

Putting Out the Fire: Your Unique Role in Bringing Jews Closer to Torah by Aharon Ungar Quotes

HaRav Yisrael Meir Kagan (The Chofetz Chaim), zt'l: "In truth, when one ponders and understands the status of Torah in recent years, and how it has fallen so much in today's world, then the obligation on every baal Torah who has learned...is that much greater to fight the battles of Torah... "The war being fought against G-d and His Torah is a continuous threat, worsening daily. Therefore it is incumbent upon every person who knows even a little Torah to do all that he can. If he just knows Chumash, he must put together a learning group and teach them Chumash. If he knows Mishnah, he should teach Mishnah... "One who has learned a few years in yeshiva, and has thus acquired much Torah knowledge, must never say he is exempt. Rather, he is obligated to go out to the battlefield and lead as many Torah learning groups as he can. Not only that, but he is more obligated than anyone else. It is up to him to urge, awaken and assemble the congregation and show them 'the right way'...and through this the honor of Hashem will multiply throughout the world. A war like this one is not a milchemes reshut, an optional war; rather, it is a milchemes mitzvah, a positive commandment in which everyone is obligated to shoulder a portion..."

Who was this terrible enemy that has been fighting relentlessly for decades against millions of Jews? Assimilation and its inevitable ally, intermarriage. “This is an enemy that uses tanks and bombs and planes,” Rabbi Moshe Zeldman told the crowd. “But what are we shooting with? We are using BB guns.” His stark assessment rang true. Against this massive onslaught, all Klal Yisrael had managed to deploy were a few scattered kiruv organizations, a few seminars and a few devoted souls who did their best to mount a rescue. The odds were ridiculously slanted in favor of the enemy, not because it was inherently stronger, but because the opposing forces had never meaningfully engaged in the battle.¹

For those who might have thought the battle was already being won — as evidenced by the thousands of baalei teshuvah who have become so remarkable a presence over the past few decades — Rabbi Zeldman provided a far more realistic vision. The thousands brought back to Torah through kiruv organizations still comprise only a small drop in a raging ocean. Yes, he confirmed, saving one Jewish soul is the equivalent of saving the world, but for every person who finds his Jewish identity, thousands of others are lost each day. “Aish HaTorah will do a seminar, and a hundred people will come,” he explained. “Ten will come to follow-up classes, two will come for a Shabbos and one will become frum. That’s a great

¹ Xxxi-xxxii.

thing, but what about the other 99 that came to the seminar? What about the other thousand in the neighborhood and the other hundred thousand in the city that didn't even hear about the seminar because there are not enough people doing kiruv?" What is our generation doing about this tragedy that plays out every day all around us? Can we content ourselves with a few overtaxed kiruv groups saving one out of 10,000 lost Jews?²

For those to whom time is the issue, consider this sobering fact. The churches have a long history of training lay people to convert others to their religion. We have all had encounters with such people — ordinary men and women who are on the alert at all times for the moment when they can introduce their subject to a Jew who might be a colleague or neighbor. One of my former employees regularly tried to initiate theological discussions with me, and even showed me her detailed manual for training lay people to be missionaries to the masses. The materials covered every facet of the process. All she did was come to work every day, but she had her mission burning in her heart, and she used every opportunity to try to accomplish it. Chazal teach that there is wisdom that can be attained from the other nations of the world, and this missionary paradigm is one that has been successful for centuries. What they have used to snatch Jewish souls, we can use

² Xxxii-xxxiii.

to bring them home. As the following statistics convey starkly, we must act now, or millions more Jews will be lost.³

“I do other mitzvos. Kiruv isn’t my thing.” Kiruv is not just a nice thing to do. It’s a mitzvah, an obligation. Just as no Jew would ever say to himself, “Davening isn’t my thing, I don’t have the time,” or “Pesach isn’t my thing, it’s too much trouble,” one cannot just dismiss kiruv. The responsibility one Jew has for another is not optional.⁴

Buy the book: <https://www.amazon.com/Putting-Out-Fire-Unique-Bringing/dp/1568714564>

Read online: <https://archive.org/details/puttingoutfireyo0000unga>

³ Xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁴ 15.