

## SOUL AND SPIRIT

Dr. Ivan Lerner offers “Insights into Ourselves through our Sexuality.”

By Sharon Bear, Ph.D.

On Saturday, December 2, I attended a fascinating talk at Congregation Beth Jacob by Ivan Lerner, a Rabbi Emeritus and psychologist, who spoke on the meaning of our sexuality, a guaranteed draw for the many singles in attendance. Rabbi Fischer led off the evening, noting that, when he was divorced in his 40s, there were few programs for over-40 Jewish singles. Hence, after he was fortunate enough to meet his current wife Ellen, who also was divorced in her 40s, he committed himself to helping others who had found themselves in his position. The result of his efforts is the “Fabulous 40s Plus Singles” (for Jews of Every Flavor), who, through the efforts of Cher Bransky, Hazel Dyer, and Beverley Lieberman, sponsored the interesting evening.

Dr. Lerner’s focus was on the Torah’s perspective on sex and sexuality and how sexuality fits into the soul and spirit. He offered a fascinating view on how man and woman came to be. He explained that the first person was a unisex being, falling somewhere between the animals and G-d. This unisex being, however, did not feel as if he/she belonged on earth. So he/she turned to G-d, pointing out that every animal species consisted of a male and a female. G-d, being responsive, took this being, put him/her to sleep, and then separated him/her into man and woman. To support this notion, Dr. Lerner explained that the word “selah,” which usually is translated as “rib,” actually means

“side.” Based on this view is the notion that “the sex drive is the yearning of the soul to return to its original state of creation.”

Then, in a seeming change of topic, he asked us, “What is the holiest place on earth?” He got the usual responses of “Jerusalem” and the “Wailing Wall.” But I knew that he was going someplace else with this. After taking a few more responses, he stated, “The holiest place on earth is when a man and a woman, in a blessed relationship [marriage] are making love, because, at that moment, we return to our original state of creation, and we have the power to become transcendental.”

Such transformation, such fulfillment can only come about in the context of a spiritual connection.

But such transformation, such fulfillment can only come about in the context of a spiritual connection. To develop such a connection, you have to first realize your own potential. Dr. Lerner believes that such potential is achieved through self-discipline, which requires three things: (1) the capacity to delay gratification, (2) the accepting of responsibility, and (3) a commitment to the truth. In regard to the third item, Dr. Lerner emphasized the necessity of being



true to yourself — that, by doing so, we engender the capacity to refine ourselves to a higher level, to become more sensitive, and, finally, to give more to another person.

Wanting to pass on the secret to a successful relationship to the eager audience, Dr. Lerner told us that “working toward forgiveness is the essence of any relationship,” adding that “we also must first forgive ourselves.” The message that we took away from the evening was that striving to achieve our potential allows us to connect deeply with another person. This, in turn, enables us to complete ourselves and to achieve peace. Amen.



# Adviceline

Over the years my relationship with my mother-in-law has changed from nice to very tense. As long as things are going well, she is really wonderful. But when she dislikes something she has very strong emotional responses.

When we were first married I would walk on eggshells to avoid this, but it is impossible to always avoid. I think all of her actions ultimately benefit her, so I often do not trust what she does. I also find her to color reality to suit her emotions. For example, she has promised us a trip. When it came time to discuss the trip she spent a while trying to explain why it was not in my best interest to go. I explained away her concerns, at which point she admitted that it was not good for her. I told her once I'd be making dinner for her and my father-in-law. She watched me make the dinner and shortly after announced they would be eating out.

These are small examples, but they color the relationship. She sees herself as this emotionally evolved woman. I see her as a very self-centered. As a result, I get very upset before her visits. I find myself not feeling that she really cares, and wanting to shield myself emotionally to avoid the roller coaster. When I withdraw to protect myself, she gets upset that I'm withdrawn. My husband agrees with me but is able to stay more emotionally neutral.

I am not sure how to prepare myself for her visits, teach my kids *kibud av v'eim*, and make sure I am *mekayeim* the mitzvah myself.

## RABBI DR. IVAN LERNER

YOU MENTION THAT "OVER THE YEARS" YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH your mother-in-law has changed from "nice to very tense." You also mention that when you were first married you would "walk on eggshells" to avoid upsetting her. Therefore, I must assume that when you stopped walking on eggshells and attempted to engage her in a more normal fashion the problems increased.

Sadly, it sounds like your mother-in-law has strong narcissistic tendencies. She's emotionally immature and creates situations which make her the center of attention. You point out that she is "a very self-centered woman." That's part of being a narcissist.

You are correct in not trusting her intentions, and also correct in your desire to "shield" yourself from her. Therefore, your lack of clarity regarding her predictable actions (i.e. promising and not delivering) surprises me. It appears that while you know who your mother-in-law is, you still operate as if she will miraculously change. Sorry, but at this point that's not likely!

You husband deserves kudos for learning how to deal with his mother by remaining "emotionally neutral." That is the *only* way to deal successfully with someone who behaves the way you've described your mother-in-law. If she promises you a trip, wait for the tickets before getting excited. Even then, be aware that the emotional cost of the trip may be too high. If she says she's coming for dinner and changes her mind — pack the leftovers for the next day's lunch.

Regarding the mitzvah of *kibud av v'eim*, it seems to me that you should follow your husband's lead. Demonstrate common courtesy and respect, but remain emotionally neutral. Your children will see you relating to their grandmother in a respectful manner and they will do the same.

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**Suzanne Adelman**

LCSW-C, DCSW, Clinical Supervisor, Hospice Coordinator,  
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**Rabbi Dr. Ivan Lerner**

Clinical and Industrial Psychologist, Educator and Community Rabbi

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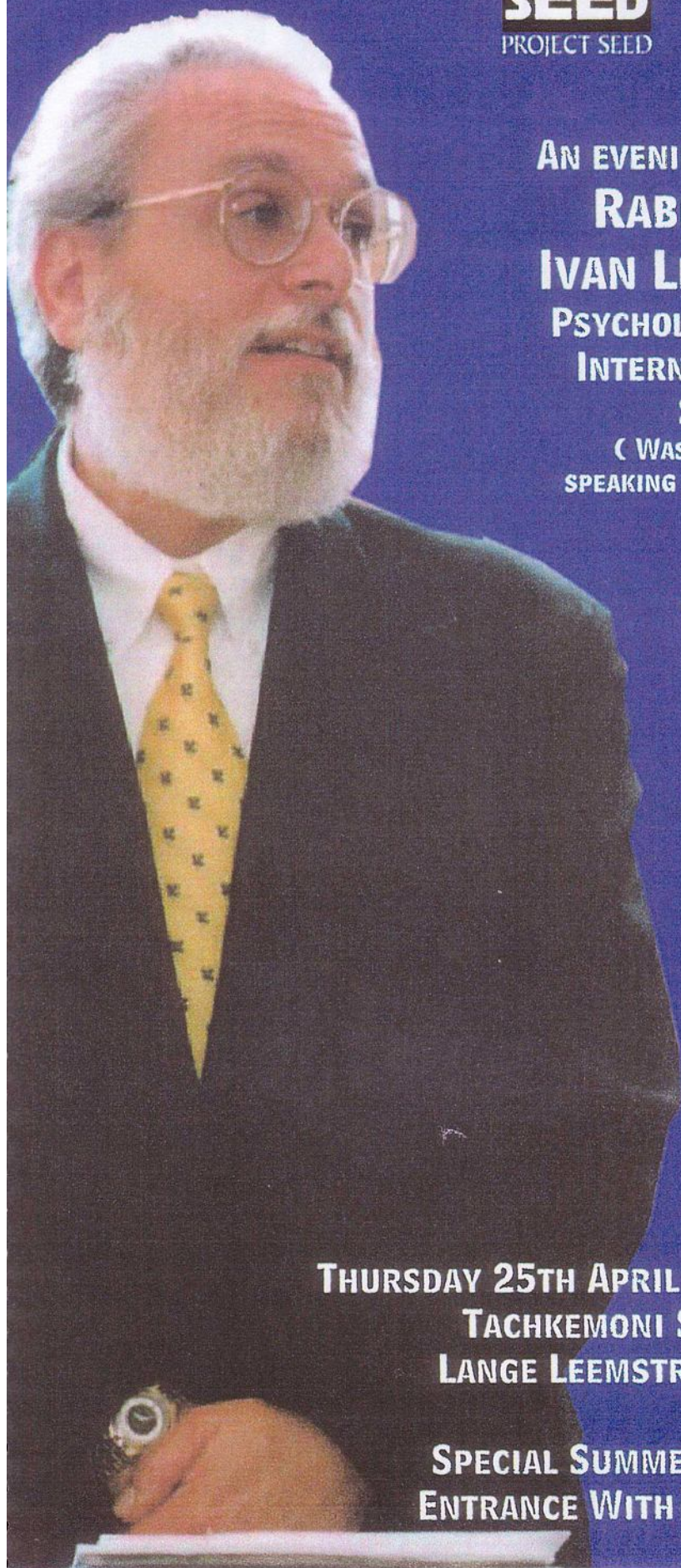
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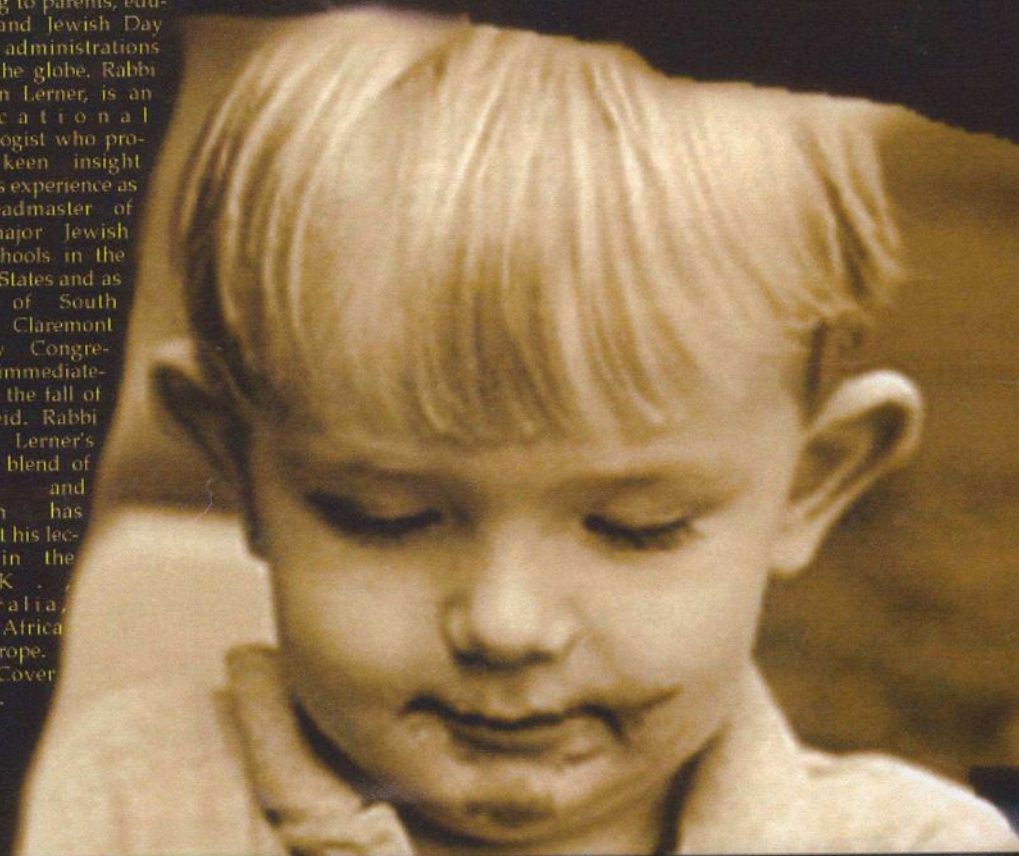
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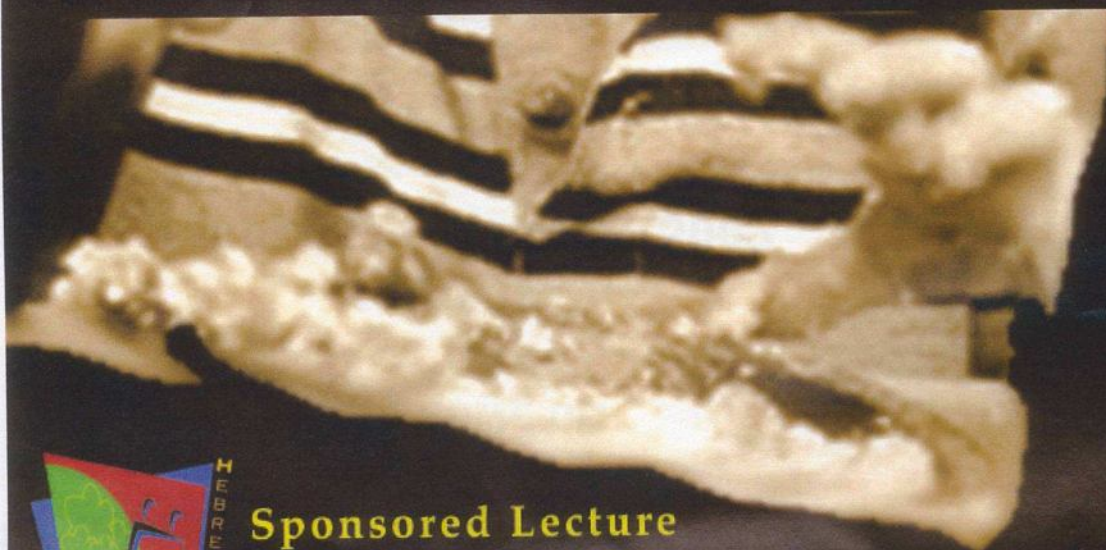
## Rabbi Dr. Ivan Lerner on tour.

B'H

Rabbi Dr. Ivan Lerner is currently on world tour lecturing to parents, educators and Jewish Day School administrations across the globe. Rabbi Dr. Ivan Lerner, is an Educational Psychologist who provides keen insight from his experience as the headmaster of two major Jewish Day Schools in the United States and as Rabbi of South Africa's Claremont Hebrew Congregation immediately after the fall of apartheid. Rabbi Dr. Lerner's unique blend of humor and warmth has sold out his lectures in the U.S., U.K., Australia, South Africa and Europe. No Cover Charge.



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