



OUTLOOK › Yonoson Rosenblum

The World Outside, the World Inside, and the Intersection Between

Maximum Response

At my father's *levayah*, one of my brothers related a late-night conversation he had had with him, *a"th*, decades before. He told my brother that as a young man he had wanted to give away all his money. The guilt feelings of living in comfort when others had nothing overwhelmed him.

My father never acted on that impulse, which was certainly fortunate given the number of descendants who would end up learning in *kollel*. But I can well understand how he felt.

The radio blares, "Save the life of Naomi," a young girl who needs a transplant in the United States, an operation that will cost over \$200,000, and we wonder how we can worry about apartments for our children, much less the family summer vacation, when a Jewish life hangs in the balance. Sure, ten of thousands of others will hear the same plea, but how can I rely on them? Only the knowledge that next week it will be Chaim who needs a transplant lets us rationalize that we have a bank overdraft that needs paying and allows us not to pledge a large sum.

In the morning minyan, most men will be approached by at least the "regulars," some of whom are still sporting peach fuzz where their beards will one day grow; there will be at least one piteous plea from the *bimah*; and likely a full-color brochure will be distributed around the shul describing a truly gut-wrenching familial situation. During the day, the phone will ring three or four times with calls from various *chesed* organizations, each one detailing a heartrending case.

Because we know the list is endless and we are incapable of fulfilling all the requests, we harden our hearts and give less than we initially want to. Often, we come to resent the constant assault on our emotions because we recognize the hardening of our hearts and feel ashamed. We do not wish to feel bad about ourselves.

OCCASIONALLY, HOWEVER, one meets someone without the normal human defense mechanisms, someone who cannot hear of a fellow Jew in need without responding to the maximum. I first heard of Aryeh Weingarten and his organization Karmey Chessed when my wife worked as a social worker in Beitar. Many of her clients were beneficiaries of the organization, and she quickly learned to turn to Karmey Chessed for help whenever a critical need arose. She felt fully confident when she made the organization the principal beneficiary of her *maaser kesafim*.

Reb Aryeh started Karmey Chessed simply to respond to the tragic situations that he encountered in Beitar. He saw the way that residents were crumbling under debts. Even some with sources of income, albeit

inadequate to meet their families' needs, were crushed by the burdens that never went away and lost the ability to function at all.

Weingarten had no resources of his own or any connection to those who did. When his oldest daughter became a *kallah*, she told her father that she would be happy to have the *chuppah* in their house because she knew her parents had no money to contribute to a *chasunah*. (He did not take her up on her offer, though the *chasunah* was in one of the heavily subsidized halls.)

But he could not stand by helplessly as he witnessed others collapsing under their burdens. The more he raised, the more his desire to give grew.

The needs of Beitar alone easily would have been sufficient to absorb any money he could raise. And if not Beitar, certainly the chareidi community in which he lives. The newest government poverty figures published last week showed that the rate of chareidi poverty rose six points, to 66 percent, from 2012 to 2013. By contrast, the rate of Arab poverty dropped 7 percent. At 47 percent, the Arab poverty rate is now nearly 20 percent lower than that of chareidim.

But Weingarten did not confine his efforts to his neighbors or fellow chareidim. High on his list of beneficiaries were victims of injustice or those who have suffered as a consequence of defending the Jewish People. In 2001, a terrorist carrying a bomb tried to blow up a busload of passengers at a gas station just outside the West Bank city of Ariel. M, the bus driver, succeeded in neutralizing the terrorist, but when a soldier on the bus shot the terrorist, he also partially detonated the bomb the terrorist was holding.

M was permanently disabled. Eventually all the medicines he was taking caused him to develop diabetes, requiring around-the-clock insulin. It took seven years for Bituach Leumi to respond to M's needs. He told *Breaking News Israel* that without Karmey Chessed, his family of 11 could never have made it through that period. Not only did the organization supply food, clothing, and expensive medications, but they called every week to make sure that M's family had everything it needed for Shabbos.

The families expelled from Gush Katif are another focus of Karmey Chessed. At the time of the expulsion, almost all the families were involved in thriving, independent agriculture. Today, nine years later, about half still do not have permanent homes, and the unemployment rate among the expellees is 25 percent.

This past summer Karmey Chessed focused on soldiers from low-income families serving in Gaza. Shoshi, the NCO in charge of welfare for a brigade with a majority of soldiers from low-income homes, contacted

Karmey Chessed, and Weingarten responded with care packages and snacks for soldiers fighting on the front lines and baskets containing toiletries, socks, towels, and underwear for soldiers on furlough. Each package came with a Chumash as well. "I can never do too much for the soldiers," Weingarten says.

With limited resources but unlimited ambitions, Karmey Chessed has had to find ways to stretch its resources to the maximum. To do so, it relies entirely on a large network of volunteers. Its successful Green

Project collects old furniture and appliances that would otherwise be filling garbage dumps around the country, refurbishes them, and distributes them to poor families.

For its ability to stretch its resources to the maximum, Karmey Chessed received the highest possible ranking from Israel Gives, which evaluates 30,000 *chesed* organizations in Israel. And Aryeh Weingarten has provided many others of limited means like him with the opportunity to be major givers.

Is the Criminal Justice System Racist?

Blacks and whites "are arrested at very different rates, [and] receive very different sentences... for the same crime," charged candidate Barack Obama at a primary debate in 2008. A recent Jewish Geography piece in *Mishpacha* ("Where Justice and Fairness Part Ways," December 3, 2014) seemed to accept the claim that the "deck is stacked" against blacks in the criminal justice system.

But is that true?

The *Mishpacha* piece cited a *USA Today* article stating that a white police officer was responsible for the death of a black person somewhere in the United States approximately twice a week from 2006 to 2012. That cherry-picked statistic, however, tells us nothing without the context of those killings. How many of those killings, for instance, were in the context of armed confrontations? How many when the police officer felt his life was endangered?

Given the violence of many urban black neighborhoods, it is impossible to know whether the statistic cited is even surprising. In 2005, for instance, the black homicide rate was seven times higher than that of whites and Hispanics combined. From 1976 to 2005, blacks committed 52 percent of all murders in America. They also constituted 39.3 percent of all violent crime arrests.

Blacks fear their fellow blacks far more than the police, and for good reason. As black commentator Juan Williams points out, the number-one cause of death among black males aged 15 to 34 is murder. And the overwhelming number of those murders are committed by other black men.

Ten murders over a weekend is par for the course in Chicago's ghettos, and many of those killed are innocent bystanders of gang or drug-related violence.

The *Mishpacha* piece also cited an unattributed statistic that blacks receive, on average, 10 percent longer sentences for *similar* crimes. First, we have no way of knowing whether that study controlled for possession of a lethal weapon at the time of the crime or for prior criminal records — both factors that have a major impact on the length of sentences. Second "similar" is not the "same." The trial judge has much more information about the heinousness of the particular crime committed than a researcher

recording dry statistics.

ABOUT ONE THING ALL CAN AGREE: Blacks are disproportionately represented in the US prison population. They made up 37.5 percent of state and federal prisoners in 2006, for instance, close to three times their percentage of the overall population. The question, however, is whether that overrepresentation reflects the racism of the justice system or higher black crime rates.

Heather MacDonald tackled that issue in the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal* ("Is the Criminal Justice System Racist?" Spring 2008). She found each one of candidate Obama's assertions wanting. MacDonald pointed to a large number of studies going back to 1978 that found a near exact match between the percentage of perpetrators of various races as identified by victims and the percentage of those arrested.

Once arrested, it is far from clear that blacks fare worse than whites or Hispanics. A 1994 Justice Department study of felony cases from the 75 largest urban areas found that blacks actually had a lower chance of prosecution following a felony and were less likely to be found guilty at trial.

Critics of the justice system point to the differentials in the federal mandatory minimum sentence for possession of a common narcotic drug produced in a crystallized form, which is consumed primarily by blacks, and those for possession of a less lethal form of that same narcotic. Possession of five grams of the former carries a minimum sentence of five years, while it takes possession of 500 grams of the latter for a mandatory minimum sentence of five years.

Yet the 5,000 blacks sent to jail for possession of the former constituted a small fraction of the 858,000 blacks in prison at the end of 2006. Moreover, the same five-gram mandatory minimum applies to possession of a commonly abused amphetamine, of which 98 percent of the offenders are non-black.

And it was black Congressmen — e.g., Charles Rangel of Harlem, Major Owens of Brooklyn, and Alton Waldon of Queens — who called for a war against the lethal narcotic drug, which they viewed as destroying their neighborhoods. Waldon described that drug as the worst form of self-inflicted oppression since slavery.

In sum, MacDonald found that the conclusion of liberal criminologist Michael Tonry in his book *Malign Neglect* (1995) still holds today: "Racial differences in patterns of offending, not racial bias by police and other officials, are the principal reason that greater proportions of blacks than whites are arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and imprisoned."