynamics and, combined with conventional psychological modalities, can bring about very powerful changes in people's lives. "When you have a person crying from release, when you have

somebody finally verbalize how he felt trapped and couldn't manage his employees because he felt hurt and now he feels a release and is more assertive, the feelings generated by the person having that release will now affect you when you have your own session. His honesty gives you permission to go deeper and express deeper emotions," Weinberger explains. These results rarely happen through one-on-one therapy; the larger the group, the more intense the experience, as participants are prodded to move beyond their comfort zones and natural defenses.

Still, LGATs are controversial for many reasons, not least of which is that they draw directly or indirectly from non-Torah sources. Erhard Seminars Training (EST), Landmark's predecessor, is derived from humanist psychology and Eastern mystical traditions, while Innate Health — promoted by Rav Michel Twerski, the Hornosteipler Rebbe of Milwaukee, as a Torah-oriented self-help program for heightened G-d-consciousness — was originally inspired by the "Three Principles of Consciousness," revealed in an epiphany to a Scottish welder named Sydney Banks and further developed by psychologist George Pransky and others. The Possible You uses some Landmark tools, while Shofar draws its tools from Landmark and other programs.

Their developers insist, however, that their



**"THERE IS AN
EMOTIONAL POWER
TO THE EXPERIENCE,
BUT THERE ARE THESE
CONVERSATIONS THAT
SAY OPENLY THAT
THERE IS NO RIGHT,
NO WRONG"**

—*Rabbi Henry Harris*



Jewish-channeled seminars have taken the wisdom of other programs but are grounded in Torah. The Possible You has the backing of the Belzer Rebbe, Rav Yitzchak Berkovits, and Rav Nachum Chaimowitz of the Hidabrook board of *rabbanim*. Innate Health's *posek* is Rav Michel's son Rav Benzion Twerski. As for Shofar, due to halachic and *hashkafah* issues raised by the Crown Heights Lubavitch community, Shofar's rabbinic supporters in the US have since withdrawn their public support and refuse to discuss the matter on record. No such concerns were raised in Israel, however, where Shofar remains active.

Update Your Life At a Landmark Forum recently, a 40-ish, professionally dressed gentleman confesses to the crowd, "I must have it my way all the time. I always want to be perfect."

"Something happened to you in the past and from that point on you decided that you can never make a mistake again. You now feel you must always be in control," the coach answers. "You constructed a story for yourself when you were young and since then you haven't updated your life."

A lady in her 30s then grabs the mike and admits that she's always feeling someone else can do her job better than she can.

"You tell yourself that so many times, it becomes real to you," he answers and then introduces one of Landmark's primary "distinctions," or concepts. None of us are born afraid or anxious. These are learned responses, whether for the good or the bad, to traumas we experienced when we were very young. But what worked for us when we were five years old doesn't necessarily serve us well today. The coach then goes on to explain a second distinction: how we live in two

It's Not What You Think

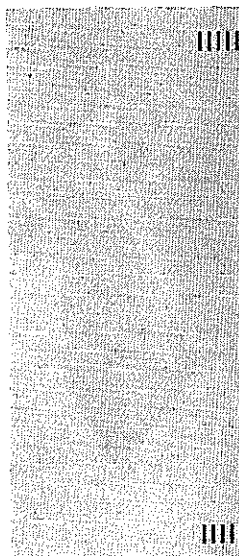
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domains, the domain of what happened and the domain of our interpretation of what happened — the meaning we apply to the event. For instance, he says, the boss is texting during an employee's presentation. Those are the facts. An insecure employee might interpret this to mean that the boss isn't interested in what he is saying and, furthermore, may conclude that he will not be promoted.

"What happened is real. Your boss texted, but the story that you created for yourself is not real. It's these dramas that we create that often kill our relationships and prevent us from fulfilling our potential," he explains. "Landmark provides the language to distinguish what it is you don't know you don't know — your blind spots — and, by doing that, it liberates you from those patterns that control your lives."

Up to now the process sounds intriguing, even liberating. No wonder so many Jews who want to improve their emotional equilibrium, spiritual connection, or just general quality of life are drawn to it. But one of the program's theologically problematic underlying principles is that life itself is "empty and meaningless"; Landmark is about inventing and fulfilling possibilities that are created out of nothing. Only after meanings based on the past are cleared out can new, empowering stories or meanings be inscribed onto our psychic slates, as if onto an artist's blank canvas. (An Orthodox Jew, for example, can put Torah into his set of "meanings.")

The Landmark Education Corporation has provided training to thousands of high-profile companies such as Reebok, Mercedes-Benz USA, and even the US Navy. Landmark Forums are



WHEN YOU
ARE A VICTIM
OF YOUR STORY
YOU CAN
DECLARING
THEIR REALITY
BE CONTINGENT
ON YOUR
REASONING
AND LOGIC



available in over 100 countries worldwide, including Israel. It's not targeted to Orthodox Jews, although Baltimore's Jews for Judaism executive director Ruth Guggenheim says that she knows of chareidi men in the Maryland area and in Lakewood who enrolled to gain the confidence needed to enter the job market. Landmark takes place over a Shabbos, is nondenominational and co-ed; some *rabbanim* will encourage participation for an individual in crisis or for a couple whose marriage is in jeopardy, but there are no across-the-board endorsements for the *frum* community.

To critics of Landmark's culture of moral relativism, proponents say that the program doesn't even deal with right and wrong; rather, its focus is about workability. A person, regardless of his personal beliefs, comes in with all kinds of issues, whether it's a sibling he isn't talking to, or a community he doesn't get along with. Landmark encourages him to go back to his sibling and fix up their relationship; it encourages him to return to his community and contribute toward making it better.

Aish HaTorah's New York educational director Rabbi Henry Harris attended a Landmark seminar and admits that it was a powerful experience for him, generating insight and enabling him to cut through personal blockages. Still, as an Orthodox Jew, he found it problematic. "There is an emotional power to the experience that can be very good, but it can also be unsettling. You are being influenced by the power of these experiences and seeing people undergo dramatic changes. And, simultaneously, there are these conversations that will say openly that there is no right, no wrong — there is just what you invent as a possibility that calls you powerfully into action."

And Landmark, he says, leaves no room for personal humility or for the acknowledgment that we cannot control the outcome of things, which remains in G-d's Hands. "Landmark tells you that you can generate the results that you want in your life. You can talk about service, but at the end of the day, it's very much about you generating things."

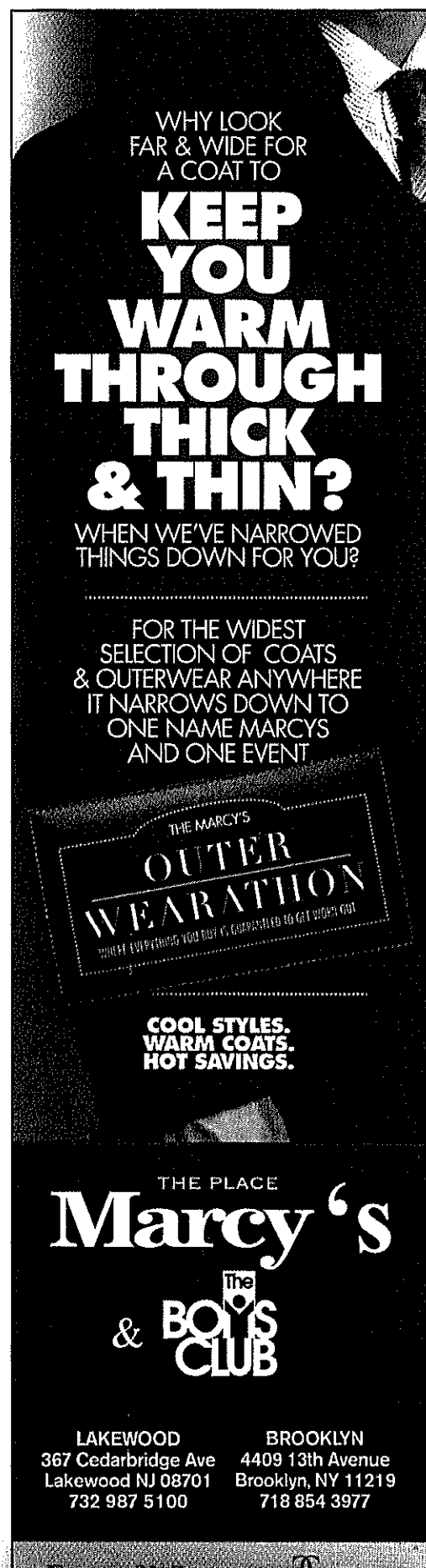
One reason people are attracted to LGATs is the promise of quick and recognizable results. Both Landmark and Shofar maintain that

breakthroughs can happen over a weekend. The Possible You seminar takes place over a five-day, four-hour-a-day stretch. Innate Health offers three-day seminars, one-on-one sessions with an IH practitioner, as well as small group interactive seminars and teleconferences; its large group seminars are not technically LGATs, because therapy doesn't take place in the seminars, but they do fall within the realm of transpersonal psychology.

These programs don't come cheap. Landmark, Shofar, and TPY charge in the range of \$600 for the retreat. A three-day IH seminar runs about \$300 and one-on-one sessions with an IH practitioner can cost over \$100 an hour, depending on the practitioner's experience. Practitioners are trained in-house, although some may also be licensed therapists.

Something Was Missing One fundamental difference between Landmark and Rabbi Yom Tov Glaser's The Possible You is bringing G-d into the picture. "Landmark sets it up that whatever one declares to be meaningful in a meaningless world is perfect. In TPY, when you create a clearing for yourself, a victory over your story, you are going to be declaring something that will be contingent on Hashem's direction," Rabbi Glaser explains. "Now that you've deconstructed all your preconceptions and you've seen what you aren't, you can now see who you really are, which is the real you — the infinite possibility of Hashem within you."

California-born Rabbi Glaser, 46, was an international surfing champion in his youth, and is still tempted by Ashdod's ten-foot waves. Seeing him dressed in chassidic garb, one might not recognize the extent of the spiritual journey that took him from a well-to-do, secular lifestyle in L.A. to the doors of Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem in 1991. Yet despite marrying, raising a family, and becoming an accomplished lecturer and musician, he felt something was missing from his life. That's when he began developing TPY; his *rosh yeshivah* Rav Noach Weinberg ztz"l helped form its syllabus and sources. Today, he learns with the Hornosteipler Rebbe of Yerushalayim, Rav



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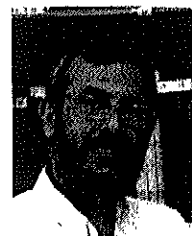
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"THIS IS THE REAL WORK, GETTING THE PARTICIPANT OUT OF THE STORY AND INTO TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS OWN LIFE"

—Rabbi Eliyahu Dordek



Shalom Shachna Friedman, and, as a disciple of spiritual therapist Efim Svirsky, works with people to break down their own blockages to reach heightened G-dly awareness. The Possible You, which offers separate men's and women's classes, is open to Jews from all walks of life and ages. Rabbi Glaser remains its only facilitator. He doesn't offer follow-up classes, but does encourage graduates to keep in touch with him and with each other on-line or in person, at no cost, to review the tools they've learned and to apply them to their lives.

One TPY graduate, Daphna Zarabavell, 39, said she "learned self-worth, confidence, how not to let other people's views bother me. I learned how to be the best person, mother, daughter, and friend I can be." After completing the program, she felt empowered enough to institute a series of learning seminars for girls, something she wouldn't have had the confidence to do previously.

Rabbi Glaser tells of how one brilliant hedge fund owner reported that as a result of taking the TPY course, his company's profits multiplied. During the program he came to realize that he was subconsciously hiring executives who were not that bright so that he could feel smarter than them. Once he became aware of this, he replaced all his employees with the most qualified people in the field.

But the Jewish world is small and people tend to know each other. How can reputations be

protected when complex relationship issues are brought up in a group setting?

"Regarding family members, the *psak* we received was that because of the nature of the environment and context of group seminars, everybody knows that when a participant speaks about his father, for example, it is only the participant's perspective and not who the father really is," Rabbi Glaser explains. "When there are people in the room for whom this could be particularly sensitive, those people leave for a few minutes. Also, people who know each other don't sit next to each other, and there's very little public sharing during the seminar. Most sharing takes place in *chavrusa*. And the seminar does not allow one to mention a *rav* or community personality who is identifiable."

The Call of the Shofar, founded in Baltimore in 2001 by Simcha and Ruth Frischling, takes its goal from a Pesach analogy: participants chew through their *maror* to attain personal liberation. In his own spiritual journey toward Yiddishkeit, Frischling — who is on the path to Torah observance, a fact that has prevented full rabbinic endorsement of his spirituality based program — has used his extensive experience with other LGAT programs, primarily Landmark and the Mankind Project, to integrate those tools into Shofar. Some *poskim* have expressed wariness over the secular influences of the program, but Rabbi Glaser notes the spiritual

risk-reward issue ("If you really need it, it's okay even if it's not 100 percent kosher"). But, insists Frischling, Shofar only uses tools and methods that are effective, safe, and kosher, and everything taught at Shofar, he says, is grounded in Torah *hashkafah*. A training manual outlining Shofar's *hashkafos* and spiritual guidelines is available upon request.

While Shofar has faced its share of controversy in the US, in Israel Rabbi Eliyahu Dordek is one of the program's promoters. Rabbi Dordek, a senior *maggid shiur* and former educational administrator in the yeshivah of Mitzpeh Yericho, is a longtime *talmid* of *rosh yeshivah* Rav Shabtai Sabato and the creator of the Mishna Sdura Project for learning Mishnayos. As a senior staff member at Shofar in Israel, he claims to have witnessed hundreds of men who were emotionally transformed. Today over 500 men have gone through the program, including medical doctors, psychologists, and therapists. Several hundred women also attended a woman's version of Shofar that was facilitated by Ruth Frischling.

When Rabbi Dordek signed up for his first workshop seven years ago, he says he was finally able to confront feelings he never knew he had. "I was coming there as the head of a respected institution with hundreds of students and staff and yet, inside of myself I felt very small and scared, and I didn't understand why."

At the seminar, he watched men discuss their innermost insecurities openly in front of strangers, some for the first time in their lives. Confronting his own buried feelings, and watching these strangers do the same, not only brought him personal insight, it sensitized him to his students' struggles. It also inspired him to study psychology. Rabbi Dordek is currently finishing a master's degree in integrative psychotherapy and practices at the Jerusalem clinic of Dr. Mordechai Lipo. He recently initiated workshops to help fathers and sons better communicate with one another using some of Shofar's tools.

As for the criticism that such intense group dynamics can lead to slandering of relatives or others, Rabbi Dordek says the issue of *lashon hara* is brought up in the very first session, in

an extremely serious way. "We stress from the beginning that we are only allowed to share our own experiences — how we felt, how we were affected, but not the other person's story. It's enough to say something like, 'I have this difficult situation at work with someone,' or 'Someone in my family is angry at me, and I'm scared I will lose that person's love.'"

"People are encouraged to skim the details and get back to the feelings and self-judgments around the circumstances. Someone might be walking around with this heavy burden — 'My dad was never there for me, he was always too busy' — but we always stress that this is the way you remember it, but surely your parents did the best they possibly could with the tools they had. This is the real work, getting the participant out of the story and into taking responsibility for his own life. In fact, nearly all of the people I know who've done the work came out with a higher regard for their parents, more acceptance, and a desire to reach out to them and to other people in their lives."

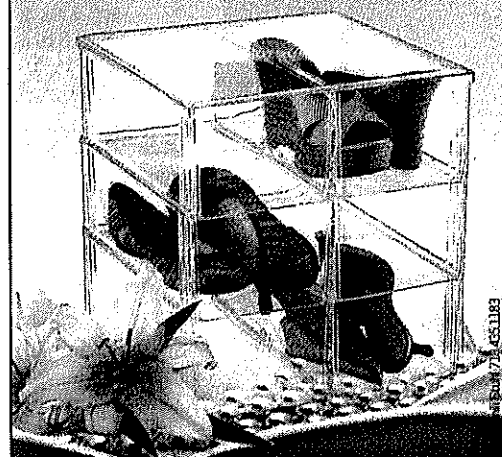
Rabbi Dordek says that respecting the privacy of other participants is a prerequisite for participation. Even mentioning that so-and-so was at the workshop is prohibited. And because much of the personal work is done in pairs or small groups, people who know each other are placed in different groups.

Don't Think Too Much The main hall of Aish HaTorah on Manhattan's Upper West Side is slowly filling up. Men and women, chassidim and others in their 20s and 30s arrive from Williamsburg, Boro Park, Passaic, Crown Heights, and the local neighborhood. The spectrum of participants is not surprising: Innate Health has taken root in many communities, such as Milwaukee, Chicago, Baltimore, Monsey, New Square, Five Towns, and Brooklyn.

Many of these participants, I soon discover, have been studying the Three Principles for a while. In fact, they are here at the suggestion of their IH practitioner. Others, like me, are experiencing it for the first time.

The theory behind Innate Health is that once we fully grasp that what we are feeling or experiencing at any given moment is a result

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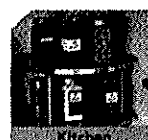
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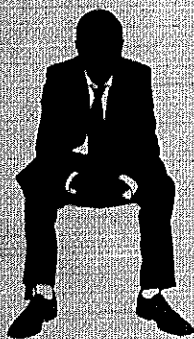


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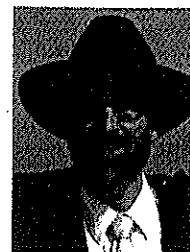
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It's Not What You Think



"IT'S A MUSSAR VAAD. WHERE TODAY DO YOU GET A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO EXAMINE THEMSELVES SO HONESTLY? THEY DISCOVER THAT BEING INSECURE AND AFRAID DOESN'T MAKE THEM ANY LESS MANLY"

—Shlomo Zalman Jessel



of our thinking, we will automatically operate our lives differently.

Seminar facilitator Dr. Mark Howard is a soft-spoken, effable gentleman with a pleasant sense of humor. A licensed psychologist, he has been teaching the principles for 31 years, and as a non-Jew, he seems to connect very easily with this predominantly chareidi audience. He tells us that throughout the seminar he will be pointing us toward this understanding of the Three Principles — whether through personal stories or exercises designed to make us conscious of our thought processes. By the end of the seminar, we'll either have achieved that breakthrough of awareness, or we won't. And, if we don't — not to worry, for some it comes later than for others. But the minute we have it, we will never forget it.

I'm amazed by how many participants have "gotten it" and how comfortable they are sharing personal victories publicly. One woman admits that since integrating the principles, her relationship with her teenager turned around. Instead of taking her daughter's constant questions as personal attacks as she had been doing because of her insecure relationship with her own mother, she realized that this was simply her daughter's way of reaching out and communicating. A chassid from across the *mehitza* adds that he's no longer afraid to walk into a subway and no longer feels at odds with non-Jewish travelers; he now sees

himself, together with them, as an integral part of the greater universe. Dr. Howard applauds these realizations, and then begins to explain the principles to those of us who haven't, as yet, "gotten it."

Innate Health maintains that everything we experience is manifested through what they call the Three Principles — mind, thought, and consciousness. The idea is that we create our psychological reality through thought, and that the way we experience life is not so much based on outside events but on our thoughts about those events. But the way our thoughts translate often leads us astray and creates much needless unhappiness and suffering. And because feelings come from thoughts, the emotions we so trust are just as likely as skewed as the thoughts that generated them.

Rebbetzin Feige Twerski, who with her husband Rav Michel Twerski and other family members created the Twerski Wellness Institute, explains that realigning our thoughts and moving out of our self-centered thinking is really about our continuous relationship with G-d, Who orchestrates every situation in which we find ourselves. "The extent to which I can divest myself of my ego thinking, to that extent I allow the Ribono Shel Olam in," she says.

Rebbetzin Twerski says she's integrated the policy that "whenever I encounter hurtful situations, I remind myself that it's not about

me.' By getting myself out of the way, it frees me up to evaluate the situation more objectively." She explains that the less immersed we are in ego thinking and the more aligned we are to our innate G-dly wisdom, the better we will know how to take care of ourselves.

Since we can never completely divorce ourselves of our ego thinking, to what extent can we trust our innate wisdom to guide us properly? For the most part, Rebbetzin Twerski says, we can trust it. For instance, if our personal thinking is making us envious or judgmental of others — in those cases we can trust it to inform us that we are on the wrong path. But when it comes to issues of ethics and morality, we must turn to *daas Torah*. And, of course, in any area of conflict, halachah always trumps our innate wisdom.

Safety Measures Programs like these sound so helpful and wholesome — so why then have they drawn so much suspicion and controversy? In fact, the controversy is nothing new. Landmark's predecessor EST, which ran self-actualization seminars in the '70s and '80s, took much of its spiritual inspiration from Buddhism and was widely criticized for using cultlike practices and brutal coaching techniques to help participants deconstruct their stories. The outgrowths of EST, LGATs like Landmark, bear its culpability. Shying away from calling them

cults, some cult experts see in their use of visualization techniques and specific jargon, repetition of mantras and sensory overload, a subtle kind of mind control at play, wherein participants lose their ability to see the program objectively.

But International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) executive director Dr. Michael Langone isn't so dismissive, and says that not enough solid research has been conducted to make any sweeping generalizations. It depends on the program, on the facilitator, and on the participants. "LGATs should be evaluated individually vis-à-vis potential risk to participants," he said, adding that "religious organizations may find it helpful to examine the philosophical and spiritual implications of what a particular LGAT may advocate... Hence, even if the program does not pose significant psychological risks to participants, it may implicitly, if not explicitly, teach ideas that the

religious host organization could challenge."

Landmark, one of the most popular LGATs, continues to receive its share of criticism. Back in 1987, Yad L'Achim issued a warning against Landmark, citing concerns with EST's ideology and methods. Although Landmark has evolved and is no longer EST, Yad L'Achim still abides by that warning, according to Aaron Rubin, head of Yad L'Achim's anti-missionary activities.

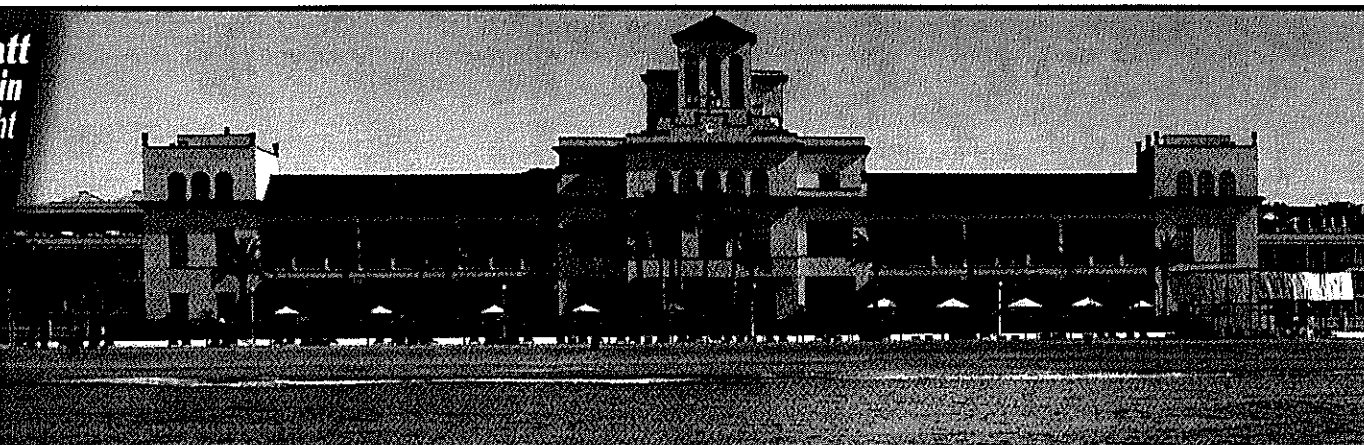
Moral and religious questions notwithstanding, is there emotional or psychological danger in these programs themselves? Most LGATs are based on tearing down old defenses and destructive thoughts. The question is whether the facilitators are professional enough to build a person back up again.

Mental health professionals are equally divided. Psychiatrist Dr. Miriam Grossman, who lives in Monsey and practices in Suffern, New York, says that when the controversy

concerning Shofar broke out in Crown Heights, she was asked for a professional opinion. "My primary concern," she says, "is that people without any mental health training whatsoever are reaching out to vulnerable people... By vulnerable I mean that they have serious psychological issues and are searching for assistance and guidance on how to deal with these inner matters. They will more easily trust people in positions of authority who are charismatic and say that they have the answers."

In order to get people to open up, Shofar breaks down people's psychological defenses, using an assortment of techniques. For instance, they have them sit in silence with complete strangers for long periods of time and look into strangers' eyes and tell them very personal things. "Crying and screaming in front of strangers is not normal," says Dr. Grossman. "That's what we do in private, maybe with someone we are close to."

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It's Not What You Think

She also feels that there is no accountability should something go wrong. Dr. Grossman admits that breakthroughs in personal understanding and relationships happen, but what happens afterward? Are participants just left to deal with possible negative fallout on their own? "As a psychiatrist, I feel it's just too dangerous." These workshops, she says, are not the same as 12-step programs, which have a proven track record, take place over an extended period of time, and do not isolate participants from family.

But Dr. Justin Resnick, a clinical psychologist with the Chareidi Training Institute in Jerusalem, says Shofar must be evaluated on its own terms. Dr. Resnick personally attended Shofar, professionally oversaw some of its workshops, and sends clients to the program. From a psychological perspective, Shofar doesn't constitute an assault on the self, as some claim; rather, it helps men get in touch with their feelings and learn how to talk with other men in ways that are honest and emotionally direct. Graduates, he says, can become better fathers, spouses, and teachers.

Clinical psychologist Shlomo Zalman Jessel, who lives in Moshav Mattisyahu and practices in Jerusalem, agrees. As a therapist specializing in men's issues, he sends clients to Shofar. "It's a *mussar vaad*. Where today do you get a group of people who are willing to examine themselves so honestly?"

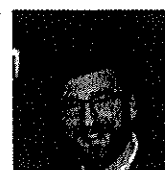
Jessel says the extreme-sounding exercises have to be seen in their rightful context. For example, while two men are staring at each other, a dialogue is taking place between them; they are asking themselves what judgments they might each be making about the other. Also, by hearing one another's stories and the extent of each other's insecurities and fears, they come to realize that they are not alone. But, mostly, they discover that being insecure and afraid doesn't make them any less manly.

What makes it safe, Dr. Resnick says, is the quality and experience of the facilitators as well as the caliber of the staff members who are simultaneously working on their own issues. He is not bothered that some don't have degrees in social work or therapy. Unlike conventional therapy, here the participant leads



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—Tzvi Werther



the process. The facilitator is simply trying to read where he's at and help get him there, but generally from a step behind.

Despite the controversy, social worker Mordechai Weinberger continues to send clients to Shofar, but warns that it's not a cure-all for everyone's woes and that the "high" participants feel at the end of the program probably won't last. "Shofar gives them awareness and a sense of freedom that is *taam Gan Eden*, but this feeling can't last unless it's followed up by individual therapy, more seminars, and phone conferences." When Weinberger sends clients to Shofar, he tells them that the insight into themselves will last a lifetime, but that they'll probably fall back into old patterns of behavior soon enough.

He also warns about those with a fragile sense of self, for whom bringing down their defenses might be destabilizing, or for those who are bipolar, schizophrenic, or suffer from other psychological disorders. "For them, these LGATs are the worst thing possible. They can trigger major upheavals and psychotic episodes that can ruin his life," Weinberger says.

LGATs are geared to people with "average"

issues, not those with a history of psychological disorders, who could throw the group dynamic off balance. Shofar and Landmark both claim that they evaluate every participant after the first day and will ask someone to leave if they feel his participation is inappropriate. Rabbi Glaser of TPY says he interviews every candidate personally and rejects those not psychologically healthy enough. Innate Health's large group seminars are not therapy-based and therefore don't arouse those concerns, but regarding its more personalized sessions, Tzvi Werther of the Twerski Wellness Institute explains that "TH practitioners will not decide for or against professional interventions unless they are separately trained and licensed in that area." When warranted, they will give a referral to a licensed professional.

Who Needs It? Given the wealth of psychological knowledge contained in *chassidus* and *mussar seforim*, why do religious Jews need programs like these? Isn't learning some of those *seforim* enough? "Before we can grasp the extent of our spiritual potential, we must

remove what is blocking us," says Rabbi Chaimowitz of TPY. "But even before that, we must appreciate that we are, in fact, blocked." He adds that today people are generally uninterested in pondering life's bigger questions or working very hard at self-reflection. "People want to get the bottom line message very quickly and very hands-on. A program like this offers a way of dealing with life's big issues in a very direct way and in a short amount of time," he says.

Chicago psychologist Yehudis Karbal adds that experiential workshops like Shofar focus on the heart as opposed to the brain. Unlike conventional talk therapy, they dig beyond the cognitive aspects of the self to unearth past traumas that are, at times, preverbal. They give people the vocabulary to express what it is that's hurting them so deeply.

Moreover, explains Rebbetzin Twerski, it's hard to connect to our higher selves when we're

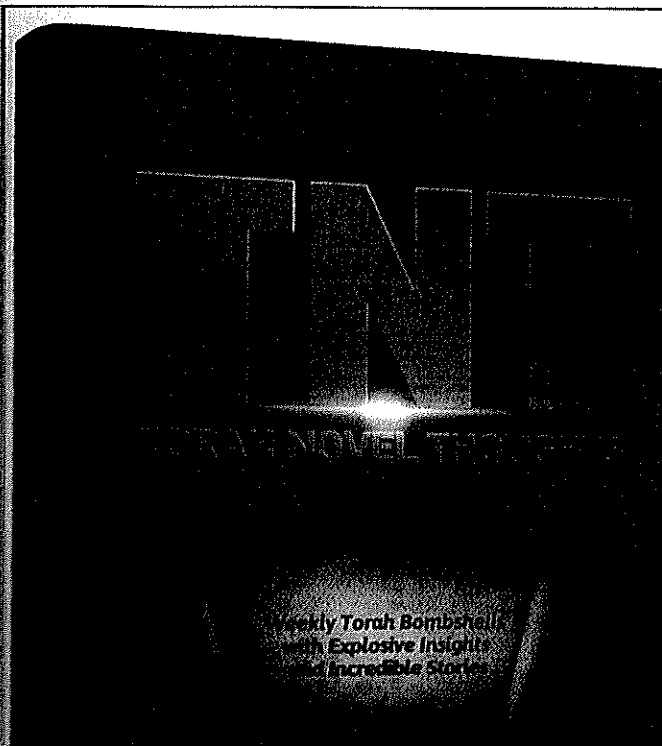
suffering. "Today, people are in a state of confusion, of flux. There is rage. People feel under attack in every which way: responsibilities; money issues; dysfunctional relationships. We don't have the time to stop long enough to really look at our treasure, at our heritage and legacy.

"But when we calm down and clear our thinking, when we start seeing the world as it really is and not as we imagine it to be, then our innate wisdom helps us understand what's important in life and what we should let go of. I don't have to control my world or the world out there. Hashem is in charge of what I am going to have and not have. I don't have to run on this endless treadmill... By clearing our minds of ego thoughts, we clear the path to the King's palace."

To determine whether an LGAT is the right direction, Mordecai Weinberger says a *rav* competent in mental health issues should be consulted, as well as others who have taken

the program. "Sometimes in non-Jewish or non-*frum* programs," Weinberger says, "people might say things that are not congruent with halachah or your *hashkafos*. Are you comfortable doing that? Also, are you able to handle hearing ideas that are contrary to your *hashkafah*, even though they are halachically permitted? I believe every psychological system needs a rabbinical endorsement and perhaps even a *beis din* who can stand behind the program, answer questions and who have the ultimate authority to change parts of the system, when necessary.

"But hearing that a *rav* gave his *haskamah* to someone else doesn't make it right for you either," he explains. "A *rav* who is competent in mental health will be able to guide you toward the most effective LGAT or other system based on your personal needs. And he might tell you not to sign up for a particular LGAT. From my experience, *rabbanim* want Klal Yisrael to get healthier." ❀



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