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Chag Sukkot Sameach!



Woman's Soul Rising
By Katherine Soskin
(see About the Cover, p4)

Editorial

Recently someone asked me what the word “spiritual” means. That is not an easy word to define. I replied that it usually refers to strong feelings that cannot be seen and are difficult to measure, such as love. Briefly, these feelings are more than love. They are about having a sense beyond one’s small self to feeling a connection with all of life.

“The Jewish Soul” reprinted below from the Aug. 1, 2011 bulletin of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles provides a good explanation of the word. According to the author, everything we do in our houses of worship – not only lofty activities such as prayer, study and acts of lovingkindness – is “spiritual”.

Of course, it couldn’t be a Jewish event without food. (See below where it says, “Jewish Culinary Institute”). That should help attract a few more Jewish souls to the Temple for a spiritual experience. Seriously though, I agree that everything we do can be spiritual, especially during the holiday of *Sukkot*.

This is because all of the mundane activities we do such as eating, drinking, and sleeping – it is a *mitzvah* to do them in the *sukkah*! Then during the rest of the year when we tend to take those activities for granted and they seem “unspiritual” to us, we can remind ourselves of that special feeling we got from doing them in the *sukkah* and they can feel significant once again.

The Jewish Soul

According to the Jewish mystics, a human being is not a body with a soul, but rather a soul that happens to have a body. The purpose of each soul while on earth is twofold. First is to improve the world through the soul’s own particular gift, talent or ability. This means to use what is best within us to help repair what is broken in society, whether that be at home, in our community or across the globe.

The second purpose of the soul is to lift itself to a higher spiritual level. What does this mean? Our sages teach us that to be spiritual is:

1. To view the world as an ultimate mystery rather than as a mechanized machine.
 2. To view life as meaningful rather than meaningless.
 3. To view life as a lesson in gratitude.
 4. To acknowledge life’s mysteries, even the questions that have no answers.
 5. To trust in the goodness of life and all the potential this implies.
 6. To perceive that every person carries within her or him the special signature of God.
- So how do we achieve this level of spirituality? The Talmud answers:

“Through prayer, study, and acts of loving-kindness.” I would add “Through connections with each other.”

As the new Director of Adult Programs, I hope to offer you many new opportunities to uplift your soul and to connect with others through a medley of new experiences: beautiful, sophisticated Shabbat and holiday celebrations with music, drama and poetry; concerts, cabarets and lectures; a series of exciting study opportunities where we can discuss, question and argue as Jewish scholars have always done; a Jewish Culinary Institute; and, most important, a chance to create community – to get to know each other as we make our way on the journey of life, and the journey of our souls. I hope you will join me.

Susan Nanus, Director of Adult Programs, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles. (Their bulletins from the past three years can be viewed on their website: wilshireboulevardtemple.org.)

World Peace Day concert

On Sept. 21, World Peace Day, I attended a concert by The Yuval Ron Ensemble in Indianapolis, titled “Sacred Music of the Middle East”.

Beforehand a short film on the origin of World Peace Day was shown. In 1981, the United Nations agreed to make Sept 21 an annual 24-hour call for ceasefires and non-violence, and a day for UN agencies and aid organizations to safely carry out life-saving work.

Independently and through his work in music, Yuval Ron actively promotes peace and goodwill. Yuval Ron is the musical director and oud player for The Ensemble, which includes Arabic, Jewish and Christian artists who unite the sacred music traditions of Judaism, Sufism and the Armenian Church into an unusual mystical, spiritual and inspiring musical celebration.

The Ensemble got the audience singing, dancing, and hand-clapping, but in between the songs the room was quiet while Ron shared little bits of wisdom. He said that Jewish music and that of other religions takes on the style of the location where the musicians live. Therefore even though the group played Jewish, Christian and Muslim music, it all sounded Middle Eastern. If it weren’t for recognizing a few Hebrew words and also hearing in advance what the songs were going to be, I wouldn’t have been able to tell which songs came from which religion.

Later in the concert Ron spoke about all the wonderful achievements happening in the Middle East in different areas such as education, medicine, technology and so forth. On a basic level there is tasty cuisine, diverse clothing, competitive sports and such. At the same time, there is

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a lot of darkness in the area. Continuing in his calm, soft spoken voice, he commented that some people think the way to diminish that darkness is with more darkness, but he doesn’t agree.

Yuval Ron believes the way to diminish the darkness is with light and that is what
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Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

Visiting Vancouver, Part 4

In my last column I wrote about a young man I met in the airport in Toronto. He shared his life story with me: his terrible suffering from his addiction, his suicide attempt, and the miracles that saved him.

My curiosity was aroused. What is this organization, NA (Narcotics Anonymous)? How did they take one of the most miserable of all young people and turn him into one of the happiest?

I went to Google to learn more.

NA is a branch of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) which was started in 1935 in Ohio by two former alcoholics. Their secret of success? Twelve steps and twelve principles. I read them and was moved to tears. I highly recommend that you read them yourself. Here is my summary of the twelve steps.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than us could save us.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to *Hashem*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to *Hashem*, to ourselves, and to another human

being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready for *Hashem* to take away our evil influence.

7. Humbly asked Him to take away our evil influence.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed.

9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible.

10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with *Hashem*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry it out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principals in all of our affairs.

Amazing! These 12 steps are strongly rooted in our *Torah*, and that is their tremendous power. I can now understand the happiness this young man is experiencing. I experienced something very similar myself. Forty-two years ago I became a *baal tshuva*, one who returned. I grew up in Indianapolis, at that time a spiritual desert. There was no Jewish Day School then. I went to public school and grew up pretty secular. When I was 18 I



Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

Learn life in the Sukkah

Sukkot begins October 13

Jews all over the world will celebrate the holiday of *Sukkot* sitting, eating, and even sleeping in these little humble dwelling places known as *sukkot*. The Torah tells us "You shall dwell in booths (*sukkot*) for a seven day period in order that your generations shall know that I



also had a spiritual awakening. I came to realize that the Torah is the will of *Hashem*, and decided to devote my will and my life to Him and His will. Since then I am trying to carry this message to all of mankind. I also became one of the happiest young people, and am glad to say that today, 42 years later I am still happy. And now I have even more reason to be happy. We are now in the advanced stages of our complete and final redemption. For thousands of years we have been asking *Hashem* to redeem us and take us out of exile. Now it is happening. This is indeed a good reason to rejoice.

One aspect of the complete redemption is that then there will be no more evil. If we just open our eyes and look around, we can see that this is now happening. The forces of evil are disintegrating. Evil regimes are falling, one after another. More and more people are overcoming their evil influence. AA now has two million members. They have all been able to overcome their evil influence to a great extent.

The twelve steps of AA have now been adopted by over 200 different self help organizations including: Narcotics, Gamblers, Overeaters, Debtors, and Workaholics Anonymous. These groups have millions of members worldwide, all trying to come closer to *Hashem* and to overcome the evil influence.

It is up to us to speed up the process. We too have to try to come closer to *Hashem*, to learn more Torah and do more *Mitzvoahs*, to bring *Moshiach* now!

We wish all of our readers and all of Israel a happy *Succos* and *Simchas Torah*. We are hoping to celebrate together with all of you in the third Holy Temple which *Hashem* will soon rebuild in Jerusalem.

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caused the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them forth from the land of Egypt." (Lev. 23:42-44)

Everything we need to learn in life, we can learn in the *sukkah*. You will not know what I am talking about unless you give yourself some time in a *sukkah*. Sitting, eating, drinking, meditating, praying in a *sukkah* transmits deep teachings that are more powerful than words could ever do so please avail yourself of this spiritual gift. The holiday of *Sukkot* reminds us of what life is really all about. It teaches us to be simple, to be real, to be childlike, to be loving, and to share with each other. We are all together on this journey of life. When we are sitting in the *sukkah*, we realize that all the external structures that we have built in our lives are not necessary. Furthermore, they have too often created barriers and separation, rather than unity and love. On *Sukkot*, we know that love is what is true, love is what is real. And it is divine love that brings joy.

We were created for joy, so we look in many places for joy in our lives. On *Yom Kippur* we experience a holy profound awesome transcendent joy. We do not eat, drink, wash, to transcend our bodies, and are bathed in unconditional love and divine compassion.

On *Sukkot*, we experience also a holy awesome joy but this is the joy of the immanence of God: God surrounds us, is with us, and within each of us. We eat, drink, sing, and sit with other people and we feel God. The awareness of God's Presence and love in our lives, in our world, fills us with joy.

In the *sukkah*, we can easily allow ourselves to experience our vulnerability, our depths, our simplicity, our heart and feel totally safe because we are fulfilling a mitzvah prescribed in the Torah. We are sitting in God's humble dwelling place as instructed to do. And that is all that we truly need. The holiday *Sukkot* is a time of intimacy with God and others. Intimacy with God, with our own soul and with other people brings joy.

Sitting in a *sukkah* also reminds us of the Holy Temple and rekindles within us the dream and the prayer that the whole world will soon be a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence. May we see this miracle in our days. May the Holy Temple, the headquarters for love, joy, peace and prosperity for the entire world, be rebuilt in our days. If the world knew this secret, they would beg us to rebuild the Temple.

During the holiday of *Sukkot*, we read *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes). King Solomon, who had wealth, women, power, and knowledge reviews all these things and concludes

(see Ribner, page 8)



Shabbat Shalom

By RABBI JON ADLAND

October 7, 2011,
Shabbat Yom Kippur, 9 Tishri 5772

We call our holiest day of the year *Yom Kippur* – Day of Atonement. It is a day of fasting, prayer, reflection, introspection, study, listening, considering, and forgiveness. There is nothing joyful about this day, but it isn't a day meant for sadness either. True, there may be moments of sadness as we recall a loved one who is no longer with us or at our side, but we may also be comforted as we wrap our arms or even our *tallit* around a child who sits with us during worship learning what this day is all about. It is so important that we teach our youth, the next generation, about the meaning and power of this day.

This year it falls on Shabbat and we know that what has been said about Shabbat is that it is not Jews who preserved Shabbat, but Shabbat that preserved the Jews. *Yom Kippur* hasn't preserved the Jews, but it is a day, linked to the days of ancient Israel, written about in Leviticus 16, commemorated by Jews for 3,000 years that has transformed the Jewish worshipper each year. On *Yom Kippur*, the worshipper can purge his or her soul of wrongs committed during the year just concluded and put him or herself in a place of spiritual cleanliness to begin the walk through the year to come.

Yom Kippur is not just any day. It is not a day to go to work, to school, to play, or to do anything that we might do on any other day of the year. It is a day unique to us Jews to confess our sins, pardon our iniquities, make things right with those in our community, and to set things right with God. It is meant to be a serious day not made any easier by a day of fasting depriving our bodies of nourishment as we pour out our souls to God.

From the first moments of the *Erev Yom Kippur* service through the final blast of the shofar 24 hours later, we turn from the world around us to our world, our community, and even more so, ourselves. Lest one would think that we are being selfish in turning toward ourselves, let's think of this as taking time, just one day a year, to think about who we are in relationship to God, our family and our community. It is a day for the individual to set things right – a day ordained in Torah and thus commanded to us by God.

Though I am not old, I am getting older and I worry, as so many others do, about

EDITORIAL

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his group does with their music. They travel around infusing light by highlighting the commonalities of the different religions and bringing them together for a joyful and uplifting experience. May the group continue to do so for many years. Check out the website of Ron and The Ensemble at www.yuvalronmusic.com.

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Jennie Cohen, October 12, 2011 ★



the next generation. Are we doing enough to teach this younger generation about living a Jewish life or, with all its complexities and choices, are we just shrugging our shoulders and saying to ourselves, "What can we do?" When *Yom Kippur* falls on a weekday do we tell our children that it is okay to go to school when they plead with us that they can't miss a day? When *Yom Kippur* falls on Shabbat do we tell our children that it is okay to play in the soccer or football game? If you ask me the answer is "NO." On this holiest of holy days, the secular world should stop for us and the Jewish world should be first and foremost.

We need to teach our next generation about this day and the power it holds for unlocking the chains that bind our souls because of past decisions, and how to start fresh with this power of release. We must teach our children about the power of this fast and to find meaning, as we have for centuries, in struggling with God when we are at our weakest. We need to teach them about the power of asking for forgiveness as well as the importance of forgiving. On this holiest of holy days this can't be accomplished if we are distracted by the casualness of the everyday world. On this day we turn to God with our hearts and souls.

When we light our Shabbat and *Yom Hakippurim* candles, light one to help us look back at this past year. May we recall those moments that sustained us, and be released from those moments that constrained us. Light the other candle to help us look forward to the year to come. May 5772 be filled with many moments of joy and a deeper relationship with all that enhances our soul. May your fast be easy and may your prayers on this *Yom Kippur* ascend to heaven. *Gemar Chatimah Tova* (May you be inscribed for blessing in the book of life).

Rabbi Adland has been a Reform rabbi for more than 25 years with pulpits in Lexington, Ky., Indianapolis, Ind., and currently at Temple Israel in Canton, Ohio. He may be reached at j.adland@gmail.com. ★

About the Cover

Woman's Soul Rising

By Katherine Soskin

This first piece of a two-part series was conceived after Katherine Soskin had been to Israel for the second time. She was walking in the *shuk* (market) and saw a soft pastel of the "Wall," the only "Wall" she had seen with any color. That glimpse became her springboard for taking it two steps further into a multi-media acrylic.

"What if all the people who have come to pray to this wall for thousands of years left not only a written prayer, but left part of their aura or Spirit in the color they felt at that time? This wall would become a composite of their prayers, hopes, fears, needs and strengths along with part of their energy, aura and Spirit."

Soskin has created such a wall. The left side of the painting depicts the dividing wall between the Men's and Women's side. The woman's side only allows the sun's illumination to peek through the slats and creep under the wall. Otherwise the women are in the shadows.

Since Orthodox Judaism is very patriarchal, this painting subtly shows the woman's energy from within illuminating them because the juxtaposition of the women at the wall keeps them in the 'dark'. So their own light from *Shechinah* must radiate outward instead of receiving the sunlight as her second painting "Men's Spirit at the Wall" does.

Soskin's second painting, continues next to the woman's side, receiving the sunlight to further illuminate them. They are more animated, walking, showing their faces and gesticulating. The men are more in movement of 'doing' instead of 'praying'. See that artwork at: jewishpostopinion.com/pdf/NAT_10-13-10.pdf.

After Soskin's first love of music and professional singing was no longer a viable option due to physical challenges, she turned to art as a therapeutic healer in releasing her feelings about her illnesses. After a period of time she took a few classes and lessons but is mostly self taught, first with water colors, then oils and then utilizing the various facets of acrylics.

"As long as I can be creative and assist someone else on their path it's a good day" she has said, "I also like to include some fun too!"

Soskin is the mother of two grown children and has assisted in raising 5 step-children. She has 6 grandchildren and many more step-grandchildren plus 2 great-grandchildren. Her grandchildren are the radiant fuel that fills her heart.

See more of her work at www.ksoskin.tripod.com. She can be reached by email at katherinemoskin@att.net. ★



Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Bar Mitzvahs: When to push, when to let go

I saw the blinking light on my answering machine and listened to the frantic voice of my girlfriend, Debbie, as I put the groceries away.

"Hellllllp! Jason says he doesn't want to do his *Bar Mitzvah* anymore. We've got the date and the place, I've hired the D.J. and he's already begun to prepare. He's making me crazy. What should I do? Call me."

Wow, what a bummer, I thought to myself. What would I have done if my son had said, "No, thanks, Mom. I'm not into Bar Mitzvahs." Or my daughter had decided she really didn't want the pressure and would do cheerleading instead.

Would I have forced, cajoled or guilt-tripped them into having one because I knew that they would be sorry later? Or would I have made them feel lousy for not completing a commitment that they had agreed to when they were in Jewish pre-school?

The answer is yes, and no. Yes because I know how important it is to teach our children about doing things that may not be "fun" but have a much more important meaning to them, as members of the family and the Jewish community. And no, because of an experience I had recently that changed my mind about when is the "right" time to have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

This past year I taught a group of college students who expressed an interest in having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Each one had a story to share about why they hadn't done it earlier in their lives. Some, like Debbie's son Jason, didn't want one when they were younger because they weren't ready to commit to the hard work and study. Others came from interfaith families where it wasn't an option or from Jewish communities to which they didn't feel connected.

After they left home for college, each of my students realized they had a personal desire to learn more about Judaism in order to understand their relationship to their faith, traditions, God and Israel. Each student approached our year of study with commitment, enthusiasm and genuine intellectual curiosity that was palpable in our weekly hour and a half classes. As a teacher, I was honored and thrilled to be a

part of their spiritual journey towards Jewish adulthood. As a mother of a college student myself, I was rewarded by having this very intimate opportunity to learn about the struggles, fears, doubts and joys of college life and be able to offer my students a Jewish lens by which to view their lives.

We studied Jewish history, holidays, ethics, rituals, and liturgy while building a trusting and genuine spiritual community. We shared holidays, birthdays, news about boyfriends, exam anxiety and weight gain. In my effort to provide them with meaningful Jewish study, I opened the door to questions of faith which often ended in conversations filled with doubt, guilt and fear. I was exhilarated and inspired by the honest struggle that my students willingly engaged in as part of their search to find meaning in Judaism.

The year of study culminated in a Shabbat morning service where each student was called up to read from the Torah and offered a personal interpretation or teaching about something important which they had learned or grappled with during the year.

They spoke from their hearts to everyone in the room. Anyone who had ever struggled with issues of faith, God or family was able to glean both wisdom and inspiration from their words. Individually and as a community, they had engaged in the type of serious Jewish study which would now enable them to become responsible Jewish adults. And that, in a nutshell, is the crux of what it means to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

At the end of the service, I offered my students the following words which I shared with my friend Debbie with the hope that they might shed a different light on Jason's reluctance to have a Bar Mitzvah.

"Being Jewish is not like being in a race. We shouldn't worry about getting to the finish line or keeping up with other runners. It is about making the journey, about finding our own stride and determining our own course. It is about taking that leap of faith and crossing over waters of doubt and fear in order to better understand ourselves and our family, traditions and culture. And it is because of the unique path we travel that we ultimately come to appreciate our special destiny as part of the Jewish people."

Amy Hirshberg Lederman (www.amyhirshberglederman.com) is an award-winning author and syndicated columnist, international speaker, Jewish educator and attorney. Her stories appear in the *Chicken Soup series* and her book *One God, Many Paths: Finding Meaning and Inspiration in Jewish Teachings* won the 2009 Best Book Award from the Arizona Book Publishing Association. ✨



Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

Home for the High Holidays

When I think of the High Holidays, I think of Homecoming. Repentance, the theme of the holidays – isn't that the Homecoming of the soul?

Consider our *Chumash*, the Book of Books. It speaks loud and often about return – *shuvah*. Repentance and Return, the same Hebrew word. *Shuvah* is a one-word sermon that says it all. Return to Holiness, return to your people. Come on home, you wanderers, it says. Come back home to Zion – that city high on the hill where you left your heart.

You can also apply the High Holidays message of *Shuva* to family. We all have our family Diaspora. Especially today where the whole wide world gleams with neon signs that lure our kids. And 767 flights that carry them away from us are cheap and plentiful.

I call the daughter in my Diaspora every year, a couple weeks before the Holidays.

"Lisa, this is your father, who with some assistance from your mama, gave you life."

"Oh, hi, Dad."

"Lisa, *Rosh Hashanah* is around the corner. I assume you'll return to Zion. I mean Huntsville, Alabama, where we two senior lifegivers reside."

"Uh, I'll try, Dad."

"Lisa, remember Jeremiah the prophet who could see the future and read the human heart like you read the directions on packaged *matzoh* ball mix? Well, he said, 'Return ye backsliding children'. What a prophet – three millenia and 8,000 miles removed yet he knew all about you. And if you don't believe me, check Jeremiah Chapter 3, Verse 22."

"Dad, we went through this last year. Remember, I couldn't come, but to make you happy, I sent you the signed note from the Rabbi testifying that I attended services"

"Yeah, sure. But you really oughta come home this year. It's your poor, old mom I'm worried about. She came home from water aerobics yesterday, sloshing and gurgling. Her shopping time is way down, too."

Sometimes it works – sometimes it doesn't. There's an old fable (I just originated) that makes the point about kids and High Holiday Homecoming. It's a neat parable about a family who lives happily in a cabin

(see Roberts, page 7)

You and everyone else

By RABBI SANDY EISENBERG SASSO



As our country races toward elections, we are privy to countless speeches. Among the words that will be spoken by the candidates, is there one that is more important than all the others, one that we need to hear to ensure the future of our country?

We often look to Scripture for wisdom, so I wondered what word is used most often in the Bible. You might think that it has to be "God" and what we really need is more attention to God in our nation. No, the most common word in the Bible is "and," and that is what our country needs.

In Hebrew, that word is a single letter, pronounced "vav." One letter, one word and it is repeated again and again. It is at the beginning of almost every sentence in the Bible. Some say the word was the mark God put on Cain's forehead after he killed his brother Abel. Why write "and" on Cain's forehead?

Cain thought of himself as separate from his brother. After being confronted by his murder of Abel, he asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The ancient rabbis taught that God's answer was the mark of the "vav," a sign that said, not just to Cain, but to everyone who saw Cain: You are your brother's keeper. You are connected to and responsible for each other. It's not just about you.

Our definition of who we are in the world has been marked of late by angry rhetoric and partisanship, by what divides us. It seems that our vocabulary has been limited to the words "either/or." We have a hard time reaching consensus, making compromise. We have forgotten that it is not just about me, my wants, my party; it is about us, our needs, our country. We have lost a sense of what it is that unites us, the delicate art of the "and."

Whether it is in business or politics, personal relationships or international relations, in discussions about the budget or taxes, jobs or immigration the word "and" reminds us that we are not here for our own sake alone, but for the sake and well-being of others upon whom our own security and welfare depend. We forget that at our own peril.

Our city is fortunate to sponsor a civic festival every November called "Spirit and Place." By building bridges among religion, humanities and the arts, it creates a vibrant public square where the operative word is "and."

We know all too well what happens when we don't speak the language of "and."



Wiener's Wisdom

By RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

Pekuach nefesh: The saving of a life

Sukkot is a special holiday and at the same time mostly ignored because it follows on the heels of the High Holidays. In fact tradition teaches that *Sukkot* is really part of the High Holiday season. So why then is it insignificant in many circles? Perhaps because we seem to be "holidayed out," so to speak. For several weeks we are inundated with *Selichot* prayers ushering in the "Days of Awe" and then the time arrives and we are left to ponder and contemplate. All of this culminates with the "Afflicting of our Souls" as prescribed in the Torah.

Somehow *Sukkot*, even with its rituals and trappings, such as building a *sukkah* or arranging to obtain the four species of vegetation put together with the *lulav* and *etrog*, seems to be lost in the shadow of the agony and ecstasy of renewal and anticipation.

However, I believe, we neglect to think of one aspect of all these holidays, a common denominator, if you will: The saving of life. *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* give us the ability to reconnect with God through introspection and *Sukkot* completes the journey by suggesting that now is the time to remember the blessings



Sept. 11, 2001 is but one tragic example. How do we engage the diversity of our world? How do we understand and accept the stranger, the immigrant, the one who is different by virtue of race, sexual orientation, culture, faith? How can Jews, Muslims and Christians get along, Republicans and Democrats, Israelis and Palestinians? Do we have a responsibility to the poor? Do we need to build the middle class? Do we have enough resources to care about people on the other side of the globe? Is it either us or them or we?

Plan to participate in the Spirit and Place Festival Nov. 4-13 (www.spiritandplace.org). Be part of what can happen when we speak the vocabulary of the "and."

Sasso and her husband Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso have been senior rabbis at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis for 34 years. Reprinted with permission from The Indianapolis Star, October 4, 2011. ★

of life afforded us through the beneficence of a caring and loving God. By recalling these messages we, in all probability, will be saving the lives of ourselves, our loved ones, and even those we don't know.

How is this accomplished? Simply stated, remembering that we are responsible to others for our actions. We are responsible to God for those things that relate to our spiritual well-being. We are responsible to ourselves to ensure that our lives will have meaning and purpose.

Sukkot reminds us of God's protection which is given because we take the necessary action and attitude to affect happiness and completeness. It also suggests that the shelter we build is established to connote that God too attempts to shelter us from the consequences of choices we make that can hurt us and those around us through ignorance and neglect.

Our lives certainly are tenuous and fragile as is the *Sukkah*. Therefore we must take the time to celebrate, rejoice, and give thanks. There is, however, one more aspect that needs to be part of our thoughts and actions: *pekuach nefesh* – the saving of humanity, one person at a time.

I recently met a woman, advanced in age, but determined to live her life to the fullest and prolong it even though she is suffering from failed kidneys. She is a candidate for a transplant, but is on a very long list and probably will not survive the wait.



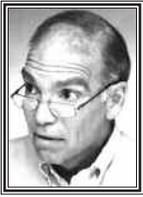
Barbara.

She needs help. She needs someone to come forward and offer her survival. She has insisted that, even though it is forbidden to purchase or sell a kidney, she is willing to make whatever arrangements are necessary to accomplish her goal: To spend her twilight years in the bosom of her family enjoying their continued growth and development.

She is not unique. There are, I am sure, many people who have maladies that require unusual attempts at life saving efforts. What does separate her is that she is not angry. She is not angry at God. She is not angry at anyone. She is accepting but hopeful. She is prayerful but realistic. She has the love of husband, children, grandchildren and friends.

I spent much time with her listening to her story. I left feeling empty and helpless. All I could offer were words of encouragement and of spiritual awareness. I have encouraged some to say Psalms for her every day. She is on every *misheberach* list I could find.

(see Wiener, page 9)



Shipley Speaks

BY JIM SHIPLEY

A rock and a hard place

It has never been easy. When Abraham brought his tribe out of the Land of Ur, the first thing he ran into was a drought. So, he took his people for a “sojourn” into Egypt. That worked out well.

The Jews were the perfect scapegoat for governments controlled by the Catholic Church for centuries, resulting in expulsion, at one time or another, from England, Spain, Germany and others. When Herzl came to the conclusion that since nobody seemed to want us, we had better find our own place, he struck a chord. But where? Governments of the world thought that was a splendid idea – as long as it was somewhere nobody else wanted.

But one small strip that had not had an indigenous government for over 2,000 years beckoned. “If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem...” And so it began. The thing about the world is that agreements between nations and peoples last as long as both parties want them. If one or the other decides that the particular agreement no longer suits their national agenda or the whims of the ruling party, the agreement no longer means anything.

You would think that a small piece of dry land, devoid of oil, comprising less than one percent to the Middle East land mass would not amount to a hill of beans to anyone. But bring in religion and oh boy.

It made sense to the socialists of Eastern Europe. They lived in their little *shtetls* until the landlord or the czar or the bishop decided they shouldn’t. They were steeped in the faith of their fathers. But, underlying all the prayers and the customs was the tradition of peoplehood. The Jews were a people long before they were a religion. So, it made sense. Go to Palestine! Create the Third Jewish Commonwealth! A people without a land for a land without people. Well, yeah, almost.

Why did we think they would want us back in the ancient and holy land of Israel any more than they did anywhere else? Did it matter that every inch of land that was settled by the founders was bought and paid for? Did it matter that the land had no governance and was always a wasteland till we got there? No.

But, for the first time in so many centuries, here the Jews took a stand. They would fight. Fight to keep the land

they bought and settled. The Turks, who had ruled the area since Caliphate was overthrown figured – okay, we’ll take the Jews’ money, let them go there and then we’ll have them slaughtered and take the land back. Not this time. Not these Jews.

When Britain took the area from the Turks in WWI, life became calmer if not better. Immigration continued from the bigotry and pogroms of Eastern Europe. Then the Holocaust. And now, literally no other place for Jews. Not back to Poland, not even the U.S. And so, partly out of guilt over the Holocaust, partly because the role of conqueror was swiftly going out of style, it was agreed that there would be two tiny states on a tiny piece of infertile, oil free land that nobody wanted until the Jews made it habitable.

The Arabs, who never gave a fig for this land, suddenly found it the most desirable place on the planet. Why? Because the Jews were there. It hasn’t changed. The Palestinians, who did not exist as a people 60 years ago, want it all. The new Islamist government of Turkey wants to use the Jew as scapegoat again so they can once again dominate the Middle East. The Arab Spring needs a rallying point as they try to figure out how to run something after centuries of having others run them.

This new sudden peoplehood – The Palestinians – wants a State. Now, 66 years later when the land has become fertile, the people of the land prosperous, they unilaterally want it all. And enough of the world, still harboring the hate of the Jew, the other, will might just sit back and let it happen.

Let a “State” be created that has never had a negotiated border. While the world has let stand borders all over the world created by the victors in war, this one will be decided by fiat? No. Not this time.

Israel is intransigent. True. Who can blame them? The government of the Sovereign Jewish State is a leaky coalition. Man, that is so Jewish! The world wants them to settle this thing already. Go! Give back some more land. Let a State be created that can make treaties with your worst enemies who have sworn to destroy you. We, the powerful nations of the world have too many problems of our own. Yes, problems we have created out of our own greed and lack of foresight but more important than the future of the Jewish State.

So, Israel is back in the spotlight. Between a rock and a hard place. Not a new thing for the Jewish people. Good time for the High Holy Days. And to look to the future. We have been here before. And we are still here. Accept it world.

Jim Shipley has had careers in broadcasting, distribution, advertising, and telecommunications. He began his working life in radio in Philadelphia. He has written his JP&O

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surrounded by a thick, pathless woods. Beyond the woods is a meadow, then the bright world.

The father knows that sooner or later the son – energized by his youthful curiosity about the world beyond the meadow – will leave the bosom of his family. Ah, but those woods. Dark, frightening, full of brambles. The boy will never find his way back to the cabin once his restless heart is satisfied.

“When you leave,” said the father, “you must mark your trail because someday you’ll want to return. Don’t forget.”

“Right,” replied the confident youth. “But why do you always think me a half-grown fool who can’t even find his way home and why do you assume I’ll return? The people out there (and he gestured beyond the cabin walls) will think me wise and beautiful. You’ll see.”

Soon after this conversation, the boy left. Early in the morning he stole out of his bedroom window and stepped into the impenetrable forest and brashly rushed through the woods in his eagerness for freedom. At a safe distance, the father followed, diligently marking the trail from home through the woods. Then with a long look at his son briskly striding over the meadow, the father returned home.

At *Rosh Hashanah*, the youth returned. And at the festive holiday table, told wondrous tales of the woods and the world beyond. “And did you have any trouble finding your way back to us?” asked the father.

“None whatsoever,” replied the son. “I told you the trail is clearly marked. Piece of cake!”

So says the legend. It’s not a bad moral. They all come home sooner or later. But you must mark the trail. May all your children find their way home these High Holidays and may the lost ones of Israel find their way thru the thick and thorny woods. The trail is clearly marked.

Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner, is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. When he’s not writing, Ted worships at Etz Chayim Synagogue in Huntsville, Ala., where for 25 years he has served as bar mitzvah teacher. His inspiration is his patient wife, Shirley. Check out his Web site: www.wonderwordworks.com. Blogsite: www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com. His collected works The Scribbler on The Roof can be bought at Amazon.com or lulu.com/content/127641. ★



column for more than 20 years and is director of Trading Wise, an international trade and marketing company in Orlando, Fla. ★

Gather the People



BY MAGIDAH
KHULDA BAT SARAH
AND RABBI MOSHE
BEN ASHER, PH.D.

Kavannah for Sukkot

Here's a *kavannah* (an intentional focus) to take with you into your *sukkah*.

The root of the Hebrew word for *sukkah* roofing material, *s'chach*, means "to protect, to distance strange elements."

But how can a roof that is open to the sky, like the roof of a *sukkah*, protect us? What kind of protection are we talking about?

It's the kind of protection we enjoyed as a people when God brought us out of Egypt, when we lived not in houses, but in *sukkot* or booths. So for a moment now, we want you to imagine that we are there, that we are them, and that God has just brought us out of Egypt.

We and our children stand at the edge of a vast wilderness. As we look out, it seems endless. And we wonder what will we do when the food runs out and maybe more importantly, what about the water? A person can survive for perhaps three days without water. And what about shelter? How will we shield ourselves and our children from the sun and the wind?

When we look out, we see nothing that would give us any assurance of survival. And yet, we step forward into that wilderness.

And that is what is *still* required of us. As Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808– 1888) teaches us, we are called to step forward on the basis of no concrete guarantees that we can see in this world, to act *l'sheim shama'im*, that is, for the sake of heaven, and for the sake of Torah – for the sake of the good – even when everything we see and our experience tells us that it won't work, even when we will be ridiculed and reviled for it.

For that is what our faith requires of us, to act for the good in spite of our experience to the contrary. The scripture says that we were fed with *manna* and made to live in booths to teach us that it is not by bread alone, nor by shelter alone, that we live. And the *sukkah* is a reminder of all that.

If it could speak, our *sukkah* would say: At this time of harvest, when you are tempted to think that you were the one who produced this wealth, when you think that it is on the basis of your own

power alone, *remember*, it is an illusion. Remember Who sustained you then and Who sustains you now. And remember that you are not alone. And that the good you accomplish for the sake of heaven cannot be accomplished alone.

For the Torah (Leviticus 23:39) says: *tachogu et chag Adoshem* (you shall celebrate the festival of God), which means that in addition to holding a feast, we are to form a festive circle around God and the sanctuary of God's Torah. It means that, for the moment, we give up living separately to join ourselves to the nation assembled around God. For the real joy in life is not to be found in the well-being of individuals. Only in our all joining together can we make God's Torah a reality on earth.

And what does the *lulav* have to do with all this?

On *Sukkot*, we are commanded to rejoice before the presence of God for the gifts that God has given us. We are told: "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of the beautiful tree, leaves of palm branches, and twigs of myrtle, and willows of the brook and you shall rejoice before *Adonai Eloheichem* seven days." (Leviticus 23:40)

This tells us, our rabbis say, that God has given us the right, even the duty, to stretch out our hands and grasp the good things of this earth and to obtain happiness in the presence of God.



These gifts of the harvest for which we offer a blessing are sometimes understood as a kind of harvest bouquet. But there is another way to understand the word "gifts." The rabbis understood the *lulav* to be representative of the different ways in which God is revealed – that is, in the different spiritual and moral gifts of the people who form the nation of God.

There are those who are an immediate revelation of God's glory, like the *etrog*, the color and scent of which is immediately apparent. There are those who strive upwards to do what is right, straight and strong, like the palm-tree (*kapot t'marim*). There are those who, like the myrtle, flourish in the midst of whirlpools (*anaf eitz avot*). And there are those who blossom in the middle of the wilderness, like the willows (*arvei nachal*). In joining them together in one combined union, the failings of one are balanced by the perfection of the other.

So in honor of *Sukkot*, for the rest of our *d'var Torah* we propose that you work at discovering those gifts. We want you to find the person in your *sukkah* or the sanctuary of your synagogue that you know the least. If there's no one that you don't know, then you will have to work

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that none of them really matter. "All is vanity". In the end of the matter, all is heard, you shall fear God, observe His *mitzvot* for this is the whole of a person." It is the God connection that is the most important possession we acquire during our brief time on earth. It is the only thing that we take with us when we leave this physical world.

Melinda (Mindy) Ribner, L.C.S.W. is a spiritual psychotherapist and healer in private practice (www.kabbalahoftheheart.com). She is a teacher of Jewish meditation and Kabbalah for over 25 years. Author of Kabbalah Month by Month, New Age Judaism, and Everyday Kabbalah, she is also the founder and director of Beit Miriam (www.Beitmiriam.org). She can be reached by email at Beitmiriam@msn.com or Miriam@kabbalahoftheheart.com. Kabbalah Month by Month offers guidelines, meditations, strategies, stories to promote personal growth and healing each month. ★



extra hard to discover the hidden gifts of a person you already know.

You are to spend 10 minutes with this person. During that time, ask questions that will help you get to know the person. Find out what their gift is. And allow that person to ask questions of you so they can do the same. Listen carefully, because afterwards you will introduce that person and his or her special gift to the group.

Whatever our gifts might be, and whatever position in life they have allotted to us, the *lulav* teaches us that –

- Whether we are like the willow, without its own fruit, without even resisting strength, even if we are only able to prove our worth as baskets for carrying and keeping;
- Whether like the myrtle we shine forth in our own beauty;
- Whether like the date palm, quietly and without glory, with hard, strong unyielding work, we produce that which is most useful and helpful; or
- Whether we sparkle like the splendid fruit of the splendid tree –

Any and every sphere of life can be full and honorable.

Any sphere can in its own way achieve perfection and beauty if only it is lived in the presence of God.

Chag Sameach!

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Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Magidah Khulda bat Sarah are the Co-Directors of *Gather the People*, a nonprofit organization that provides Internet-based resources for congregational community organizing and development (www.gatherthepeople.org). ★



Jewish Spirituality

By RABBI ELI MALLON

Hitbonenut: Contemplation along a highway

"Who knows, but that the universe is not one vast sea of compassion actually, the veritable holy honey, beneath all this show of personality and cruelty?" ~ Jack Kerouac

One August night in 1969, I was hitchhiking from San Francisco to Los Angeles. I was 22. I had the romantic idea that I'd hitch all day as far as I could, and wherever I found myself in the evening, throw out my sleeping bag and spend the night.

I was in for a surprise.

It never occurred to me that people wouldn't want a stranger in a sleeping bag sleeping on their lawn! Plus, someone who'd given me a ride let me know that the police would arrest me for trespassing if I went on private property, or vagrancy, if I tried to sleep on public property. I also remember being told that the motels and campsites were full.

So, as the sun was going down, I found myself on the Pacific Coast Highway, around Carmel, with nowhere to go for the night. At that spot, it was a 2-way road; one lane in each direction. Lots of dangerous curves. Behind me were some trees or hills. Across the road from me was a drop directly into the Pacific Ocean. I couldn't stay there, so I tried to keep hitching south. After a while when no one picked me up, I just wanted a ride anywhere, and tried hitching in either direction. It was dark, the fog was rolling in, I was tired.

I began to wonder how I'd gotten myself into this and thought about my lack of planning. But then, something happened.

My mind began to remember all the thoughts, even before my trip, that had led me there, too. Then – the thoughts that led to those thoughts, and so on. It kept expanding, until I realized that every thought I'd ever had in my entire life, even years earlier, had led me to that very place, at that very moment.

Then, I saw G-d.

I can't tell you more than that. I wasn't a "believer;" I didn't do any sort of prayer or meditation in those days. I didn't see a Light; certainly not a form or any other image. It wasn't an idea. Nor a belief. I wasn't drinking or using drugs. It was just

an awareness of G-d as a Real Presence. G-d was suddenly truly present to me. I can't describe it. But I knew it was G-d.

I wasn't suddenly ecstatically happy. I wasn't "seeing G-d" in some kind of natural beauty. I wasn't suddenly "sorry for my sins," as some people describe their experience. (Actually, I didn't even think at the time that I'd done any sins!)

What changed in me, in that brief moment, was: I could no longer doubt that there is a G-d. I'd had an experience that I couldn't deny or rationalize. It didn't feel like I'd suddenly found my "life-purpose" or my "mission." What happened just happened. (Writing this now, though, I realize that after it did, I was no longer at all concerned about how I'd gotten myself into such a spot, or what was going to happen that night.)

Directly after that moment, someone picked me up and took me to a campsite he and some friends were sharing in Big Sur. The next day, I headed back north with them to San Francisco and Marin County. While there, I visited again with some New York friends who had moved there. They were highly intelligent, articulate people – far more than I. At some point in the conversation (in which I was usually more of a passive listener), something was brought up about doubting that anyone could believe in G-d.

Then – I did something very uncharacteristic of me, especially in those days. I disagreed with them. I didn't "argue." I simply said, "I believe in G-d." There was no tension in me, there was no defensiveness. I simply made my statement and then described what had happened to me on the highway. I remember the room being kind of quiet. They weren't sure what to make of it, but were ready to pounce on the idea, I think, except that they saw that I wasn't trying to convince them. One man, Michael, said something like, "If that's what really happened, it was very profound." He could have been quite scathing, if he'd chosen to be. But he was only highly skeptical, without being unkind. I just shrugged helplessly. I couldn't explain or discuss it any more than that.

I've almost never spoken of it again, in all these years. I intuitively felt that it shouldn't be talked about too often or too commonly. It seemed like a "private" matter. But I never forgot it. It felt very easy and good to write about it tonight (3/3/11), almost 42 years later. Remembering it suffuses me with a special peacefulness.

Rabbi Mallon first came as an adult to Jewish learning, after experience with Transcendental Meditation (TM), yoga, and other growth-producing modalities. He also studied Jewish Science and Visualization at

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Still I feel despondent because that is all I have to offer.

So I turn to my readers and ask if you know any way you can lend a hand. I urge you to call me or write me with whatever information you have available. I take this unusual step because of the message I have received through the High Holiday experience and significance of holiday called *Sukkot*.

There is something I read recently written by Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman titled, *A Prayer for Prayer*. The following are excerpts from his offering:

O My God

My soul's companion

My heart's precious friend

I turn to you.

In your oneness, I find healing.

In the promise of Your love, I am soothed.

In Your wholeness, I too can

become whole again.

Please listen to my call –

Help me find the words

Help me find the strength within

*Help me shape my mouth, my voice,
my heart*

So that I can direct my spirit and

find You in prayer

In words only my heart can speak

In songs only my soul can sing

Lifting my eyes and heart to You.

This is my prayer as we begin a New Year: A prayer for God's guidance and understanding so that all who listen and read will find the courage to affect true *pekuach nefesh* for a woman called Barbara.

Rabbi Irwin Wiener is spiritual leader of the Sun Lakes Jewish Congregation near Phoenix, Ariz. He welcomes comments at ravyitz@cox.net. ✨

Thought

Judaism is a religion of time... every hour is unique, exclusively and endlessly precious. ~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

the Society of Jewish Science in New York. Over the years, he has taught people of all ages as a bar/bat mitzvah instructor, Hebrew school teacher, cantor, pastoral counselor and rabbi, in addition to his work in public education. He resides in New City, NY. View other works by him at <http://rabbielimallon.wordpress.com>. ✨



Jewish Theater

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

Harry & Eddie, Follies, and Kaddish

Harry & Eddie – The birth of Israel

The title gives promise of an intriguing story covering a critical moment in history. The characters to which playwright Mark Weston refers are Harry Truman and his one-time business partner Eddie Jacobson. The two were close friends, according to the play, and co-owners of a men's clothing store. Moreover, the play indicates, Jacobson strongly influenced President Truman's decision to recognize Israel.

But intriguing stories do not necessarily translate into strong plays – or any kind of play, for that matter. And Weston's concoction, which is now running off-Broadway at St. Luke's Theatre, has yet to reach the level of drama. What we have is a monologue, an Eddie Jacobson monologue, delivered from a podium. No, make that a lecture. Though occasionally other characters share brief encounters with Eddie, and there are rudiments of a dramatic exchange, one could gain as much by reading a magazine article.

Weston has his background facts correct. Eddie's father, a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania, moves from the lower East Side to Kansas City, Mo., a city which he feels offers greater opportunities. He soon

becomes a milkman, and his son, growing up in Missouri, (and noted for his "silver tongue") eventually becomes a salesman. Joining the army in 1917, Eddie bonds with Harry Truman, who is his captain. After the war, they launch a business, which thrives for several years. When hard times take over, Eddie becomes a road salesman and Harry goes into politics.

Yet the two remain close friends, according to *Harry & Eddie*. And in Eddie's frequent White House visits, he pleads the cause of the Jewish people. Israel is pushing for statehood and recognition by the United Nations, and official American support could make the difference. Truman, who has an anti-Semitic wife, according to the records (and is himself no lover of the Jewish people) resists the pleas of "pushy Jews" (Rabbi Hillel Abba Silver among them). But ultimately, with Jacobson's persistent urging, Truman sees Chaim Weitzmann and goes on to recognize Israel as a state.

Eddie is the only fleshed-out character, and a rather endearing character at that (as performed ably by Rick Grossman). He is unpolished, unsophisticated, but decent, good-hearted, and devoted to the Jewish cause. Whether he actually played the key role that *Harry & Eddie* attributes to him is controversial. Margaret Truman's biography noted that such claims were "absurd," but Weston says that the friendship was well documented by historians.

True facts or not, the question is: how well does this story translate to the stage? Though Eddie comes through clearly, his monologue is limited, flat, and cliché-ridden. Granted that the real Eddie Jacobson may indeed have spoken and thought in that way. But more serious

problems lie with other characters. Harry Truman is a stick figure, as is Eddie's wife Bluma, and their exchanges with Eddie carry no impact. It is difficult to care what happens to any of these three, despite the story's intriguing dramatic possibilities.

Back to the drawing board for *Harry & Eddie*, we would hope. There is too much story potential to let this piece languish on the vine. We look to a revitalized piece, with stronger characterizations and more intensive, believable exchanges. It is a story which deserves no less.

Follies

Follies. The name implies a splashy Broadway show with gorgeous girls in elaborate costumes descending stairways, with large-scale company numbers, with upbeat song-and-dance routines, with spectacular stage sets.

Wrong! This is Stephen Sondheim territory, and you can bet on a very different take – in fact, a darkened world. Specifically, the *Follies* story is all about disappointment, regrets, and the roads not taken. Looking to the past and longings for one's youth is the dominant theme. This is not a Rodgers/Hammerstein feel-good show.

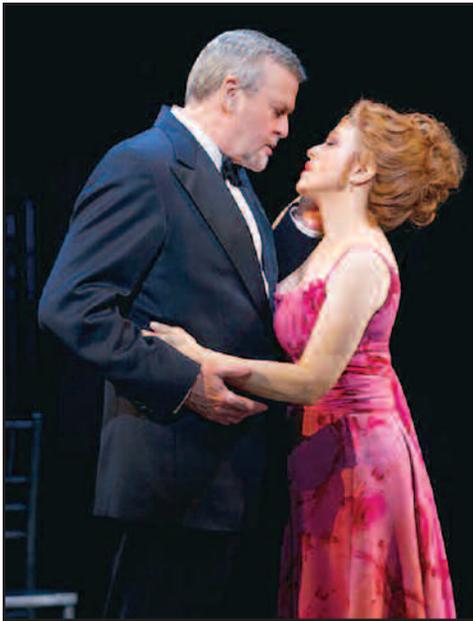
One cannot but reflect, however, on the Hammerstein connection. Sondheim, with a difficult childhood as the son of a divorced couple – New York, Jewish, West Side – had much darkness in his own early years. It's as if centuries of dark Jewish history weighed in on his work. But he would go on to be mentored by Hammerstein, learning much from his surrogate father, and taking musical theater to a new level.

This *Follies*, now in a fine revival at the Marquis Theatre, opens on a dim stage, with wandering ghostly figures. It is an abandoned theater, soon to be torn down for a parking lot. But as the stage lightens and real people appear, an impresario, Dmitri Weismann (or Ziegfeld?) announces that this is a reunion of his many past performers (stars, chorus girls and their mates). It is 1971. They are looking back some 30 years and earlier, when the "Follies" were in their heyday.

Like any reunion affair, there are joyous hugs and moments of happy recognition. But gradually, layer upon layer peels away. Two unhappily married couples come to the forefront. They are Sally and Buddy, Phyllis and Ben – two former chorus girls and the stage-door Johnnies they married. They look back at the joyous times of their youth, when the boys waited at the stage door. What went wrong over the years? Why were particular choices made? For anyone who looks back – and most of us approaching later years do just that –



(Left to Right): Dan Hicks (as Harry S. Truman) and Rick Grossman (as Eddie Jacobson) and Lydia Gladstone (as Bluma Jacobson) in *Harry & Eddie*. Photo credit: Carol Rosegg.



Ron Raines and Bernadette Peters in *Follies*. Photo credit: Joan Marcus.

such issues are painfully relevant. And Sondheim, with tunes like “The Road You Didn’t Take,” “Could I Leave You?” and “Too Many Mornings,” really strikes home, as does the show’s book by James Goldman.

With Derek McLane’s down-played stage set, the production certainly captures the Sondheim mood. It is, if anything, anti-Broadway – or at least a different Broadway. And, in fact, far more suited to our own disaffected times than an *Oklahoma* or *South Pacific*. The production, under Eric Schaeffer’s direction (with choreography by Warren Carlyle and musical direction by James Moore), surely maintains that mood. Ghosts blend with real-life characters, even as the past blends with the present.

As to the performers, Jan Maxwell and Danny Burstein are terrific, with Ron Raines not far behind. Maxwell and Burstein create achingly vulnerable characters. And others in the cast add considerable substance – Jane Houdyshell in all-too-brief appearances, and Elaine Paige belting out “I’m Still Here.” Only Bernadette Peters, the much-touted lead, is a disappointment. Is Peters just too attractive and glamorous, despite efforts to dress her in a frumpy dress and wig? In any event, she seems to disappear into the woodwork, hardly meeting the challenge of lead character. It is only when she comes on stage, clad in a slinky black gown to sing “Losing My Mind,” that the best of Peters comes through.

All told, this *Follies* revival will pierce your heart – particularly if you can look back, wondering if you made the right life choices.

“Kaddish” in dramatic form

Performer Donnie Mather has taken the famed Allen Ginsberg poem “Kaddish”

and transformed it into a solo piece. It has recently enjoyed a brief run off-off-Broadway, but speaks so poignantly to audiences in this dramatic form that it could well go on to future New York productions.

In a makeshift little theater housed in an old East Village building, this showing reminds one of the earlier off-off-Broadway scene. Much can be made of little – and, in this case, it certainly does. On the pocket-size stage, with few props and limited background images, Mather has all he needs to give us a vibrant Allen Ginsberg.

The Ginsberg poem is appropriately named “Kaddish” (the Jewish prayer for the dead). And though Ginsberg would later become a Buddhist, his Jewish heritage is inherent in his work, never far from the surface.

“Kaddish” is Ginsberg’s agonizing tribute to his own mother, a schizophrenic whom he saw through numerous hospitalizations, electroshock treatment, and, ultimately, a lobotomy. As a 13-year-old, Ginsberg took on enormous responsibility. His father and older brother Eugene were somewhat removed from the scene. Allen was in charge. And, though revolted and horrified, he loved and tended his mother. It was a responsibility – and resentment – he would feel all his life.

These life experiences would provide the necessary elements for a strong voice and a visionary poet. Born and raised in New Jersey, Ginsberg would move on to a larger world, becoming one of the driving forces of the Beat Generation. With colleagues Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady and others, he would be the spokesman for the rebels of the 1950s and 1960s. And



Donnie Mather in *Kaddish* (or *The Key in the Window*). Photo credit: Ben Strothmann.

A Bit of Wit

A Sukkah on Park Avenue

An observant Jew who lived on Park Avenue, built a *sukkah* on his balcony. Some of his “high society” non-Jewish neighbors brought him to court. They claimed that the *sukkah* on his balcony was an eyesore and was having a negative impact on the value of their homes in this posh neighborhood.

In court, the man was very worried about the outcome. It was the eve of the eight-day holiday, leaving him no time to make alternative arrangements in case the judge ordered him to take down the *sukkah*. He prayed for help.

And Hashem listened.

Judge Ginsburg, who was Jewish himself, had a reputation of being a very wise man. After hearing both sides, he turned around to the observant Jew and scolded him:

“Don’t you realize that you live on Park Avenue, and not in Brooklyn?”

“There is a certain decorum which is expected on Park Avenue. You have no right to be putting up an ugly hut on this lovely street without a building permit authorizing it. I hereby rule that either you remove the hut, or I will fine you \$1,000. You have exactly eight days to do so! Next Case!”

Submitted by Arnold Parris, *Overland Park, Kansas.* ✨



though his poem “Howl” brought him international fame, it is “Kaddish” which speaks most directly to his own experience. Using a style somewhat reminiscent of Walt Whitman, but also influenced by William Carlos Williams and other contemporary poets, Ginsberg’s scattered images and chaotic phrases flash through the poem like stab wounds.

Mather gives endless variety to his performance, using body language, facial expressions, and, of course, the text itself. “Kaddish” is a fine tribute, not only to Naomi Ginsberg, but to the poet as well. And, indeed, to the off-off-Broadway scene.

Theater critic Irene Backalenick covers theater for national and regional publications. She has a Ph.D. in theater criticism from City University Graduate Center. Her book *East Side Story – Ten Years with the Jewish Repertory Theatre won a first-place national book award in history.* She welcomes comments at IreneBack@sbcglobal.net and invites you to visit her website: nytheater.scene.com or at: jewish-theatre.com. ✨



Confidentially Yours

BY AVI & ADELE

On meeting his kids

Dear Avi and Adele:

I have been dating this guy for six months and things seem to be going really well. I've expressed interest in meeting his two kids, but he seems reluctant. Should I take this as a sign that he's not interested in the relationship going further, or that he's not ready for me to meet them? ~ Like Him Lots

Dear Like:

So you think you should take up a career as a psychic? No? Then why are you trying to predict the future?

Good for you indicating that you're interested in meeting his little *bubelehs* (dear children). After all, you knew when you began dating him that these little munchkins were part of the package. You've probably already been flexible in scheduling your time with him around his kid time so your current query is just another aspect of your relationship that requires flexibility – on your part especially.

Our experience has shown that dating a parent has some intricacies that are worth noting. There are probably two things running through your Schlomo's mind given his hesitation. First, many parents are leery of introducing the kids to a new love interest because they are concerned about the kids' reaction. The kids may become overly attached or not attached at all as children can be spiteful and jealous little creatures. Who knows? They may be unruly or prone to embarrassing your *menchy* (decent) man, or he may be trying to prevent a future sense of loss.

A second, and highly likely, factor in his hesitation has to do solely with him: he may not be ready yet for you to see him as a "Daddy." We have a friend who says that she dies a little death each time a date hears her daughter call her "Mommy" for the first time. He has been under your lens of scrutiny as a suitor for six months; seeing him as a parent adds additional pressure to impress. He's probably thinking, "What if I yell too much? What if I'm not able to give my lovely Leah enough attention? What if she hates me around my kids?"

When dating a single parent, it's not enough to say "I love kids" or "I think my niece is the greatest thing ever." Single parents, even in the most peaceful of co-parenting arrangements, have the

stress of raising a kid single-handedly. Your comments about your love of children likely carry the same meaning as your love of whales: they are nice to look at, kind of fun to spot in the wild, but you aren't the one putting that whale to bed.

Take it slow, and let him know that when he's ready, you're ready. He'll appreciate the leeway, even if you don't entirely understand his perspective.

Ready for your close-up? Tips on dating profile photos

Dear Avi and Adele:

How can I select the best photos for my online profile on jdate.com? ~ Cute Punim

Dear Cute Punim:

All the online dating sites will tell you that photo quality impacts the responses that you get, and we have to agree. Here are a few easy steps you can take to get the best possible outcome from your profile.

1. Choose a close-up, cropped headshot for your primary photo. You should be the only subject in the photo, and it should be a flattering, everyday, recent photo.

2. When choosing a photo that has more than just you in it, clearly identify yourself or crop it down. Girls hate trying to determine which guy matches the profile when looking at a photo of five tall-dark-and-*menschy* guys (and she's more likely to ask you who your cute friend is); guys hate learning that the other hot woman in the photo turns out to be your *mamele*.

3. Consider how the photo reflects your personality. If you only went to one concert in the past five years, and you choose a dolled-up concert photo, ask yourself if it accurately portrays your personality. Halloween costumes, photos with your ten cats, and shots of you doing shots of Manishevitz are generally advised against.

4. In the same line, consider your expression in the photos. Guys seem compelled to post "tough guy" photos, which many girls see as the "Sleeping with the Enemy" expression. Girls like to either show their bookish or their party girl side with their hair and clothing, which guys see as well, either librarian or party girl.

5. Do not post pictures of your pet, you with your pet, you with friends who did not give you permission to be in their photos, your friends' children or your own, or your car. If we had to explain why, you need more help than we can offer.

Best of luck on digital dating. Honesty in photography is truly the best policy.

Livin' and Lovin', Avi and Adele

To submit questions to Confidentially



Fun Coach

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

Fun is easy

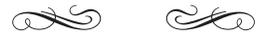
Fun is easy. It's wherever you are, in whatever you are doing or sensing or thinking. It's between you and the person you're with or the machine you're using or the table you're sitting at or the path you're walking down. It's not something to strive for. But something to melt into, to sink into, to open up to. Listen. You can almost hear the laughter. Breathe. You can almost taste the joy. Listen a little more closely. Breathe a little more deeply. And there it is again. Fun. Real fun. Deep, forever fun.

So, look, I'm sorry if all these articles about how important fun is, and how many games there are to play and learn and how you can learn to lead games and how you can help other people have more fun and be a fun coach and stuff and things – I'm sorry if I somehow gave you the impression that fun is one of those things you have to study (though studying fun can be great fun) or teach (same with teaching fun) or coach people in (ditto with the fun potential).

Fun isn't the hard thing. The hard thing is remembering to have it. Even when you spend your lifesavings on something you think will be the most fun you've ever had or will have, you forget. Instead, you start thinking about how much more fun it will be when you land, how much more fun it will be when you finally unpack, and how much more fun than that it will be when you finally get back home. Or you start believing, maybe because someone told you, that you have to earn it, or deserve it, or get wise enough or enlightened enough or have sacrificed enough or been good enough.

No, no, no. I say again, no. Fun is easy. It's the most natural feeling there is. It's life. It's living. It's being a being. Don't let me or anyone else make you think other. Remembering to have fun might be hard. Believing that you can have fun might be hard. Allowing yourself to have fun might be hard. But fun? Fun is easy.

Bernie DeKoven has devoted his life to helping people bring more fun into their lives. Online at <http://deepfun.com>. ✨



Yours: Avi and Adele, please email aa@letmypeoplegrow.org. For additional Jewish content, please go to www.letmypeoplegrow.org. ✨

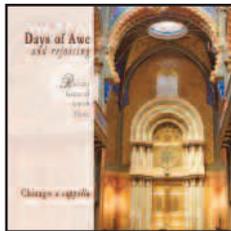


As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

Two thumbs up for this CD

I am pleased to describe a marvelous CD recorded by a choral group of ten superb singers known as "Chicago a cappella" who are directed by Patrick Sinozich. The title of this beautiful CD is: *Days of Awe and rejoicing: Radiant Gems of Jewish Music*. I am pleased to relate that the CD lives up to its title and then some.



As an *etwas* conductor myself, I would sorely be tempted to do whatever Satan would require of me to have this group at my disposal as they are that good. While not every selection is related to Yom Kippur the performances alone are well worth the price of the CD. Yes, there surely may be other small choirs that may be as good as this one. However, I do not believe that there is one (save in the heavenly sphere) that is any better. This CD has 22 selections. What follows is my brief reaction to each.

1) "*Shalom Aleichem*", attributed to Rabbi Isaac of Vorke. This solo chant-like rendition (traditional Eastern European style of *davening*) is ably performed by Benjamin Rivers.

2) Psalm 112 "*Hal'luyah*" by Salomone Rossi. Composed over 500 years ago, it sounds even more beautiful and powerful now as it did then.

Folks who attend small *shuls* of various "streams" or *Havurahs* these days are still under the impression that Jews have no tradition of choral singing or of choral participation in the service. They are mistaken. Even when faced with this example of Renaissance style they will counter that this sort of thing is *goyish* (non-Jewish). I would aver that anything this most likely well meaning but uniformed lot are not familiar with they would demean by calling it *goyish*. OK, *goyim* use electric lighting, have carpets in their houses of worship, have rest rooms, plumbing, stoves, and such. Should we not have these things simply because they do?

It was an eye opener for me to observe several years ago that in the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam there still

stands a built-in music stand for the choral director. (This is and was a historic Orthodox synagogue. The only difference between choirs in Orthodox congregations and other Jewish houses of worship is that in Orthodox *shuls*, the choirs are all male as they still are in the Vatican and several English Cathedrals.) The performance of Rossi's masterpiece is not only beautiful but even inspiring. It really doesn't get any better than this.

3) "If I am not for myself" from *Pirke Avot* set by Robert Applebaum, The text is attributed to Hillel. This composition is both moving and expressive. The soloists (Elizabeth Grizzel and Brian Stroom) acquit themselves very well.

4) "*Hineini*" by Joseph Kurland, arranged by M. Janowski with Carl Plachy, soloist. This is an Orthodox approach to using a choir with a cantor. The cantor essentially sings by himself with the choir occasionally supporting with a few notes and echoing the end of a phrase. Mr. Plachy sings very well, but it seems like a waste of a perfectly wonderful choir to me!

5) "*Uri Tzafon*" by Dov Carmel and arranged by Y. Braun. Like the selection by Applebaum, this features excellent choral writing and would be suitable for any good choral group. Chicago does it justice.

6) "Four Motets" by Paul Schoenfeld. While the Applebaum and Carmel works could be performed in a synagogue service, these motets are more suitable for the concert hall. Number 9, "*Horeyni darchecha*" however is an exception in this group.

10) "*Schhecheyanu*" by Jonathan Miller is a joyful, even rousing setting of this prayer. Miller was the founder and artistic director of this group. To state that the performance got everything out of it that Miller put in would still be an understatement.

11) "*Uvashofar Gadol*" by Joel Feig, Hoss Brock was the excellent cantor in this work. There is a solo soprano (Cari Plachy) singing ever so well in thirds doing full justice what I can only imagine a boy soprano trying to do. The style is in character with *davening* and not really noteworthy until the phrase *KI lo yizku v'eynecha badin*.

This phrase is an excellent example of what choirs used to sing, especially in New York in the years before World War II and may still be doing today. It may be dated, but that is not to say that is not exciting and downright engaging to listen to even today.

12) "Traditional *Kaddish* from *Ne'ilah*" as arranged by M. Janowski. While I heard other variations on this melody, this one as well as the rendition given by Stroom and Grizzel, as soloists are right on the mark.

13) "*Hava Nagila*" by Stacy Garrop. This familiar melody attributed to Moshe Nathanson is given a very different treatment by Garrop. This is probably the most difficult work to perform, and the beginning and end of the work are not in character with the rest of the piece and may not be worth the effort. This work would be a challenge to any choral group.

14) "*Shiru L'Yom Tov*" (Four Festive Songs) by Shulamit Ran. No. 14 is not of this planet, while No. 15 definitely is. (Superb choral singing.) No. 16, a setting of "*Ma Tovu*" suggests something medieval with its open fifths, while No. 17, while short is charming.

18) "Traditional *Ashamnu*", with Brian Stroom as soloist. No arranger is given for the wordless choral section.

At last, we have returned to the synagogue! No. 19 "*Avinu Malkeynu*" by Max Janowski is arranged by Patrick Sinozich. (The work needed to be arranged for choir as the original is a work for soloist and organ.)

When one thinks of *Yom Kippur*, musically speaking, one thinks of the music for *Kol Nidre*. After that there is this wonderful piece of music by Janowski. Kathryn Kamp gives a musically thrilling rendition of this emotional prayer. Great music, great singing. It really doesn't get better than this.

20) "*Hal'lujah*" (Psalm 150) by Louis Lewandowski. Attention choirs and choir directors everywhere. While I wish the organ part that the composer wrote were included, (one can't have everything I suppose) this performance is what the composer must have had in mind. To my way of thinking, this is what it ought to sound like.

21) "Traditional *Shabbat Kiddish*" with Benjamin Rivera as soloist. Appropriately enough it is sung by the *hazzan* alone and NOT by the congregation. (My feeling is that if one wants to chant the *Kiddush* over the wine, one should do it at home. There are some things that should be left to the professionals. *Kiddish*, *Kol Nidre*, *Hin'ni* are among them.)

21) "*Oseh Shalom*" by Nuri Hirsh as arranged by E.B. Ginsberg. I have never heard it sung like this before and I wish I had as this is how it ought to be sung. Why? This is a piece of Jewish sacred music and not some kind of wedding dance. Chicago sings it as it should be: namely ever so musically and as a piece of Jewish sacred music. To the ten members of Chicago and their conductor, I say, *Yasher Koach*. In the event you didn't get the drift of this review until now: This CD is very highly recommended.

Dr. Gold is a composer, conductor, and arts reviewer who can be reached at: drmortongold@yahoo.com. ✨



Media Watch

By RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

Summer TV and Film: Jews conspicuously present and absent

The Closer

Kyra Sedgwick has had a tour de force run on the TNT series, *The Closer*, playing Brenda Leigh Jackson, a deputy police chief in Los Angeles with a distinctive Southern drawl and an effective, piercing style of interrogation. To escort her character to the conclusion of the series, which is departing in the fall, the producers and writers have given her an intense and driven, even creepy and fanatical, nemesis and foil, a lawyer named Peter Goldman (Curtis Armstrong).

When writers Leo Geter and Jim Leonard introduced us to Goldman, the lawyer was posing as a process server, handing out subpoenas to the whole squad, except, conspicuously for David Gabriel, the African American detective. While we don't know immediately that the server is in fact a lawyer bringing a lawsuit against the police department, that realization sets in rather quickly and creates instant audience distrust of the character, who keeps hanging around, obnoxiously and, it seems, malevolently.

The Deputy Police Chief, Brenda Leigh, and the city, are being sued because she dropped off a murderer, a gang member, who had eluded the system, at his home, knowing that members of his gang suspected collusion with the police because of his release. In a previous episode we learned that he told her that it was her duty to protect him. Two officers were with her in the car. After the police left, he was grabbed while trying to escape his home and beaten to death by fellow gang members. Recalling the case, an officer reassures Brenda that "Tyrell murdered an old man and his grandson – who cares what happened to him?"

When Goldman's lingering presence is noticed, the eavesdropping nemesis introduces himself: "I'm serving subpoenas today, and I'm also the attorney representing the mother of Tyrell Bayler, bringing suit against the city, the L.A. Police Department, and almost everyone in this room. My name is Peter Goldman, and it's a great pleasure to meet you all. Now that I have your squad on record saying Tyrell

Bayler deserved to die, I was wondering if I could ask your detectives a few simple follow-up questions."

This is not only *chutzpa* but outright invasion of privacy, and sneakiness to the point of creepiness. The driven, disheveled-looking Goldman then virtually stalks Brenda Leigh for a few minutes, trying to question her. He comes very close to blackmailing her, offering to abandon deposition of the whole squad for the names of the two cops who were in the car with her. He continues to pop up in the squad rooms, hanging around the coffee machine, boasting that he "never left the building," like a cockroach who temporarily retreats out of view.



The Closer - "Forgive Us Our Trespasses" - (L-R) Kyra Sedgwick, Curtis Armstrong and Robert Gossett. Photo credit: Karen Neal/TNT.

In all fairness to writers Geter and Leonard, I must say that they don't single out Jews for being deceptive and obnoxious. Most of the episode is a cheap shot against the family of a prominent Christian Evangelist "mega-church" minister. We learn that the minister's widow has been enabling her husband to practice cross-dressing at weekly motel tristes with a prostitute. But it seems that the minister has been cruel to a son in military service who is homosexual. In this episode the entire family, including the widow's parents (her dad being the founding minister of the church!) conspire to tamper with evidence and to obstruct the investigation. The episode suggests that Evangelical Christianity is so unrealistic a way of life that it will inevitably lead to conflict with the law. In attempting to depict a gay character as more honorable than his Evangelical family, writers Geter and Leonard actually portray everyone in the Christian family as dishonorable and hypocritical.

Does this episode reflect some bizarre collaboration between Jews who use Jewish characters as comic relief while depicting Evangelical Christians in an ugly way, and Christians who, while stereotyping Evangelicals, choose to stereotype Jews as well? Writers Geter and Leonard would probably argue that the theme of the episode is the evil of singling

out any individual for any reason. At the end of the hour even Goldman grants the wish of the black officer whom he has singled out, handing him the subpoena for which the latter, worried about being shunned as a collaborator by his colleagues, has asked.

Goldman explains to Detective Gabriel that he wanted to show him – and the squad and deputy chief – "what it's like to be singled out by one's own gang." Of course, we know that Goldman's first goal was to sew dissension in order to get more information, and then, if that didn't work, to "win friends" with his guise of coming clean in order to show compassion, after having done a cruel thing to the entire squad and to the deputy chief, who goes to pieces at the end of the episode, worrying even her unflappable FBI, husband.

Indeed, the writers and producers of this show had only begun with that first Goldman episode to spin a yarn about a sneaky, ruthless and annoying lawyer with a Jewish-sounding name. They lost no time in finding their blond white knight, rakish and flamboyant in more positive ways than not, and brash and brilliant enough to win Brenda's attention and respect, little by little, step by step, in the person of Gavin Q. Baker III (the charismatic actor, Mark Pellegrino).

In the episode that follows (aired on 8/8/11), writer Geter makes sure that Goldman is described as "looking very smug." Goldman slithers back to announce that the Baylor family will lower their claim from twenty million dollars to five hundred thousand dollars, since all they really seek is a new house for the mother who no longer wants to live where her son was killed. Gavin closes the door after Goldman as if to represent, in one gesture, the contempt felt for Goldman by all, and to whisk out his unwanted, intrusive and obnoxious presence.

The viewer can't help rooting for Gavin, who seems to know how to exorcize the he-demon. Why are we not surprised that in the course of the banter, Goldman blurts out, "It's not every day you get a 97% discount"? Or that he sneaks into his "fair" offer a stipulation that Deputy Chief Johnson was unconcerned with Tyrell Bayler's welfare when she dropped him off? Does writer Geter intend to distract us from this nasty-Jewish-character-in-the-making with the levity of having one of the suspects in the week's murder case, a sleazy publicist/manager of a child star whose father has met a violent end, pull out a card offering to "do *bat mitzvahs*"?

In ensuing episodes, the writers demonize Goldman all the more by keeping him absent and letting the other characters discuss him, as if to show that in his case absence does not make the heart grow

fonder. Gavin does most of the talking about Goldman, saying things like “Mr. Goldman can sneak around all he wants to, but if this case ever gets to a courtroom, I win. No matter what he thinks he knows, I win. No matter what lies he gets passed, I win.” So speaketh the great bright hope against the nefarious Goldman.

Everything came to a head in the summer finale episode, written by Adam Belanoff. From the first scene, it did not look good for Goldman. His case comes across as a petty obstruction once all the deposed squadspeople receive beeper signals calling them to the grisly murder of a sheriff's deputy. Even when the judge appears to give Goldman a nod, he rules against him and questions his competence, observing that “whatever crimes Mr. Baylor may have committed, he was entitled to be tried in a court, not the streets of L.A. Mr. Goldman, the lack of evidence supporting the central thesis behind your pleading leaves me no choice but to grant the defense its motion for summary judgment.”

Goldman is scolded for asking the court to try his opinion, “an improper use of the justice system.” The judge embarrasses Goldman, telling him that he has not even been able to provide the evidence as to who killed Mr. Baylor.

Yet the squad celebrates too quickly. The menacing Goldman returns and angrily warns Brenda: “It's my intention to put an end to you and all your works.” (Who talks in such quasi-biblical phrases any more?) Brenda, who is likable even when she is formidable, responds with a pathetic vulnerability (well-captured by Sedgwick) which makes her even more likable. She trembles physically at his fanatical threat. Is he the voice of conscience, or a mercenary on vendetta?

Clearly, Goldman believes that he is both. Yet in the summer finale he came across as a self-righteous monster bent on vicious second-guessing, mounting a “case” that is little more than a skewed stacking of incidents in Brenda's career – a career which, after all, has thrown her together with violent and vicious perpetrators. Brenda certainly bears some responsibility for Baylor's death; she may have wanted to have seen him dead. But her choices and actions demonstrate that she is human. Will Goldman be given some humanity in the show's closing episodes? Will he become the focus of those episodes? And if he does become the focus, why? Who has a burning need to create a nasty nemesis for Brenda named Goldman?

Captain America

I have to admit that I found *Captain America: The First Avenger*, the summer

blockbuster movie, a bit surprising. Here is a story about fighting Nazis with no identified Jewish characters or even references to Jews.

Director Joe Johnston and writers Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely go out of their way to de-Judaize even the refugee scientist from Germany, certainly largely associated with Jews in the Manhattan and other related urgent weapons projects.

Dr. Abraham Erskine (Stanley Tucci) from Queens, originally from Germany, develops the machine that transforms a ninety-pound weakling into Captain America. He is the one who recognizes the heart of a hero, especially after the young man tells him: “I don't want to kill anyone. I don't like bullies, no matter where they are from.” Erskine replies: “There are so many big guys fighting in the war. Maybe we can use a little guy.” He adds: “You must stay who you are. Not a perfect soldier but a good man.” Erskine is the visionary who says of his experiments: “Today I take not another step toward annihilation, but the first step on the path to peace.” Yet despite Jewish-sounding first and last names, Dr. Erskine becomes, for all intents and purposes, the good German.

Among the soldiers who support Captain America with heroism, there are Asian Americans and African Americans and a woman agent, but no Jews – except, perhaps, one named Stark, which may or may not be a Jewish name.

This film plays like a comic strip and is, I suppose, supposed to, because it is based on one. Its arch villain, Herr Schmidt, who has his own mad scientists and undergoes his own transformation to superhuman status, is the cartoon character par excellence. But does it help the cause of Holocaust education to refer to him as “worse than Hitler”?

The film does give Hitler a lot of credit. He is portrayed as a master occultist, the New Ager of New Ager, who understands the power and value of Teutonic myth. After all, the film begins in Norway, where Hitler has sent his goons to make off with a magical serum which reputedly makes the good great and the bad worse. But what good can be done by a film where Hitler is called better than one of his followers and Jews are not mentioned at all?

Contagion

Steven Soderbergh's thoughtful thriller, *Contagion*, is about the outbreak of a terrible and seemingly uncontrollable world epidemic. It is a taut, well-acted and well-written, brilliantly directed thriller that engages both mind and heart, and inspires admiration for the dedicated

members of the health care professions.

If there is a villain here besides the disease, it is a blogger who, according to the film, is “spreading contagion” of his own in the form of false information and recrimination. At one point the slimy blogger gripes about the use of monkeys, even as doctors rush to come up with a vaccine in order to save a large portion of the world's population. While many people are risking their lives to save others, he says that it is “bad to be a monkey. First we shoot them into space. Then we shot them through with virus.” If writers Scott Z. Burns and Soderbergh intend this to be a rebuke to New Age thought that puts animal life on the same level as human life, then they do succeed.

This film offers an inspiring portrayal of a Jewish doctor, unlike the various *Law and Order* franchise series on television, whose Jewish doctors are often mercenary and morally weak. As soon as there is evidence of a pandemic, the leaders of the medical field suggest that tissue and other samples be sent “to Sussman in San Francisco. If he doesn't know what it is, nobody will.” Dr. Sussman looks a lot like Elliott Gould, the actor who portrays well the character's authenticity and altruism.

Sussman wins our admiration immediately, when, dogged by the muck-raking and muck-making blogger, he tells the latter that blogging “is not writing. It is graffiti with punctuation.” Sussman risks his personal safety by continuing to investigate when told to shut down his work because of the dangers involved. When he comes up with a vaccine solution, he gives the information to authorities without a thought of selling it to a pharmaceutical company.

Yes, the film has its pharmaceutical CEO's and hedge fund guys, whom it features with ambivalence, but not as cartoon villains. Understandably, rightly, it extols the physicians and nurses and medical researchers who do not rest until people are treated and until the virus is isolated. Hopefully, it will inspire a new generation to enter these professions, especially Jewish youngsters. The number of young Jews entering the medical profession has, unfortunately, dropped to record lows.

Rabbi Gertel has been spiritual leader of Conservative Congregation Rodfei Zedek since 1988. A native of Springfield, Mass., he attended Columbia University and Jewish Theological Seminary. He is the author of two books, What Jews Know about Salvation and Over the Top Judaism: Precedents and Trends in the Depiction of Jewish Beliefs and Observances in Film and Television. He has been media critic for The Jewish Post & Opinion since 1979. ✨

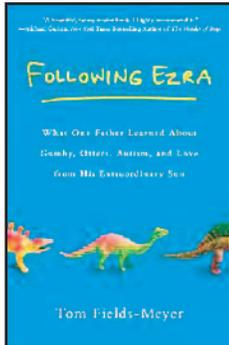
Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

Superlative portrayal of autistic boy

Following Ezra. By Tom Fields-Meyer. New York: New American Library, 2011. 241 Pages. \$15.

Autism is an as-yet incurable disease that appears among young children. Its symptoms include poor social skills; late development of speech including problems with speech; and rapid, often repetitive, movement. Special abilities in memory sometimes appear. As they grow older, some autistic children lead lives that are relatively normal. There are many other features of autism that are movingly set forth in this poignant account of one autistic child's first 13 years of life and how his parents, especially his father, coped with his son, Ezra.



Author Fields-Meyer is a journalist and editor. He is married to Shawn, rabbi of a small congregation in Los Angeles where they live and where she also teaches rabbinical students. They have two sons in addition to Ezra. Avi is two years older and Noam is two years younger than Ezra. The parents and the brothers each have a special, often difficult, relationship with Ezra. Their experiences are described with great warmth and with a light touch.

Although his parents recognized at an early stage that Ezra was different from other children of his age, it wasn't until he was three that a psychologist placed the diagnostic label of autism on him. Both parents asked for elaboration of the diagnosis's meaning and the psychologist offered the useful comparison that, unlike others who enjoy a movie without worrying about its singular frames, Ezra sees "a hodgepodge of individual frames." He cannot put them together in a coherent whole. His father worries about Ezra's "fractured consciousness" but takes some comfort from the recognition that the diagnosis will enable Ezra to be eligible for a number of therapeutic services.

Many illustrations of Ezra's behavior and his interactions with other people are offered, all providing evidence of his father's patience and determination to help his son. Some of these experiences are funny while some are disturbing. Their

substantial impact on the family, including Ezra's grandparents, is described with great understanding, enabling readers to grasp the consequences of this disease. What shines through is the remarkable capacity of the author to confront the arduous reverberations of having a son with autism and to deal with them by sustained effort and with boundless love.

The happiest and most inspiring part of the book comes at the end with its description of Ezra's bar mitzvah in 2009. Those who were fortunate enough to be present at that occasion were brought to tears, as will be many readers, by Ezra's bar mitzvah speech in which he talked about his favorite parts of the Torah and then went on to explain his being "an autistic person." He compared the special memory he has to the memory of Jews whose holidays enable them to remember events from long ago. He concluded by pointing out that his bar mitzvah is taking place on *Rosh Chodesh*, the beginning of a new month which celebrates the future and said, "Today is about my great future."

This singularly outstanding conclusion brings to a close a superlative portrayal of an autistic boy and his unique relationship to his father.

Perceptive portrait of playwright Wasserstein

Wendy and the Lost Boys. By Julie Salamon. New York: Penguin Press, 2011. 480 Pages. \$29.95.

The too-cutesy title of this penetrating biography of playwright Wendy Wasserstein may put off some potential readers. It would be their loss since skilled author, Salamon, formerly with the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as author of both fiction and non-fiction books, has written a perceptive and astute portrait of her subject. The title, of course, refers to the story of Peter Pan and his friend, Wendy, for whom Wasserstein was presumably named. The *Lost Boys* probably refers to the many gay men with whom Wasserstein was very close.

Wendy Wasserstein's parents, Lola and Morris, were non-observant Jewish immigrants from Poland. As Wendy eventually discovered, Lola was originally married to Morris's older brother, George, with whom she had two children. George

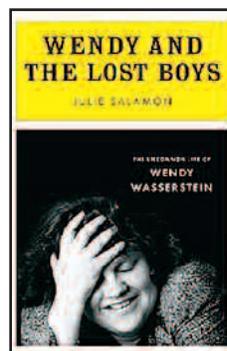
died four years after he and Lola were married and, two years later, she married Morris, George's younger brother, with whom she had three children, the youngest being the future dramatist.

George and Morris, along with their other brothers, were successful ribbon manufacturers. Converting to war production during World War II and, expanding into textiles and real estate after the war made them wealthy, enabling Lola and Morris to buy an 18-room house in Brooklyn. Later, they moved to an apartment on New York's "ritzy" Upper East Side. They sent their children to private schools; Wendy and her brother, Bruce went to the Yeshivah of Flatbush whose prestigious graduates included at least two future Nobel Laureates. Lola, dominating the household, decided to transfer them to the Ethical Culture School and then sent Wendy to a private high school in Manhattan.

Although Wendy was not a particularly good student, she took a summer program at Phillips Academy in Andover which, combined with good recommendations, enabled her to gain admission to Mount Holyoke where she was a student from 1967 to 1971. A Jewish classmate saw her as being "out of place in the prim WASP propriety of Mount Holyoke." Graduating with no job prospects and no husband in sight, Wendy was contrasted disparagingly by Lola to her successful siblings. Her sisters were married; one was a corporate executive and the other became a prosperous innkeeper. Her brother Bruce's Wall Street career led to his becoming a billionaire.

Wendy took playwriting and writing classes at City College then attended the Yale School of Drama, writing a play and meeting a number of people. Returning to New York in 1976, she wrote a play that was staged off-Broadway with positive reviews. It won a larger audience when it was produced by Playwrights Horizons. Wendy became part of the New York scene, maintaining her Jewish identity, running an annual party, "Orphan's Christmas for the Jews" and attending synagogue on the High Holidays "but religious belief eluded her." She became friendly with a number of men, most of whom were gay.

Wendy's *The Heidi Chronicles* was a resounding success, winning a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award. Lola referred to her daughter's "Nobel Prize" and said she would be just as happy if Wendy married a lawyer. Wendy went on to further success with *The Sisters Rosensweig*. However, she was frustrated by not having children and turned to in-vitro fertilization for a number of years before finally giving birth to a daughter at age 48. She already had signs of the illness that killed her seven years later. Her unusual success as a

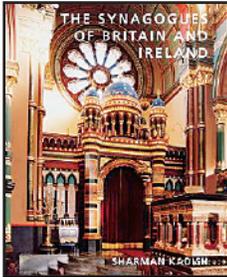


woman playwright remains a lasting legacy. This well-researched book fully captures the essence of Wendy Wasserstein's life.

Beautifully illustrated presentation

The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland. By Sharman Kadish. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 412 Pages. \$75.

This coffee table book, (8" x 11"), is a beautifully illustrated presentation of the synagogues in England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland from the time that Jews returned to England under Oliver Cromwell in 1656 after having been expelled in 1290 by Edward I. Author Sharman Kadish is an expert on British Jewish history and architecture. She was born in London and educated at Hebrew University and Oxford University where she earned her doctorate in modern history. She has written two books on British Jewish architecture and a monograph on Jewish architecture in Gibraltar. Kadish is the Director of Jewish Heritage UK and was a Research Fellow and Lecturer at the University of Manchester.



The book begins with Creechurch Lane Synagogue, London in 1657, the initial congregation after the Jews came back to England. It was located in a brick merchant's house, converted for use as a synagogue. Today, it is commemorated by a plaque on Cunard House. Bevis Marks, consecrated in 1701, is the first synagogue constructed in Britain. It was erected in a City of London back alley, inconspicuously enclosed in a courtyard and hard to find.

That is still true as I can personally testify, having had considerable trouble locating it when I participated in Sabbath services there a few years ago. Kadish's meticulous description of Bevis Marks is enriched by pictures in both color and black and white. These are the first of the 200 illustrations that greatly enhance the text. Bevis Marks was influenced by the Sephardic traditions and style of the Great Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, unlike subsequent British synagogues that were Ashkenazi.

The book continues with detailed examinations of the many synagogues that followed Bevis Marks during the Georgian, Regency, and Victorian ages, including large and impressive cathedral like structures. Based on extensive research, each one is thoroughly described and pictures are provided to enhance the



Book Review

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

Building bridges of common understanding

The Abyss (What Really Separates Us from the Arab World?). By Eli Avidar. Agam Publishing House. 2011. Pp. 270. In Hebrew.

I bought this book in Israel in June 2011, during the annual "Hebrew Book Festival" that offers welcomed discounts given that the great plethora of published books there are quite expensive in shekels. I was intrigued by the book's enticing title and the author's write-up on the inside jacket, though not recalling much about him. I'm glad that I got it irrespective of one's political inclination.



script. The architects, some non-Jews, are named and later listed in an appendix. The entire study is richly supplemented by appropriate and useful discussions of British Jewish history.

The final section of the book is devoted to the contemporary synagogue and includes a particularly well-illustrated chapter on stained glass in the synagogue. Kadish points out that the large structures of previous eras have given way to smaller, more modest synagogues. Moreover, she makes the point that Jews do not need a synagogue structure for purposes of worship. A *minyan* can assemble anywhere. While she does not mention anti-Semitism in present-day Britain, she does refer to "deep-seated insecurity about Jewish identity" and claims that this may well be reflected in the modern British synagogue. The decreased size of the British Jewish population must also be taken into account but reassurance can certainly be found in the fact that Bevis Marks still exists after 310 years!

Dr. Morton I. Teicher is the Founding Dean of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University and Dean Emeritus, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. ★

The author, Eli Avidar, a native of Egypt and founding chairman of "The Forum for a Wise Middle East," was head of Israel's diplomatic office in Qatar, serving for a total of 16 years in Israel's Foreign Ministry as well as an officer for I.D.F. Intelligence Corps in Lebanon. He holds a masters degree in Middle-East History from Jerusalem's Hebrew University. Avidar offers us essential hope and wise advice in face of frustrating Radical Islam's uncompromising extremism and the yet unseen democratic transformation of the "Arab Spring." He contends that Israel has potential partners for dialogue in the Arab world. However, we may ask, would those moderate Arabs have both the conviction and courage to stand up to those extremists undermining them? After all, Israel already has a mixed experience through its breakthrough peace with Egypt and Jordan.

The author's leading thesis is that the way to those moderates runs through far greater immersion of Israelis into the Arab language and culture, mindful of the indispensable role they play in shaping the Arab mindset. Sensitivity and sensibility toward long-standing norms of Arab tradition with its unique customs, quite different from their western counterparts, should be respected and utilized in building bridges of common understanding and interests. Before Israel's 5th President, Yitzchak Navon, met in October 1980 with Egypt's President Onwar Sadat in Egypt, he was guided by Professor Moshe Sharon of The Hebrew University. Thus, Navon had been warned not to be the first one to speak in their public appearance which he advantageously acted upon. Whereas in the West the individual is at the center, the Arab focus is on the larger groups of affiliation, such as the family, tribe and nation. A high premium is placed on "honor" and "shame" to be avenged when violated.

In addition, the Arab world is not to be treated as one homogenous unit rather it is varied and complex. Just as Eliezer Ben Yehudah called for fellow Jews to speak Hebrew does Avidar call upon fellow Israelis to speak Arabic. Instead of seeking the kind of a "New Middle-East" advocated by Israel's President Shimon Peres, the author opts for a "Wise Middle-East." He is concerned that the former Middle-East model which stresses "normalization" (a loaded term for the Arabs) in the relations between Israel and the Arab states, is still subject to deep Arab suspicion and resentment whether justified or not, that it is merely a means for Israel to assert itself further with even greater superiority. It would also threaten Israel as a Jewish state.

(see Zoberman, page 18)



My Kosher Kitchen

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

What to do with an etrog after Sukkot?

What do you do with an etrog after Sukkot? Joan Nathan, Jewish cookbook author, once wrote in her *Jewish Holiday Cookbook*, embalm it! The purpose is to make it the spice box for *Havdalah*. Make multiple perforations with a pointed, narrow tool. Insert hard and dry whole cloves into the etrog, perforations up to but not including the heads, allowing each clove to touch the next. When it is completely covered, expose it to the air, preferably in the sun, for several days. When the fruit begins to harden, line an etrog box with cloves, and place the clove-studded etrog in the box and close.

Here are some recipes using the etrog.

Etrog Marmalade

This recipe comes from *New Kosher Cuisine* by Ivy Feuerstadt and Melinda Strauss, Ten Speed Press, 1992.

- 1 etrog
- 6 cups water
- 3/4 cup sugar

Wash and trim off ends of etrog. Slice and remove as many seeds as possible. Chop into very small pieces (do not peel). Chopped etrog should equal about 1 cup for amount of sugar. If less, decrease sugar. Place fruit in water and refrigerate for 12 hours. After 12 hours, place fruit and water in a saucepan, bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Drain. Add remaining water and refrigerate again for 12 hours. After 12 hours, mix fruit, water and sugar in a saucepan, bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer uncovered for one and a half hours until water becomes syrupy and the fruit becomes clear. Pour into a jar, close and refrigerate. For more traditional marmalade, add one cup of chopped orange and double the water and sugar.



Photos by Barry A. Kaplan/Jerusalem.

My Etrog Jam

This version takes less time.

- 1 etrog
- 1 orange
- 1 grapefruit
- 1 lemon
- Sugar
- Water

Wash fruit and cut in halves to remove seeds. Cut in thin slices and cut slices in halves. Put in a bowl, cover with water and soak overnight. Next day, put water and fruit in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Strain fruit and bring to a boil again. Strain again and measure fruit. Place fruit in saucepan and add 1 cup sugar for every cup of fruit. Cook for 30 minutes, stirring frequently. Pour into jar or jars and close. Refrigerate.



Candied Etrog Peel

Gil Marks, in *The World of Jewish Desserts* suggests getting donations from your neighbors for this recipe.

- 4 cups etrog peels, cut into 1/4 inch by 1/2 inch by 2 inches long strips*
- Cold water
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 1/4 cups light corn syrup (optional)

Place etrog peels in a saucepan with 6 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Drain and repeat 2 to 4 times. Stir sugar, 2 cps water and corn syrup in a second saucepan over low heat until sugar dissolves (about 5 minutes). Increase to high and bring to a boil. Add peels, reduce heat to low and simmer until peels are translucent and most of the syrup has been absorbed (about one hour). Pour peels and syrup into sterilized jar, seal and refrigerate for at least 2 days. Eat as candy, serve as a garnish, or add to cakes, cookies and puddings.

*You can use only etrog or combine with any combination of grapefruit, lemons, oranges, or tangerines.

Etrog Liqueur

One year we tasted this and thought it was so great, we made it ourselves.

- 6 etrogim
- 19 ounces brandy
- 2 1/4 cups sugar
- 1/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. coriander

(see Kaplan/Recipes, page 19)

ZOBERMAN

(continued from page 17)

However, Avidar seeks a mutual accommodation that honors Arab rights while protecting those of the Jewish State of Israel. He questions though to what extent Israel really wants to be part of an Arab Middle-East.

The author regards the one-sided steps which Israel undertook in regard to the I.D.F. departure from Lebanon and the disengagement from Gaza as counter-productive, serving only to embolden the other side to believe in Israel's weakness under pressure. He also finds fault with Israel's exclusive support of Lebanon's Christians while neglecting the golden and missed opportunity to also reach out to the Shi'a who have a long history of being discriminated against.

I'm not sure about this claim for feasible simultaneous support for both parties. Avidar is also critical of the economic sanctions against Gaza that hurt innocent children without tangible results, reminding us of the American failure vis-à-vis Cuba. He urges a separation in perception between the Arab people and their victimizing leaders, just as Iran is not all about Ahmadinejad and generalizing is dangerous. This approach he recommends also in supporting the Kurdish people in Turkey.

Avidar calls from his own rich experience as an Israeli diplomat in Arab Qatar and the United States, along with his work in Israel's Foreign Ministry for Israel to further engage with Muslim clergy in dialogue, sharing some significant successes with which he was personally involved. Avidar emphasizes that gaining the support of mainstream Muslim clerics who enjoy high standing in the Arab and Muslim world is an effective way to curtail the influence of the extremists and the terrorism they bring about. It should also be part of the strategy of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In wake of the "Arab Spring" and the world's selective response to it, the author discerns diminished American influence leaving Israel to rely more on its own devices. It is hard, however, to contemplate such a suggested radically changed scenario. Obviously the author, no doubt an authentic Israeli patriot, whose commentary is found in both the Israeli and Arab media, does not mince words with his constructive criticism of a lover's quarrel.

Rabbi Israel Zoberman, who translated all quotes, is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach, Va. He grew up in Haifa, Israel. ★

KAPLAN/ISRAEL*(continued from page 20)*

Beit Aryeh is 12 minutes from Ben-Gurion International Airport, 30 minutes from Tel Aviv and one mile from what is referred to as "the green line." (This refers to the demarcation between Israel and the territories liberated in the 1967 Six-Day War including Judea/Samaria [the so-called West Bank], the Gaza area, and the Golan Heights. Green ink was used to draw the line on the map while the talks were going on thus the name, the green line.)

The Mayor tells us that 73% of the population of Israel lives across from what we see, the central shore plateau. Currently, a new road being built will make the trip to Tel Aviv half the time or 15 minutes.

Over and over again, Mayor Naim stresses the good relationship the community has with the neighboring Arab residents of Luben. "They come to us for medical assistance," he says; recently a fire broke out in a home in the Arab village, and Beit Aryeh people went to help put it out. The residents of Beit Aryeh and the residents of Luben call each other by name.



(L-R) Mayor Avi Naim, Minister Yuli Edelstein, Oren Helman (Dir. Government Press Office).

"The relationship is different from what people describe," says the Mayor. "Palestinian workers work in our municipality. We have a very normal life, and we want to keep it."

The Mayor stressed that in any agreement Beit Aryeh would be part of Israel "to protect the heart of the State of Israel." The homes there were all built according to the law.

Yuli Edelstein, Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Minister, addressed the group, explaining "this land is Jewish land and we have a perfect right to live and build here." He emphasized the strategic importance of this community.

He stressed that the source of the problems is not "settlements," as we learned six years ago when Israel evacuated "settlers."

At the Sharon Observation Point, Minister Edelstein said that in Area C of Judea/Samaria, there are only 43,000 Palestinians.

(The 1993 Oslo Accords declared the final status of the West Bank to be subject



Why Faith Matters

*From his Facebook posts.***BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

On *Sukkot* we read Ecclesiastes (Koheleth): "Time and chance happen to all." Or as Henry James' character Lambert Strether says in "The Ambassadors"—"Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had?" ~ Oct. 11

"It is difficult/ to get the news from poems/ yet men die miserably every day/ for lack/ of what is found there." William Carlos Williams. Sometimes imagery blooms where blunt speech falters; a soft breeze



to a forthcoming settlement between Israel and the Palestinian leadership. Following these interim accords, Israel withdrew its military rule from some parts of the West Bank, which was divided into three administrative divisions. Area A, comprised of Palestinian towns and some rural areas, is under Palestinian control and administration; Area B are populated rural areas and are under Israeli control but Palestinian administration. Area C contains all the Israel communities in Judea/Samaria, their access roads and buffer zones and is under both Israeli control and administration.)

Regarding the issue of the proposed unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state, Minister Edelstein said Israel still has hopes with the position of the U.S. and leaks in the Arab world that this is not a good idea, but if it happens, Israel will take different security arrangements. "We have to find a modus operandi to co-exist."

Regarding Israel annexing Judea/Samaria, Minister Edelstein said it had not been discussed in the government but "it would be one of the steps if the Palestinians go too far. We would rather negotiate, but we haven't found a partner on the Palestinian side in two and a half years. We are here to stay. The Palestinians are here to stay. We must find a way to coexist and cooperate."

Minister Yudelstein gently criticized the media for their ignorance of the real life in Israel, picturing Israel "in a way that has no reality."

Sybil Kaplan is the "Creating a Stir" columnist for the Jerusalem Post; a food writer and lecturer; leader of "Shuk Walks" in Machaneh Yehudah; presenter on Rustymikeradio.com with "Shuk Shopping"; and compiler/editor of eight kosher cookbooks. ★

lifts what gusts would blow apart; and poetry, like music, stirs us at the center. One sage teaches that the Torah can be read as a single long poem. If we spoke in poetry, we would understand each other less easily and more deeply. ~ Oct. 11

Sukkot begins Wed. night and reminds us how fleeting and fragile is all that we treasure in God's world. On *Yom Kippur* we recited *Yizkor*, the memorial prayer. Deep learning begins in loss but cannot end there. On *Sukkot* we gather up our fears and failures, and boldly build a hut on shifting ground. We are not forever, but we are here now to grab life with both hands. ~ Oct. 10

The Kotzker Rebbe taught that God fashioned a great ladder and on this ladder people climb down from heaven to earth. When we reach this world the ladder is drawn up and we are told to get back to heaven. Most give up because there is no ladder. Some leap but quickly become discouraged. Others leap and leap, knowing that if God sees their effort, God will reach down in mercy and lift them up to the presence of the Divine. So what is our task, asked the Kotzker? We must be leaping souls. ~ Oct. 6

From Steve Jobs' commencement speech at Stanford: "Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle... Stay hungry. Stay foolish." *Baruch Dayan Emeth*. May he rest in peace. ~ Oct. 5

Rabbi Wolpe is the senior rabbi of Temple Sinai in Los Angeles and author of several books including Why Faith Matters. ★

**KAPLAN/RECIPES***(continued from 18)*

Peel *etrogim* and chop finely. Squeeze *etrog* juice into a jar or bottle. Add brandy, sugar, cinnamon and coriander. Close and leave for two months. Watch to make sure *etrog* rind does not absorb the liquor. If this starts to happen, remove some of it.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food and feature writer, cookbook author and lecturer, who lives in Jerusalem. ★

On this date in Jewish history

On October 12, 1165

Maimonides arrived in Jerusalem.

~ From *The Jewish Book of Days* published by Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., New York.



Seen on the Israel Scene

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

The Jewish Post & Opinion

1427 W. 86th St. #228
Indianapolis, IN 46260

Sound the Shofar – A witness to history

The Bible Lands Museum opened its newest exhibition, “Sound the Shofar – A Witness to History,” in the presence of the press on Sept. 7.

Guided by the articulate and personable Museum Curator, Dr. Filip Vukosavovic (from Montenegro, formerly Yugoslavia), the fascinating exhibition begins with the characteristics of a shofar – an animal kosher for consumption, one of the 140 mammals with cloven hoofs, and not from a cow or calf. To be a kosher shofar, the bony material inside must be soft and able to be removed when boiled in water, and it has to have an outside shell as well.

While most people associate a shofar with the one blown during *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, in fact the exhibition shows aspects of Jewish history through the prism of a shofar over the last 3,000 years.

The Bible contains 72 references to the shofar, mostly militaristic uses. Although there are descriptions of the shofar for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* (Leviticus 23–24, Numbers 29–1), there is no explicit call for the shofar to be used. The only commandment calling for use of the shofar is in Leviticus 25, for it to be blown at the time of the Jubilee, every 50 years.

In one case, one sees the first depiction of a shofar dating from the 3rd century BCE; there are also examples known from then to the 7th century BCE – in rings, bronze figures, pendants, a bracelet and oil lamps.



Photos by Barry A. Kaplan/Jerusalem.



By Medieval times, *shofarim* were illustrated in *Haggadot* because Elijah will blow the shofar as he heralds the arrival of the Messiah.

In a showcase, for the first time seen by the public – and the most dramatic current illustration – is the actual shofar seen in the photograph of Rabbi Shlomo Goren blowing the shofar, announcing the liberation of the Old City and the Temple Mount, June 7, 1967, at the Western Wall. Both that shofar and that photograph are part of the exhibition.

In a room to one side, there is the showing of a 10-minute film of the 2010 reunion of the men who defied the British prohibition of blowing of the shofar at the Western Wall between 1931 and 1948. They were chosen to blow it anyway at the end of *Yom Kippur*, at great risk to themselves. The shofar they used is also part of the exhibition.

The exhibition ends with a display of Israeli stamps from 1955 to 2011 with illustrations of *shofarim*.

Who makes shofarim? The Bar-Sheshet family is descended from 14th century Spain and began the shofar-making business in Haifa in 1948. The Ribak family learned shofar making from a cousin who came to Palestine from Poland in 1927. Today the two families collaborate with a shop in Tel Aviv.

A short film can be viewed of one of these makers of *shofarim* but only certain

aspects of the process are revealed as the techniques of making the shofar are secret. Craftsman Shimon Keinan also manufactures *shofarim* in his factory, Kol Shofar, in the Golan Heights.

Currently, in honor of the new exhibition, the Bible Lands Museum is soliciting reminiscences and personal stories related to the shofar; people may send these to pr@blmj.org. The exhibition will be on display until February 2012.

Visiting the community that protects “Israel’s waist”

You are just a 47-minute ride from Jerusalem, in the 30-year-old Jewish community of Beit Aryeh when you stand at the Sharon Observation Point. Airplanes about to land at Ben-Gurion International Airport are heading for the runway we can see nine miles from us. On a clear day, you can see Hadera to the north, Ashkelon to the south and Tel Aviv straight ahead.

Beit Aryeh is at the tiny waist of Israel.



View towards Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv.

In the conference room of the modern community center, we meet Mayor Avi Naim, who is in his seventh year as mayor. In 1991, Naim, who was born in the Negev town of Yerucham, came to the 10-year celebration of this community, liked what he saw and moved his family here.

Tulips from the Netherlands decorate one area of this community. There are 1300 non-religious families (4,500 people) from all political parties. There are 12 kindergartens and two schools.

(see Kaplan/Israel, page 19)