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Cover Art
by Irene Konig

Editorial

As November arrives, my thoughts turn to Thanksgiving and all that I have to be thankful for. Two at the top of the list are family and good food, which are a big part of the holiday. I have already been assigned to make cranberry sauce without sugar for my family's pitch-in dinner. That will be somewhat of a challenge, but it will be fun to experiment. For starters, I plan on adding sweet cooked apples. I wrote the following three years ago at this time.

Holidays are a good time to be mindful of the many reasons we have to be thankful. At the top of the list is usually close family and friends. Following that is having a job and being healthy, and then the basics such as food, shelter, and clothing. Then we may think about the beauty of nature such as watching a sunset over the ocean on a warm day where the colors, from red-orange to magenta-violet, radiate out filling the sky, reflecting on the water, sand, and rocks below.

Frequently we take for granted all of the modern conveniences that make our lives comfortable – until they stop working. Then we become quite grateful for electricity and plumbing; telephones and computers; washing machines and refrigerators; heat and air-conditioning; and cars. I find myself being very grateful for structures such as elevators, highways, and bridges – especially after they have been closed for repairs.

However, we need not wait until Thanksgiving Day or for a bright, sunny day to find reasons to be thankful. *Every day there are small occurrences for which one can be very grateful.* For example, I am always thankful whenever I learn something new. The following is a list of examples that my dear readers and I have compiled.

- Finding the mate to a sock that was lost
- Clean and well-stocked public restrooms – especially on long-distance road trips
- A parking spot becoming available directly in front of the entrance to the location in which one is about to be late for a job interview
- Parking at a metered spot and returning to find that the meter expired but you did not get a ticket
- Finding something important, valuable, or sentimental that was missing, such as car keys, a wedding ring, a wallet or purse, prescription eyeglasses or a lost cat
- The person in front of you in line at the grocery having a full cart when you have only a few things, and having them offer to let you go first
- During rush hour, while you are trying to drive out of a shopping mall parking lot where there is no traffic light or officer, but there is an endless line of cars in front of you creeping forward, when one car stops and the driver motions for you to exit in front of him
- Being able to take a hot shower after three months in a body cast
- Getting a thank-you note from a patient
- Having a patient do better than expected
- Finding a \$20 bill in the pocket of a coat you've not worn for a long time
- Finally spotting

About the Cover

The Priestly Blessing

"This blessing in Hebrew and English with lilac flowers is a favorite. I had created the Priestly Blessing, which is said both in synagogues and churches, as it seems to belong to the Judeo-Christian world. It is the sweetest of blessings, directing the Lord's graciousness to shine down on you and give you peace. It is the blessing that Aaron, Moses' brother, was divinely instructed to give to the people of Israel.

"My first Priestly Blessings were done in Hebrew. I drew all the letters, and then painted them in. I always provided an English translation. But one day a friend asked me if I could create a Priestly Blessing that had both Hebrew and English text on it. I said I would try. I had come across some beautiful lilac colored petals, and I formed a cascade of them and used that image as a background. Then I drew my Hebrew letters, and painted them, and below that I did my English calligraphic text.

"A common English translation of the blessing is: May the Lord bless you. May the Light of the Lord shine upon you and may the Lord be gracious to you. May the Lord protect you and grant you Peace."

Konig has created many works with Jewish themes, including works that have a tallit image as a background. The Jewish-themed works range from calligraphy and design prints for weddings to comforting works for those in mourning, inspirational quotes, excerpts from the Song of Songs, other Psalms, quotations from some of the greats in Jewish history, home and personal blessings, and many, many more.

In addition to this large collection of Jewish inspired art, Konig has also created many other art pieces, which encompass a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and experiences, all heartfelt. All master prints are made up by hand, and then prints are made from this master print. All in all, there are close to 300 prints, all available in modest prices, all made on request, and all matted for gifting, or for the individual,

a gas station after the fuel gauge has been reading empty for a couple miles

- Miraculously getting out stains of car engine oil from a new pair of white pants
- Finding a pair of shoes that fit like a glove and are perfect even in color after having shopped all weekend
- Watching your children get off the bus and bring in the trash cans unasked
- Watching your favorite team win in double overtime
- After being pulled over by the police for driving over the speed limit, getting a warning instead of a ticket. (11-22-06)

Jennie Cohen 11-4-09. ✪



Irene Konig.

Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

October 30, 2009, Lech L'cha (Genesis 12:1-17:27), 11 Cheshvan 5770

Last week I traveled around New York City with 25 members of this year's Confirmation Class. This annual trip to NYC has been a part of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation's identity for decades. You can ask people who went on the trip 20, 30, or 40 years ago and they will have stories and remembrances of the experience.

and enclosed in a crystal-clear envelope. Categories on the website, www.artoflife.us, serve to help in the search for the perfect piece. Konig will be glad to work with you to find what would be the best print, and gift certificates are available, if needed, in case you can't decide.

Konig likes to use interesting materials and incorporate them into the master print. She has used leaves and berries, ribbons, fabric, flowers of all kinds, jewelry, masks and other assorted objects. Often she puts into calligraphy her own words, expressing a sentiment that she could not find elsewhere as a quotation. Her works adorn many homes in the central Texas area and in other parts of the country. In addition, she has donated some of her artwork to the Jewish Community Center in Havana, Cuba, and to a hospital in Israel, Shaare Zedek.

Konig holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the City College of New York, as well as a master's degree in psychology from the New School for Social Research in New York. Just a little over half of her life has been spent in Austin, Texas, where she currently resides. Her other years were spent in New York. She is the mother of two young adult daughters.

Irene Konig may be contacted at pleasure-to-behold@Juno.com or at 512-835-2165. ✪

Those who go on the trip get to meet and bond with other class members they don't really know and when the trip is over there is a shared experience that lasts through the year and a lifetime.

Along with my wife Sandy and our Derech Torah coordinator Debbi Kasper, the Confirmation Class explored the history of Jewish New York. Our first stop was the Lower East Side where only about 8% of the current population is Jewish. Except for a few synagogues, a few kosher places to eat, and a variety of markings on some buildings, there is nothing identifiable that would lead one to say that the Lower East Side was once Jewish.

One hundred years ago, 500,000 Jews lived in this tiny area of Manhattan. There were synagogues, competing Yiddish newspapers, the smells and sounds of a lively Jewish community coming from the streets. Lest we think that it was a grand experience, just visit the Tenement Museum on Orchard St., and see the size of one of these apartments where 8-10 people may have lived. This was a dirty, smelly area and many of our ancestors worked hard to find a way out so that their children would have a chance to succeed in America.

We also saw the hope of Jewish life on the Lower East Side when we visited the now completely renovated Eldridge St. Synagogue. This was the first synagogue built by Eastern European Jews on the Lower East Side and it is magnificent. It is a testimony to the Jews fleeing the persecutions of their lands of origin. It says, "We are here!" Today, the neighborhood surrounding the synagogue is all Asian, as much of the Lower East Side is today, but that is just the story of this part of this city. One community moves out and another community moves in.

I am not sure how our Midwestern Jewish youth, who are many years removed from the Lower East Side, identify with all of this, but it is important to remind them that for many Jews this was a land of

(see Adland, page NAT 14)

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Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

What it means to be "The People of the Book"

In 1965, when I was just 11 years old, I bought my very first Bible. Not the "Jewish" kind that one my friends made fun of because it opened backwards but the Official King James Version published by Oxford University Press. I read late at night with a flashlight under the bedcovers, underlining in orange crayon the passages that stirred me. By my 12th birthday, I knew as much about Matthew, Luke and John as I did about Abraham and Moses, and while my parents thought it a bit odd that I preferred Bible over Barbie, they rewarded my curiosity by buying me more books.

Since then, I have collected Bibles like Celine Dion collects shoes. (At last count, she had over 3,000 pair; I, on the other hand, only own 14 – Bibles, not shoes!) Unlike shoes however, I have never thrown a single one away because each version of the Bible offers slightly different interpretations of the events, stories and wisdom found within its Books.

As a Jew, I have always taken great pride in the fact that we are referred to as the "People of the Book." I assumed the name originated within Jewish circles as a way to identify and connect the Jewish people with the Torah, the quintessential blueprint for Jewish behavior and belief. But surprisingly, the name surfaced during the 7th century as a Muslim reference to Jews and Christians who were regarded as "infidels with a protected status." Jews were the "people of the book" because we possessed a prior revelation from God, which was manifest in our Five Books of Moses. As such, in the early years of Islam, we were permitted to live undisturbed among Muslims and observe our faith without interference, although that changed significantly by the 11th century.

The Torah, also called the Five Books of Moses and the *Chumash* in Hebrew, was expanded into the *TaNaKh*. The *Tanakh* is an acronym for 24 books that are divided into three major categories: *Torah*, *Nivi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). In a sense, the *Tanakh* is the very first consolidated Jewish library: It presents the history and ideas of the first 3,500 years of the Jewish people, written by different authors over many centuries, covering the time period from Creation until about the time of the Bar Kochba revolt in the 2nd century C.E.

In 499 C.E., the second most important Jewish book was codified. The Babylonian Talmud, a compilation of discussions, arguments and analyses of a broad range of subjects by the greatest rabbis of the first four centuries, vastly expanded

Jewish literature. It is filled with Jewish law (*Halacha*), interpretations of Biblical texts (*Midrash*) and stories that teach moral lessons (*Aggadah*). For centuries thereafter, Jewish literature was defined as those books that emanated from the Torah and Talmud or found their source in Jewish law and liturgy.

The concept of Jewish literature has been radically augmented since the Middle Ages to include many other types of literature. Sephardic/Ladino ballads, Yiddish stories, European Enlightenment literature, Hebrew poetry, and Jewish-American novels are examples of what we designate as Jewish literature today. In its broadest sense, Torah is more than the name of our Jewish Bible; it literally means "teachings" and includes all of the wisdom from Jewish texts and literature.

But what exactly does it mean to be "the People of the Book?" To answer this question, I turn to the traditional mode of Jewish learning by asking more questions. Questions like: Do we have an obligation to study the Torah? Will studying Torah affect our behavior? Will it lead to a life of good deeds and justice? Which is more important – study or action, learning or doing?

As Jews we are commanded to study the Torah and teach it to our children. It is our spiritual inheritance – the roadmap for Jewish living and guidebook for what God expects of us. But the relationship between the study of Torah and our behavior is a complex matter, one that intrigued the Talmudic rabbis who attempted to balance and reconcile the tension between these two essential values in Judaism.

There are conflicting texts about what takes priority: study or action. On Shabbat we read *Elu Devarim*, a prayer that recites a list of nine *mitzvot* whose rewards are without measure, such as honoring our parents, doing acts of kindness and visiting the sick. This prayer concludes with the words: "And the study of Torah is equal to them all because it leads to them all."

But in *Ethics of the Fathers* (1:17), we read: "It is not study that is essential, but rather action."

And a frequently cited passage from the Talmud pits Rabbi Akiva against Rabbi Tarfon in a heated debate on this issue. Rabbi Tarfon asserts that action is greater than study but Rabbi Akiva disagrees. The majority sides with Rabbi Akiva: Study is greater than action because it leads to action.

Does the study of Torah necessarily lead to a life of good deeds and meaning? For some, the answer is a resounding yes; for others, clearly not. That difference may depend upon how we engage in "study." If study entails digging deeply into our texts to discover meaning and relevancy, the kind that will enable us to tackle, resolve and survive the issues and problems of everyday life, then I believe it will.

Amy Hirshberg Lederman is an award-winning, nationally syndicated columnist, author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney. Her new book One God, Many Paths: Finding Meaning and Inspiration

Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

In a previous editorial, I wrote that a rich life, full of happiness and fulfillment, can only be achieved by learning Torah and doing all of the Mitzvahs. One of my readers feels that this isn't so. Here are my thoughts on this subject.

Until you experience Torah and Mitzvahs, you don't know what you are missing. A blind person can't know the beauty of a sunset. An orphan can't know the love of parents. A secular person has little or no connection with Hashem, may not even be sure whether He exists. By learning Torah and doing Mitzvahs, we establish a relationship with Hashem, our Father and Creator.

We discover all kinds of things that we never knew existed such as our soul, the Sabbath, spirituality, holiness. The Sabbath is a day of holiness. Experiencing holiness is a truly wonderful feeling. All material pleasures pale in comparison. The first Shabbos that I spent in Chabad made a strong impression on me. This was 41 years ago. I was 18 years old, a student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. At the time I was open to spirituality. I had been practicing yoga for a year, and Judaism for two months. What was so special about my first Shabbos with Chabad? I felt a lot of joy. When they finished davening, they danced. During the Shabbos meal, they all sang. My host for that Shabbos had seven children, and the oldest was 11 years old. These special kids were friendly, happy and full of life.

After Shabbos I went back to Hebrew University, but my heart wasn't there anymore. I looked around me. Where is the joy, the friendliness, the love? A month later I dropped out of university to learn in the Yeshiva of Kfar Chabad. I started to learn Torah 10 hours a day, and keep all of the Mitzvahs. Now I was experiencing Shabbos as an insider not as an observer. From week to week I got more into the holiness of Shabbos. I remember telling myself "Wow! This one Shabbos is worth more than all of the 17 years that I spent in Indianapolis."

It is true that you can be secular and still live a relatively good life. For example, if you are fortunate enough to be a social worker, then you spend eight hours a day trying to help people. This adds up to a lot of Mitzvahs. Besides, social workers don't get paid too much. This self-sacrifice on their part makes their Mitzvahs even greater. So some people who consider themselves secular actually do a lot of Mitzvahs, which brings them some happiness and fulfillment.

(see *Chassidic Rabbi*, page NAT 15)



in Jewish Teachings won the 2009 Arizona Book Publishing Association's Best Book Award on religion and is available at www.OneGod-manyPaths.com or on her web site at www.amyhirshberglederman.com. ★

Appreciating Sarah

BY L. R. RARICK

In recent decades, "Sarah" as the first of the matriarchs has been added to the Amidah in many prayerbooks.

In Genesis XVII.15, God said to Abraham: "As for Sarai thy wife, though shalt not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be."

The word translated as "her name" here has the consonants sh-m-h. Two of the consonants, those that are frequently translated as "name," are the same as two of the consonants of the "Sh'ma," which is usually translated "Hear!"

Some linguists claim that Hebrew and related languages had historically two-consonant root vocabularies with a third consonant being added for emphasis or modification. And some writing in linguistics calls basic forms "polyvalent roots" in other languages also when they might be a root of more than one of the "parts of speech."

The designation of "Sarah" for Abraham's wife is what she was to be heard to be, what she is going to be heard as.

Is this only a personal name or is it a description of her? Is it an evaluation of her? Is it her title?

In Genesis XII.15, "the princes of Pharaoh saw her and praised her to Pharaoh." The word translated as "princes" here has the same consonants as "Sarai," two of which are also two of the consonants in "Sarah." A footnote in the Hertz chumash says of "Sarah": "Brings out more forcibly the meaning 'Princess' than the archaic form 'Sarai'."

These words "Sarah," "Sarai," and "princes" seem to be cognate with the designation "Sargon the Great," ruler in the Middle East from 2335 to 2279 B.C.E., and "Sargon the Second," king of Assyria from about 722 to 705 B.C.E. The name or title seems to have survived in Europe as "Caesar" and Kaiser," in Russia and in English metaphors as "czar", and in West Africa as "sarki," a Hausa words meaning king, chief, or head of group such as an extended household, market, or guild.

What "Sarah" was heard as was not only a person who was an individual or a wife and mother. Not that individual, wife, and mother is necessarily "only" or "mere." It can even be too much for many. But Sarah was also heard to be a ruler or co-ruler, a maker or one of the main makers of sociopolitical decisions and influences. She was an ancestor not only physically but sociologically, culturally and spiritually as well.

In today's world of three billion or more females, this may be even more important. For intimacy and fertility are very important, but they should not have to be the first priority of all three billion. Other important roles and functions and activities are worthwhile too, and some people are going to have to take care of these sometimes.

Rarick is a freelance writer living in Bloomington, Ind. ★



Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

Reform vs. conform

According to Webster's Dictionary, "reform" means to improve or to change something for the better. And thumbing through the pages of this very same dictionary, we stop at the word "conform," and we learn that its meaning is to make or become similar; to be in agreement. These meanings, to me, indicate the turbulent storm that has erupted in Judaism's Reform Movement.

On the one hand Reform Judaism was designed to give meaning to today's world. And today's world includes yesterday, today and tomorrow. As the world turns so does our understanding of its purpose and significance. The understandings of yesterday do not fit neatly into the world we live in today.

Yesterday contained no computers or space travel. Yesterday was filled with disasters that boggle the imagination. Yesterday was good for one thing: To bring us to today with all the new discoveries and means to adapt these revelations to life as experienced right now.

Today we accept modernization and experimentation as a way of life not a figment of some dark corner of the mind that has taken us to sinister places. Today we know that the vastness of the universe reminds us that we have the ability to accomplish things as endless as time and space.

We have learned through trial and error that we are not committing sins of omission but rather methods by which growth can be maintained. We are not destroying the fabric of human existence but rather enhancing its possibilities. Growth can only be maintained with continuous speculation.

Reform Judaism understood that the past is an essential ingredient in reaching for the future. You cannot assume to know the goodness or proficiencies of human endurance without regard for the past.

I, certainly, am not an expert on Reform Judaism. Nor am I a participant in its deliberations and pronouncements. What I do know of it, I learned from experience and from books. But what I extracted from all the research and living as a Reform Jew and Reform rabbi was one vital fact: Reform Judaism was created to bridge the gap between traditionalism and secularism. Having been trained in traditional Judaism enables me to fully appreciate the value of Reform Judaism's approach to the universal understanding of God.

Reform Judaism's most potent weapon was a small word, inclusion. It understood that Judaism could not and would not continue to grow and develop if it remained in a vacuum. Telling fellow Jews

that if they did not fit into a narrow definition of religious completion that they would forever be isolated was an enigma.

Reform Judaism teaches that there is no value to Judaism if it does not seem relevant or necessary in every day life. Where is the future of the Jewish People if we live only in the past without trying to reach for the present and the future? That is the underlying characteristic that makes Reform Judaism important for the continuity of the generations and the perpetuation of a dream that began with a man called Abraham.

Even the rabbis of the Talmud were forever engaged in making Judaism relevant for their generation. There are constant references to the learning centers of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai. Shammai was considered more rigid and inflexible while Hillel was more liberal in the transmission of religious thought and its interpretation. Reform Judaism follows the standard set by Talmudic expression and relates to this definition of relevancy.

On the other hand, I have noticed a resurgence of traditional expressions in Reform Judaism. I have always marveled at the somewhat intimidated attitude that can be found among Reform rabbis. It is as though they consider themselves inferior to their more traditional counterparts. They are more deferential to Jews who profess to be true Torah adherents. Perhaps some think that they are not legitimate and therefore must resort to introducing a different kind of Jewish acceptance.

Inclusion, which was the hallmark of Reform Judaism, has been replaced by exclusion. Tampering with traditional attitudes now seems to be a repudiation of religious living. We see Reform congregations building mikvehs (ritual baths) for conversion or other purposes. We find Reform rabbis refusing to participate in interfaith marriages.

When people reach out and our hand is not there to take theirs, what have we done? Alienation is not the road to acceptance. If Judaism is to remain vibrant and relevant then we need to be as inclusive as we possibly can, not to dilute but to be an example. To teach that even today Shammai is still relegated to the next world as described in the Talmud. To make clear that Hillel is the path to involvement and continuation.

Perhaps when Reform rabbis feel secure in who they are, we too will feel comfortable in Reform Jewish fervor. If our people are not afraid to identify, in whatever form, why should we Reform rabbis tell them to change or be sidelined?

Are we reformists or conformists? That is the question. It should be a continuing debate that should be in the forefront of attempting to bring relevance to an ancient faith that deserves better than excluding many of its adherents. I wonder if the Conservative Movement realizes that the Reform Movement is the new you!

There is a classic story about a man coming to the saintly sage, the Ba'al



Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

Meeting the challenges of Cheshwan

(Oct 18–Nov 17)

In the Jewish calendar, a new month begins at the time of the new moon. The Hebrew word for month is *chodesh*, which also means "newness." According to Kabbalah, each month offers new energies and new opportunities to realize one's personal potentials. Just like there are various seasons and fluctuations in our weather, there are fluctuations in the spiritual energies available. Those who are attuned to these energies are very aware of such changes and know how to use this knowledge for their personal growth and success. Rather than promoting fatalism, this knowledge actually increases our capacity to make meaningful and effective choices for our highest good.

The Hebrew month of Cheshwan began on Sun., Oct. 18 and Mon., Oct. 19. In the preceding month of Tishrei, we spent more time celebrating holidays than any other time in the calendar year. Tishrei is the month when we open and fill ourselves with blessings for the entire year.

Now in the month of Cheshwan, the month following Tishrei, we begin to translate into reality the visions we received in Tishrei. In the month of Cheshwan, there are no Jewish holidays. This month is the time when we go back to work.

On this date in Jewish history

On November 4, 1956

Israeli army captured strategic Egyptian military position at Ras Natsrani.

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

Shem Tov, and remarked that his son had abandoned God. In desperation the man asked, "What shall I do, Rabbi?" And the Ba'al Shem Tov answered, "Love him even more than ever."

Is that not what the founders of Reform Judaism going back to Spinoza had in mind when they sat and determined that the future of Judaism was not only in yesterday but in today, which will guarantee tomorrow? Reform or conform – the choice seems simple.

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

Recommendations for Cheshwan

1. Spend time in nature to better learn how to let go and flow with the cycles of life.
2. Talk to God in your own words and take time to listen deeply.
3. Review your goals for the upcoming year and update your plan to go forward.
4. Give yourself time to meditate and find a place of refuge within yourself.

~from *Kabbalah Month by Month*

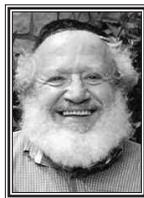
Cheshwan is a time of cleansing and purification as well. It is no coincidence that the Torah portion Noah is read to welcome in the month of Cheshwan. As you recall the story, Noah was instructed to build an ark to safeguard life from the destruction of the flood. So Cheshwan is when we must build an ark within ourselves to afford us safety and security for this month and coming year. There may be floods in the forms of challenges in the course of one's life and particularly during this month of Cheshwan. Our internal ark will serve us through these times.

The Hebrew word for ark is *teva*, which means "word." The arks we build in our lives are the positive words of love, prayer and blessing that we utter. Positive words provide a sanctuary for us and we need to fortify ourselves with them during this month. We each need to make a conscious effort this month to speak positively, to express words of love and blessing more than we might do otherwise.

During this month of Cheshwan, it is helpful to know that it is natural that we find ourselves letting go of what no longer serves the new spiritual order of blessing that we are open to in the month of Tishrei. It is a new year, a new order. We are in the Hebrew year 5770 and not 5769. Letting go of the old, letting go of what is not essential or is even detrimental may not be an easy one for many of us who are sentimental and want life to remain the same. What worked for us last year may not be relevant or even good for us this year. We need to let go gracefully this month as we deepen our opening and alignment to the new order of 5770. Let's look at or even hug some trees this month. They have so much to teach us about letting go, many so beautifully shed their leaves each year and yet they stand so firmly connected to the earth with branches reaching outward and upward to heaven.

Blessings for a beautiful transformational healing month of Cheshwan.

Melinda (Mindy) Ribner (Miriam Shulamit), 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 Miriam@kabbalahoftheheart.com. ✨



Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

Howard Schultz, CEO Starbucks

I read a great many self-help books. I believe my interest came from a desire for personal growth, and from teaching, and wanting to push, inspire, and enable growth in my students. My wife frowns every time I add another title to a very big collection. She reads fiction and feels that anyone with a collection the size of mine, should stop aspiring and concentrate on integrating. She is supportive of my talents and achievements, but is just trying to understand where it is all pointing. I am not sure myself, only that I believe in human potential, I have come to believe that what is "sinful" in a Jewish sense is the wasting of talent.

My current interest is focused on Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks, and came from long conversations over the holiday with my daughter-in-law, Tzippy, who is a shift manager at one of the Starbucks in Northbrook, Ill. Tzippy understands the benefits of working at Starbucks; it is close by, offers hours that meet her life style, and protects her family with medical coverage, which is high in value and low in cost. That benefit is part of Howard Schultz's philosophy. But our conversation was past the discussion of the benefits, and about the meticulous efforts that Mr. Schultz expects and demands of his workforce. Everything is fresh to the max. Everything is clean to the max. Every single detail has been thought out, tried out, and if it works, implemented. In good times and bad, there is nothing in the business that has passed by his eyes.

I am wondering what kind of a change someone like Howard Schultz would make if he was given the chance to take on a challenge bigger than the biggest coffee store chain in the United States, perhaps the world. What difference would he make, if we asked him, on behalf of the United Nations to do something about world hunger and disease?

I am always disappointed in the annual opening of the United Nations. Here is a gathering of the most powerful men and women in the world, and they speak in a forum that historically promised much and delivered very little in terms of its potential. Forget the politics, because the politics are the most reprehensible. The United Nations has stood by and watched over civilian death, destruction and massacre, and has largely failed to make the world any better. It has failed to bring the resources of the world to the problems of the world.

I still hope that one day soon, some leader will passionately ask that for a single year when politics is set aside, and they set about bringing the resources of

the world to the service of the people of the world. Why, I ponder, does it not bother these great men, including our own great men that every day thousands of people are dying of hunger in a world of abundance? Children are dying from diseases that have been eradicated in most progressive countries, and could be eradicated in every country in the world. The solutions are in our hands, and the cost of all this is minimal, next to costs of endless wars, misery, dislocation and pain.

We now have a czar overseeing almost every part of our life. Why is it that our president and our congressmen and women have not taken the initiative in solving the world issues that could be solved if they brought the leadership that each of these issues require? The English government has just decided to send 500 troops to Afghanistan, which will make no difference in the outcome of the war. Why don't they just forget the whole exercise and show the moral leadership of meeting some of the problems our wars have already created. Why is there no national shame?

How do the people in power go to sleep at night when so many people in the world are on life support? What are we supposed to think when we see that the White House has become a national-event-location to celebrate worthy accomplishments, while children are homeless and dying?

The president of the United States of America, the heads of the government of the world are not unaware of all these situations, and they are not dependent on us to point them out. What is the reason? Is there some book that we have not read, perhaps on social Darwinism that suggests that the world will be better off if the weak die? We can bring fresh water, malaria nets, nourishing staples to every part of the world that is in need. Why don't we?

It is odious and beyond our belief that during the Second World War, neighbors who could see the smoke of the crematoriums, simply went on with their lives, but we see no heroic role for ourselves in changing how man regards pain and suffering. We have left the matter to relief agencies, to church missionaries, and show business "do-gooders." I am thankful for their work, but they cannot and never will bring the answers to these issues, and every second, every minute, every day it all continues happening while we talk and plan.

The United Nations is only a symbol of our issue. President Obama, we are told, has a "full plate" and cannot get to every issue at the same pace. When he spoke the other night to the gays and lesbians, he told them to be patient, that he will fulfill his commitment, but as of this moment he has made no commitment to those who are dying and will die. He is not responsible to do it by himself, but since he has the power to mobilize and focus attention on any issue, the one issue he should bring to the attention of the world is the plight of the world.



Jews by Choice

BY MARY HOFMANN

Bereishit

It is always with a sigh of relief and a deep, cleansing breath that I begin each new Jewish year. For one thing, when I was diagnosed with stage III cancer in May 1999 I figured I'd be lucky to see the end of the secular millennial year and was grateful and surprised when I was still there for the High Holy Days in 2000 CE, 5760 by the Jewish calendar, and 2 AC (after cancer). This year I celebrated my tenth cancer-free High Holy Days and am a veritable fusion of gratitude.

Sukkot came and went. Then came seven of the longest *hakafot* in Merced memory took place throughout the gardens outside the room where we hold services prior to the reading and rolling of our beloved scroll on Simchat Torah.

And so to Bereishit, our first Torah portion of the year and the first Torah Tales reenactment by the Sheva Shy Shabbat School Players – my seven students under seven years old at Shabbat School. When better to start a new tradition?

I believe that even the youngest among us should read Torah throughout the year, which presents something of a challenge when half the kids can't read at all. The first year I taught Shabbat School this time around (the last time was 30 years ago when my own kids were little), we did the stories as read-alouds using



I cannot believe that there is a single gay or lesbian who does not understand the difference between life and death. I am certain that with all the money we are spending, some of the stimulus could be effectually given to everyone in America who can produce food, medicine and skills to the people of the world. And then he will get to every issue that was raised and dealt with in his campaign for president.

Why are we not demonstrating?

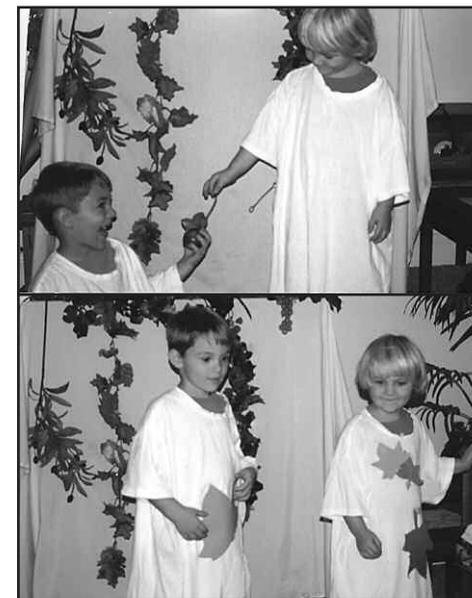
I believe that our president should have coffee with Howard Schultz, and ask him how he would attack one of the most pressing problems of our time. How long would it take to begin to save lives, use technologies, increase the potential of those who are there and bring an army capable to stemming the tide, and preparing these people to become self-sufficient? We know how to do it with creating police forces and armies under fire, could saving children be more complicated?

And if you are reading this, Mr. President, and Howard Schultz says "no," we have some other resourceful and creative Americans for you to consider.

Howard W. Karsh lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisc. His e-mail is howkar@wi.rr.com. ✪

picture books. Last year each child created his or her own Torah scroll using text and photos copied from books they could paste onto pages that were then taped together to form a Torah scroll. We made covers and rollers and yads, and the kids were very proud. This year, I thought we'd do the stories as skits the kids could immerse themselves in.

Of the seven kids from 2 to 6 years old, two read very well, two read a little, and three don't read at all. This creates a significant challenge in learning lines. Time is another issue. Our two-hour class includes time for Hebrew, for cutting out and baking cookies shaped like the Hebrew letter of the week, reading the Torah story to understand the background, decorating the "set" and putting on costumes, and discussing what we learned after the play.



Aidan and Lyra portrayed Adam and Eve. Photos by Linda-Anne Rebhun.

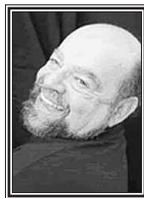
Happily, I discovered Torah Alive, a preschool curriculum by Lorraine Posner Arcus that provides scripts that I read aloud while the children follow my instructions and merely reenact the story. Our first two weeks strongly indicate that we've found a winner.

The first week we began creating our class 3-D Torah book, a craft project with a page dedicated to each day of creation and we will add a page for each subsequent portion. We created the Garden of Eden in an upstairs bedroom we dedicated as a sacred space for Torah study.

I read them the Adam and Eve story twice, each a slightly different illustrated version. My Aidan and Lyra played Adam and Eve, two of the other kids were the "legs" walking our huge stuffed snake, and two were the cherubim who guarded the garden.

As you can see, the reenactment was a rollicking success. Adam and Eve wore my husband John's t-shirts to indicate nakedness, Eve plucked the fruit from the Etz Ha-Daat when the Nachash tempted her, and Adam accepted a bite with more than a little enthusiasm. They took it well when they "realized" they were naked and

(see Hofmann, page NAT 14)



Funsmith

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

We are here for the fun of it

Hello, Mr. Funsmith,

I've been reading your columns regularly, and really appreciate the National Jewish Post & Opinion for including your kind of mishugas. But sometimes I wonder about this whole kosher fun thing. Do you really believe that fun can be compared to a religious experience?

~ Annie O'haiv-Simcha

Dear Annie,

As an American, I am of the people who made the pursuit of happiness an inalienable right. Interestingly enough, American Jew that I am, son of a rabbi that I also am, I find myself pretty much inexorably drawn to a certain, especially loving, somehow Jewish, monotheistic kind of fun – the kind of fun that transforms us by connecting us, as one, to Oneness. Maybe the belief in, the very idea of Oneness is an exceptionally Jewish idea. Maybe even behind Einstein's search for the One grand unified theory of everything.

I find this kind of One Fun most readily in the games that no one really cares who wins – Pointless Games, really, where no one even keeps score. Like in the games I've developed and played and taught for the last four decades with my wife and kids and students and clients, for neighbors and whole cities, and for the world, which now includes my grandkids.

Like the deeply loving, pointless fun we manage from time to time to create for each other. Like the fun of playing Pointless Games with the family – you know, games like "let's see if we all say the same color," or New Games like the Lap Game, whose sole objective is to see if everyone, thousands even, can wind up sitting on everyone else's lap. Or like trying to juggle giant, 6-foot-diameter balls with 25-foot-diameter parachutes.

Actually, it's the very same kind of fun you can get watching the sunset with your lover or giving names to clouds. The kind of fun you get loving someone who's loving you. Profound. Mutual, powerful, all-embracing, unifying Fun.

For me, as an American Jew, fun is something I have come to believe in. So, for a living, I invent new games and new ways to play. This way, I can be part of the fun. I can be always making it more fun. I seek and cherish The Big Fun that I find in community, when we play together.

This particular experience of Oneness is the very stuff of fun. Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of many books exploring the social and psychodynamics of fun, points to the state of being "at one" (with oneself, with the environment)

as key to the experience of what he calls "flow" and I call "really fun."

Such a wonderful experience is this "flow" or "really fun" thing that, as Csikszentmihalyi notes, people are willing to risk their lives for a timeless moment of it. Snowboarding, bungee-jumping, hang-gliding flow. Playing in an orchestra or on a basketball team, being on a surgical team or in a marching band, the "really fun" part of the experience is when you find yourself part of that Oneness.

And, humorously enough, when you are in flow, when you are really having fun, you feel as though you are being someone in touch with something other than yourself... Think about it. There you are, in flow, having something really fun. It's as if you have become larger than yourself, funnier than you think you are, stronger than know yourself to be, other than yourself.

...I find myself...drawn to a certain, especially loving, somehow Jewish, monotheistic kind of fun – the kind of fun that transforms us by connecting us, as one, to Oneness.

You feel you are other, and you feel connected to something other. To Otherness. Other than yourself. Other than everything and everyone else. A transcendent spirit, manifesting itself in fun, in joy, in laughter.

In other words, you are at one with Oneness. With the One.

I think this is why "fun" is such a big word for me. It covers so much of my reality – from what on the one hand can seem so trivial, to the other, so real, so present, so universal, so transcending. Sometimes, I do think I see evidence of the Divine – every time, come to think of it, I have real fun. But even as a Jew, even as an American, it still feels somehow rebellious to believe that fun is really what it's all for – that fun is what we're really supposed to be, commanded to be, having.

I think fun is directly related to the experience Martin Buber was talking about when he wrote *I and Thou* – the experience of being in relationship, of connection and uniqueness, unity and otherness. You and the sea at sunrise. The taste of the divine.

I think the most fulfilling things we can do with our lives are also the most deeply fun. And I've also noticed that when we're doing these things together, it's even easier, touching that deep kind of fun. It's closer, more accessible, longer-lasting.

Sometimes, I even think the spirit that manifests itself to us as divine is that very same spirit that manifests itself when we are really having fun. Sometimes when we're alone, but especially with each other. Especially when we are making things really fun together. Making our very world really fun.

Yeah. The Really Fun. Something divine about it.

I recently realized that it was probably my father who first taught me all about this Oneness I have learned to call both "God" and "Fun." It makes sense. My father was a rabbi. Certified in seven different rabbinic specialties from Hevron Yeshiva Rabbi, including Rav Kook, then Chief Rabbi of Israel. And we played a lot of games. Get it. God and Fun in the same presence, as it were?

My father was the author of *Siddur Mifurash*, an annotated prayer book that has made its way into synagogue and Hebrew school libraries throughout the world. On the other hand, financially, we didn't do so well. And my family had to move from state to state, synagogue to synagogue. But we played a lot of games, my father and my family. Chess. Word games that we played whenever we were waiting for something better to do. So we managed to stay connected: the rabbi who taught us about God, and played games with us.

And then there's Jewish humor, for example.

Like any American Jew, I know a good joke when I make one. And I appreciate it, too. Jew-wise, I know you can find writings about joy in the Bible, the prayer book, Mishna and Talmud. I know that the rabbis believe that there is no greater joy than being in the presence of the Divine. And I know that the original Hasidim celebrated those who celebrated life, not just with prayer, but with every act of their joy-prone beings. Like in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

I have come to most definitely conclude: Fun is a face of the truth, a taste of the Divine. I believe the delight I get from the beauty of shared laughter is just like the delight I get from laughing with God.

As an American, and as a Jew, and a Funsmith, I am ready to believe that having fun, being at One, is the point of it all – that our reason for being in the world is that we enjoy it, that we delight in it, that we have fun, totally.

DeKoven resides in Indianapolis, Ind. and calls himself a "funsmith" because it's the easiest way he can define the last 40-plus years of his career. In brief, he helps people make things more fun: work, school, games (of course), marriage, parenthood, exercise, healing, toys, recovery, retirement, life. He does this by helping people look at things from a fun perspective, which usually turns out to be something people under stress would never think of. And he happens to know a lot about this particular perspective. Which is what he hopes you will conclude from reading more about him on <http://deepfun.com/about.html>. ✨



Cinema Review

REVIEWED BY CHARLIE EPSTEIN

Serious-ly marvelous

The Coen Brothers can *kvell* with pride with their most recent movie, *A Serious Man*. Not only did they write the screenplay, but they also directed this marvelous Jewish film.

The story concerns Larry Gopnik, wonderfully portrayed by Michael Stuhlbarg. He is the husband and father of a dysfunctional Jewish family in Minnesota where he is a physics professor. He tries to cope unsuccessfully with his family and his working conditions, but his wife, Judith, played energetically by Sari Lennick, wants to live with another man, namely Sy Ableman (Fred Melamed).

Larry's son is about to be bar mitzvahed, while his older sister steals gelt from the wallets of her parents. She is saving the cash in order to get a nose job. When Larry discovers the thefts he declares, "No one in this family is going to get a nose job."

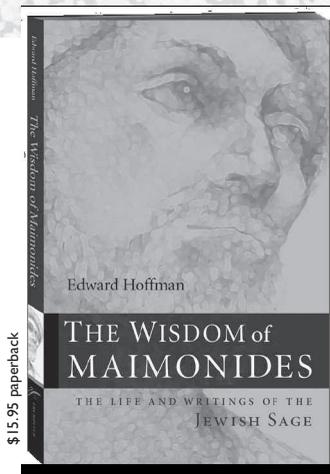
Richard Kind plays Larry's brother who lives with him. Alan Arkin is a rabbi. There is Yiddish and Hebrew sprinkled though out with English subtitles for the uninitiated. At the beginning of this very unusual film is a Jewish fable, which is completely unnecessary. Why it is there I do not know.

Michael Stuhlbarg is spellbinding, and an Oscar nomination is certainly due to him. His subdued characterization is superb. This film is a very dark comedy. The dream sequences are confusing and sometimes shocking. The end of the film is still in question. However, this is a very entertaining movie. I heard a member of the audience comment, "I liked it, but it was really strange."

Charlie Epstein has been a theater, movie and the performing arts critic for The Jewish Post & Opinion for more than 30 years. ✨

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Seen on the Israel Scene

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

Celebrating my birthday – Israeli style

When the girls were small, we frequently celebrated their birthdays and mine by eating at Olive Garden, where the trained but not so much on key waiters would come to your table, sing a Happy Birthday song and present you with a complimentary dessert. We *never* could celebrate Barry's birthday there or anywhere else, for that matter, because kosher restaurants that might be open were unavailable in Overland Park and other restaurants were always closed. His birthday is Dec. 24.

As my birthday approached, we decided to rent a car and take a weekend trip, combining things he wanted to do and people I wanted to see. Thursday we headed out of Jerusalem on Highway 6 at 10:30 a.m. By lunch time, we were in Afula, the largest city in the Jezreel Valley of northern Israel, where we found a nice spot and I surprised Barry with a picnic lunch I had prepared.

That done, we headed north toward the capital of the Golan, Katzrin. A short while before reaching this town, we entered the parking lot of Moshav Aniam, founded 31 years ago. We happened to visit this artists' colony a few years ago, when we came to visit my daughter, Elissa, who was in the Israeli army. A ceramicist in an industrial park near Katzrin suggested we go there.

At the time they were planning to build 16 cottages, each housing a different type of artist. Dafna Kadoushevet, a silversmith, was my hostess. She came here seven years ago with her husband and four children because they wanted a different way of life.

The other attraction to this colony was to revisit Joel Goldman, Golan Gold, a third-generation American jeweler of gold, precious and semiprecious stones. When we were there before, he noticed our woven wedding rings and asked to see them. (We had bought them in Kansas City, Mo. at Tivol's jewelers). Inside both of our rings are stamped the initials, DFS; Joel had made them in his father's workshop in New York. We were also there to look for items for a new website, A&B Unique Judaica and Israeli Art, to be launched by Barry and Alan Organ.

Leaving there, we realized no one just pops in to visit someone who lives in the Golan Heights but, in fact, we were about 10 minutes from Michael Even-esh, formerly Mike Firestone, son of the late former

Kansas City Jewish Chronicle editor and owners, Bea and Milton Firestone.

Michael and his wife, Tzurit, and four of their six children live in this community of about 130 families. Tzurit is a vice principal of a high school for religious girls with special needs; Michael is an independent tour guide.

From there we headed south on incredibly curving roads for two hours to visit a former Midwest Young Judea shlich, Michal Avivi, who lives on Kibbutz Maaleh Gilboa but works for the city of Bet Shean in fundraising, public relations and some legal work. Although she and her new husband, Shlomo, are not members, they rent an apartment and are building a home on this kibbutz. Regrettably, we were unable to coordinate schedules and pop in to the kibbutz next door, Merav, where we hoped to visit the daughter of the late Milton and Bea Firestone, Judy Singer.

Next morning, we were out early and heading to the Upper Galilee to Dalton Winery, one of the few wineries that produces its own grapes. Daniel Rogov, Israel's preeminent wine critic and connoisseur, says Dalton's reputation has earned it a "consistently good name for high-quality wines." (Out of the 54 wines he tasted and commented on in his 2009 *Guide to Israel Wines*, he gave a "very good to highly recommended" to 32 Dalton wines and an "exceptional in every way" to 13 Dalton wines.)

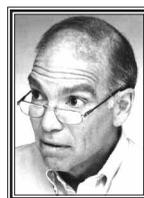
From here we went across the road to the Rimon Winery, where the cute and spirited 21-year-old niece of the founder gave us a tour. What is remarkable here is her uncle developed a 1.5 kilo hybrid pomegranate. These pomegranates are made into six different kinds of pomegranate "wines." Just knowing the health benefits should motivate people to rush and drink it! After testing, they maintain pomegranate "wine" is good for preventing heart disease and bad cholesterol; it balances the level of insulin for diabetics; and it destroys cancer cells and the development of some cancers. And you only have to drink less than a tablespoon a day!

We then drove to spend Shabbat with Linda, an old friend of mine originally from California, whom I met with her husband and three children as we stood to board the boat to come on aliyah in 1970. Regrettably, her husband passed away in May. She lives in a charming small town, Kiryat Tivon, nine miles southeast of Haifa.

Shabbat afternoon we were off on our leisurely drive to Jerusalem, only stopping long enough to have the famed humus of Abu Gosh, the Israeli-Arab town, 6.25 miles west of Jerusalem. During the 1948 War of Independence, the Arabs of Abu Gosh remained neutral and neither fought nor fled. Today, their multitude of restaurants attracts throngs of Israelis.

We arrived home in time to rest and shower, and my birthday weekend ended when we tried one of Jerusalem's kosher

(see Kaplan (Israel), page NAT 14)



Shipley Speaks

BY JIM SHIPLEY

What's with Turkey?

Last month I wrote this glowing column about Turkey. Rachel and I had just returned from a 12-day odyssey covering over 2,000 miles in the country, including 1,500 on a minibus with three other couples from Australia of all places.

I went on glowingly about the people, the history, the relationship with the Jews and with Israel. We get home and less than three weeks later, the Turkish prime minister decides to put Israel under the bus. What's with Turkey?

On top of that, we have a colleague who negotiates the sale of Israeli military technology to Turkey and uses Turkey to transship Israeli materiel to other countries. Turkey has welcomed over 50,000 Israel tourists over the past year and a half. We needed a visa to enter the country. Our daughter Tracy who flew in to meet us from Israel did not.

What's with Turkey?

Once the shock wore off of hearing that the prime minister of Turkey was excoriating Israel over its treatment of the Palestinians in the recent Gaza War and of pulling Israel out of the recent military exercises in Turkey, I then hear of a public television drama in Turkey that shows Israeli soldiers killing Palestinian babies. What's with Turkey?

As I stated in my previous column, it is understood that Turkey lives in a dangerous neighborhood. They border with (in geographical order) Russia, Chechnya, Azerbajhan, Armenia, Iraq, Iran and Syria. It's like living in a neighborhood of pit bulls. You don't want to antagonize them if possible.

For a number of years Turkey depended on Israel for a vast array of military equipment and technology. They were considered Israel's staunchest ally in that part of the world. But with the new government, which was elected in a close and bitter election less than two years ago, Prime Minister Erdogan rules with a narrow majority. Make no mistake, this guy is a dedicated Islamist.

Turkey in its propaganda campaign may say that it no longer need be so dependent on Israel for technology and would rather spread it around to nations like France and Germany, but the real reason for the sudden coldness is deeper. My Daddy told me years ago, when in doubt – "follow the money." Well, it turns out, Erdogan's family business is called AMAR Construction. It is the largest construction company in Turkey.

Okay. Who are the Erdogan family partners? Saudis and Palestinians. Now it all begins to make sense. While we were in Turkey, the media was concerned with two things: the floods in Istanbul and the

coming downfall of the Dogan group, the last secular news organization in Turkey. Steadfastly against the Islamist bent to the government, the Dogan Group was hit with a fine on back taxes large enough to cripple and probably destroy the group.

In essence, Erdogan is trying to destroy the very basis of the nation of Turkey's principals, those on which the present nation was formed in 1923 by its founder, Mustapha Kamel Attaturk. Attaturk's Turkey was to be a strictly secular state, respecting all religions. The nation today is 99% Muslim, but still clings to its secular laws and understanding.

Not only that, but Turkey has a 500-year history of partnership with the Jews. Jews flooded there after the Catholic King and Queen of Spain inaugurated the Inquisition. Jews from Bulgaria and Romania sought refuge in Turkey to escape the Nazis.

Obviously, Erdogan and the nation's admittedly Islamist president, Gul, hand picked by Erdogan want to change that. Ergo, cuddling up to Syria and saying "see ya!" to Israel. In response to the sudden attacks, Histadrut, the Israeli Labor Federation, has cancelled all its package tours to Turkey. Travel agents throughout the Jewish State say that their business between Israel and Turkey has dried up. The reservations are being changed to Europe, Greece and the Grecian end of Cyprus.

Many of our Turkish friends, more fearful of Erdogan and Gul than the Israelis, feel that in less than two years, they will be gone, and the will of the people will prevail. We can only hope. But it is interesting for all the bluster, the root of the change is still the money. So what's with Turkey? Money. That's what's with Turkey.

All of this as if Israel doesn't have enough *tsuris* at home. Rockets still fall from Gaza, the smuggling tunnels from Egypt still function, a Jewish judge has laid full blame for atrocities during the Gaza incursion squarely on Israel in his report to the UN.

A "distinguished" jurist, Judge Richard Goldstone of South Africa, a hired gun at the UN, took reports from Hamas and accepted them at face value about the abhorrent behavior of the Israeli soldiers in Gaza. He submitted his report stating "If this were a court of law, there would be nothing proven. I would not in any way consider it embarrassing if many of the allegations turn out to be disproved."

But, he submitted his report and the draft resolution from the UN Human Rights Council – a misnomer if ever there was one – came out with not one of the allegations of the Israelis against Hamas. Just the Hamas allegations against Israel. No surprise there.

At least the U.S. voted against the Resolution. If you were to eliminate the despots and dictatorships that serve on the UNHRC, you would eliminate 68% of those condemning Israel. In which case the Resolution would not have passed.

(see Shipley, page NAT 15)





Parsha Perspective

BY REUVEN GOLDFARB

Fear of water: A few comments on Parashat Noach

I. On Dec. 26, 2004, a massive tsunami, triggered by an undersea earthquake near Sumatra in the Indonesian archipelago, overwhelmed the coastal regions of the Far East and inundated numerous small islands across the Indian Ocean. The catastrophe was compounded by the failure of authorities in Thailand, who knew of the danger posed by the earthquake, to issue any warnings – not only to people living in low-lying areas, but even to the thousands of vacationing beachgoers who found themselves in mortal danger a few hours later, as an enormous wave rushed hundreds of meters inland, destroying homes, swamping whole villages, and, of course, drowning thousands of hapless residents and visitors.

In this *parasha*, too, we read about a massive flood that, in this version, covered the entire world. However, unlike the Thai government agency's reluctance to warn of the peril facing all those in the path of the probable tsunami, Noah publicly warned the people and openly built a vessel in which to rescue his family. According to the *midrash*, Noah told all who would listen, among those who came to marvel, laugh, and jeer at his construction project, that he was building this boat in anticipation of a massive flood. Even as the torrential rains began to fall, people laughed at him and partied on. Only when the waters began to rise and the ship began to float did the people realize their danger and plead for rescue. But by then it was too late for them.

But, in fact, the Torah says nothing about his presumed conversations with curious stoppers-by. And many commentators note that the Torah's description of Noah as *ish Tzaddik tamim haya b'dorotav* (a perfectly righteous man in his generations), who walked "with God," as rather disparaging compared to the subsequent description of Abraham as being "perfect," without any qualifications, and walking "before God," perhaps because Abraham pled on behalf of the residents of Sodom and Amora while Noah did not do so for the vast population of the earth. He neither prayed for them nor proselytized to them. Instead, he kept his head down and worked for 120 years to build the vessel that God had ordered. He must have assumed that God's verdict on his generation was final. It's proper to note, however, that despite Abraham's attempted intercession, in the end Sodom and Amora were likewise destroyed, with only Lot and his daughters escaping.

I would like to point out, however, that Noah might justifiably be better compared to Adam, his predecessor by ten generations, whom God put in charge of the Garden He planted. Adam was instructed "eastward in Eden," so that he might *l'avdah u-l'shomrah*, "dress it and keep it" or "work it and guard it" or "maintain it and protect it" – that is, to be a gardener and steward, to take care of the plants. Noah's task is perhaps more challenging – to take care of the animals, that is, to rescue enough of the locomotive species to ensure that they would be able to reproduce when the deluge ended, and to keep a surplus number around to be offered as sacrifices to the omnipotent God who directed the disaster. Noah's challenge was the submersion and dissolution of his own project, due to the dissolute ways of the earth's inhabitants, whose creation God explicitly regrets.

Ten generations later, Avraham took up the task of introducing humankind to the same God. This was a more advanced challenge, but one that could not have been undertaken without the previous efforts of Adam and Noah, who through their nurturing of plants and animals laid the foundations for Avraham's concern for humanity and his mission as a teacher and prophet.

II. According to the Zohar, the flood waters are called "the waters of Noah" (in Isaiah, 54:9) because although he was himself righteous, he did nothing to prevent his contemporaries from sinking into depravity. Yet the tipping point, according to scripture, was the descent into violence, *hamas* – alternative translations for which, according to Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, include robbery, oppression, cruelty, and outrage. Many sources include idolatry and sexual immorality among the egregious violations that corrupted all the earth and led to the Deluge.

Abarbanel says that the phrase *Asay l'cha* – "Make for yourself" – means that HaShem directed Noah to build the Ark himself. Alshich adds that in effect HaShem was saying, "make an Ark to symbolize your own behavior. You remained aloof from your compatriots, instead of chastising them and trying to save them by improving their conduct. Now you will isolate yourself in an Ark with beasts and animals."

These are weighty charges to be laid at the feet of the man who rescued all the existing antediluvian species and who was, moreover, called an *ish Tzaddik tamim* – a perfectly righteous man – by the Torah. But our sages were scrupulous men, and they knew that the imperfections of a Tzaddik have wider reverberations than those of an average person.

Likewise, in modern times, those leaders and functionaries whose offices confer on them responsibility for the well-being of the population that they represent cannot escape being associated with natural and man-made disasters that occur on their watch if they have been derelict in their duty and not properly prepared for such

eventualities as flood, fire, earthquake, tornado, hurricane, cyclone, monsoon, iceberg, or blizzard. Preventative measures can reduce fatalities and property damage if undertaken in a timely manner. Foresight is better than hindsight. We have the example of natural disasters and reckless actions of the past to caution us concerning risks we may be running now.

For example, it is risky to build homes on a flood plain. It is dangerous to cut down a forest, for the erosion that is engendered by the subsequent increased run-off during storms can cause landslides and floods and fill streams with debris, destroying marine life, in areas the forest once protected. Just as forests store rainfall, wetlands absorb high waters. In their absence, due to man's propensity for building along the shore, as in the Gulf of Mexico, along America's southern coast, floodwaters can re-take their accustomed territory and destroy what man has built.

...the flood waters are called "the waters of Noah" because although he was himself righteous, he did nothing to prevent his contemporaries from sinking into depravity.

The heating of the atmosphere through the proliferation of what are commonly called greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, has led to an increasing melt-down of glacial ice, thereby raising the sea level; it could eventually flood coastal cities and shorelines worldwide. The vast herds of livestock, especially cattle, nurtured by human efforts, have added an even greater volume of such gases as methane, nitrous oxide, and ammonia to the atmosphere than the carbon dioxide produced by industry and manufacture, the culprits usually identified with climate change. This habitat-damaging process is already well underway, yet no concerted effort mounted so far has succeeded in reversing it. Will the Bush presidency be forever linked with its failure to prevent an increase in global warming? Will the Obama administration be more effective?

Transporting oil in single-hulled tankers has led to numerous disastrous spills, fouling our ocean waters and pristine beaches and killing fish and birds in immense and heartbreaking numbers. Yet one country – Liberia – permitted such tankers, from many lands, to sail under its flag even though every other country transporting oil had accepted the double-hulled tanker as the industry standard. Many years had to pass, and the seas had to swallow repeated instances of pollution by oil spills before this practice was universally banned. Why did it take so long for leaders of other countries to intervene?

A cyclone in the Irrawaddy River delta of Myanmar on May 7, 2008, reportedly killed 140,000 people. In this case, too, the government – a military junta – chose not to warn the population and, even worse, actually prevented aid from reaching their own people. Here, too, a so-called act of God was made immeasurably worse by the callous disregard of a government more interested in its own preservation than in the lives of its citizens.

In the U.S., preparations for the pending landfall of Hurricane Katrina on the coast of Louisiana and Mississippi during the last week of August in 2005, following its passage across the southern tip of Florida, was less than optimal, and the rescue efforts turned into a national scandal. The Sichuan earthquake in China occurred on May 12, 2008, just prior to the Beijing-based Olympic Games and a few months after China's harsh repression of the Tibetan freedom movement. The Mandate of Heaven – the divine *heksher* that in the minds of the Chinese people entitles an Emperor or his successor, in this case, the Communist Party, to rule China – was profoundly shaken. I could go on, and I could go into greater detail regarding the sociopolitical context that made these events seem like purposeful comments on the realpolitik of the day. But my astute readers can undoubtedly make their own connections and draw their own conclusions.

At-risk populations have far too often not been notified of tsunami dangers. Wikipedia notes that in 2004, "despite a lag of up to several hours between the earthquake and the impact of the tsunami, nearly all of the victims were taken completely by surprise. There were no tsunami warning systems in the Indian Ocean to detect tsunamis or to warn the general populace living around the ocean. Tsunami detection is not easy because while a tsunami is in deep water, it has little height and a network of sensors is needed to detect it. Setting up the communications infrastructure to issue timely warnings is an even bigger problem, particularly in a relatively poor part of the world.

According to Wikipedia, "Tsunamis are much more frequent in the Pacific Ocean because of earthquakes in the 'Ring of Fire,' and an effective tsunami warning system has long been in place there. Although the extreme western edge of the Ring of Fire extends into the Indian Ocean (the point where this earthquake struck), no warning system exists in that ocean. Tsunamis there are relatively rare despite earthquakes being relatively frequent in Indonesia. The last major tsunami was caused by the Krakatoa eruption of 1883. It should be noted that not every earthquake produces large tsunamis; on March 28, 2005, a magnitude 8.7 earthquake hit roughly the same area of the Indian Ocean but did not result in a major tsunami."

You might remember that at that time little had yet been done to establish the infrastructure for a warning system. The world was justifiably alarmed that

another tsunami, on the scale of the previous one, might occur in its aftermath. Fortunately, it did not. Nevertheless, the quake served as an additional warning against any tendency toward official laxity. The once-in-a-century event could, for all anyone knew, be repeated in a mere three months – or at any time. Therefore, the Wikipedia entry goes on, “in the aftermath of the disaster, there is now an awareness of the need for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean. The United Nations started working on an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System and by 2005 had the initial steps in place. Some have even proposed creating a unified global tsunami warning system, to include the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean.

“The first warning sign of a possible tsunami is the earthquake itself. However, a tsunami can strike thousands of kilometers away where the earthquake is only felt weakly or not at all. Also, in the minutes preceding a tsunami strike, the sea often recedes temporarily from the coast. Around the Indian Ocean, this rare sight reportedly induced people, especially children, to visit the coast to investigate and collect stranded fish on as much as 2.5 km (1.6 mi) of exposed beach, with fatal results.

“One of the few coastal areas to evacuate ahead of the tsunami was on the Indonesian island of Simeulue, very close to the epicenter. Island folklore recounted an earthquake and tsunami in 1907, and the islanders fled to inland hills after the initial shaking yet before the tsunami struck. On Maikhao beach in northern Phuket, Thailand, a 10-year-old British tourist named Tilly Smith had studied tsunamis in geography class at school and recognized the warning signs of the receding ocean and frothing bubbles. She and her parents warned others on the beach, which was evacuated safely. John Chroston, a biology teacher from Scotland, also recognized the signs at Kamala Bay north of Phuket, taking a busload of vacationers and locals to safety on higher ground.

“Anthropologists had initially expected the aboriginal population of the Andaman Islands to be badly affected by the tsunami and even feared the endangered Onge tribe could have been wiped out. Of the six native tribes only the Nicobarese, who had converted to Christianity and taken up agriculture in place of their previous hunter-gatherer lifestyle, and mainland settlers had suffered significant losses. Onge tribespeople explained that the sea and land always fought over boundaries. First the spirits became angry and shook the trees and then when they saw changes in the sea and clouds, they knew ‘the sea would enter the jungle and mix with the land until they decided on a new boundary.’ The aboriginal tribes evacuated and suffered few or no losses.”

This issue of shifting boundaries is crucial to understanding our gratitude to and fear of water. We praise it, compare human achievements to it (e.g., “the Sea of Talmud,” “Waters of healing”), immerse

in it regularly, and pray for timely and nourishing rain to fall, yet subconscious dread frequently emerges. I was fascinated by the saga of these Andaman Islanders, who have evidently been living in this remote and isolated location for around 30,000 years. They discourage visitors and seek to maintain their distance from mainland culture. As a result of their separation from civilization, they were able to retain their oral traditions and their sensitivity to climatic signs and portents. One cannot help noting that it was the most assimilated tribe that was most at risk and that suffered the heaviest losses.

III. My colleague in England, David Bash, wrote a note to the Aleph-Pnai-Or list shortly after the tsunami had struck and after the extent of its destructiveness had become apparent to all, asking about passages in Jewish scripture, commentary, and liturgy that reflect our collective

Eat less meat; reduce global warming

I understand that while carbon dioxide may take hundreds of years to dissipate, the other greenhouse gases mentioned in the last paragraph of

Part II, methane, nitrous oxide, and ammonia, take only about 13 years to dissipate. Furthermore, the quantity of these gases that are produced each year may exceed that of carbon dioxide by weight. If so, it would seem prudent to pursue a two-pronged campaign against the human-fostered production of both kinds of greenhouse gases, even though it would mean challenging the livestock lobby and people’s ingrained eating habits as well as heavy and light industry, the other major polluters. The practice of clear-cutting (or burning) huge tracts of land, as in the Amazon rain forest, to provide pasture for these cattle, has already caused an incalculable loss of protective canopy, with its carbon dioxide-absorbing and oxygen-producing capability.

Of course, the melting of the permafrost in Siberia, Greenland, and northern Canada would release vast quantities of methane, causing the global temperature to shoot up even more, and perhaps create an irreversible condition (irreversible, at least, in terms of one person’s life-span). So one thing we can do, besides reducing our carbon footprint, is reduce our intake of meat and other animal products, and more, reducing demand will reduce the size of the herds that are dependent on human factory farming. This is a long-term goal, one as difficult to persuade people to accept as curtailing the use of fossil fuels has been. Nevertheless, I believe that it is already a well-established trend (think back to *Diet for a Small Planet* for the first popular explanation of its desirability and feasibility), one that should be practiced and encouraged.

concern about the threat posed by what covers 75% of the surface of our earth. I began noting numerous such references in the Siddur. I would like to mention a few of them here.

In Psalm 104, perhaps the most beautiful and all-embracing of the 150 Tehillim, we read, “The watery deep, as with a garment you covered it; upon the mountains, water would stand. From Your rebuke they flee, from the sound of Your thunder they rush away. They ascend mountains, they descend to valleys, to the special place You founded for them. You set a boundary they cannot overstep, they cannot return to cover the earth.” Here, in an apparent reference to the primeval flood, we are assured that the waters will stay within their divinely ordained boundaries. The psalmist continues, “He sends the springs into the stream, they flow between the mountains. They water every beast of the field, they quench the wild creatures’ thirst,” an idyllic portrait of the world and the elements in harmony and at peace. The passage concludes, “He waters the mountains from His upper chamber, from the fruit of Your works, the earth is sated.” This psalm is read on Rosh Chodesh and by some congregations after Mincha on the Shabbat beginning after Sukkot until prior to Shabbat haGadol, in the week before Pesach, clearly in association with the rainy season in Eretz Yisrael.

Psalm 136:6 expresses the same idea: “Give thanks...to Him Who spread the earth upon the waters” – *rokai ha-aretz al ha-mayim*. The same wording is echoed in one of the Dawn Blessings that are recited daily at home or in shul. The idea that God has established limits to such an inherently unstable and perpetually fluid substance is crucial to our own sense of stability. One less thing to worry about.

Psalm 33, recited on Shabbat mornings, provides a further note of reassurance, in that “He assembles like a wall the waters of the sea. He places the deep waters in vaults.” Nevertheless, the image of a wall of water reminds me of the way a tsunami traverses thousands of miles of open ocean at hundreds of miles per hour, with most of its immense strength hidden below the surface. Only the top of the wall is perceptible as it speeds toward its distant landfall. And who has the key to the vault? What if it were opened? Our commentators agree that God had declared that He would not again flood the whole world, but the return of the Reed Sea upon the Egyptian army did not violate this oath, as that surge only inundated a portion of the earth – moreover, a portion that was usually submerged.

Yet the reminder of what happened to the Egyptians seems to haunt later liturgical poets. Empathy for the drowned Egyptians even finds a place in the Haggadah, in the ritual of diminishing our second cup of wine by ten drops, flicking them into a saucer, an act that might also serve to assuage our survivors’ guilt. It is as if their drowning ignited dormant traumatic memories of Noah’s

flood. The memory of both is compared to the danger posed by our oppressors in Psalm 124, recited after the daily Tachanun prayer or shortly after the Torah service in Nusach Sfar: “Had not HaShem been with us when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us. Then the waters would have inundated us; the current would have surged across our soul. Then they would have surged across our soul – the treacherous waters. Blessed is HaShem, Who did not present us as prey for their teeth.” Perhaps the fact that our liturgy repeats the Song at the Sea daily suggests that what happened to “them,” could have easily happened – and still could – to “us.” “Pharaoh’s chariots and army He threw into the sea; and the pick of his officers were mired in the Sea of Reeds. / Deep waters covered them; they descended in the depths like a stone.”

Thus, the implied terror when in Psalm 29 we sing of all the power that the Voice of God can command, capped by the astonishing declaration, *Adoshem haMabul yashav* – “God presided over the Deluge,” a claim comparable to the statement in the Song of the Sea / *Shirat haYam – HaShem ish milchamah* – “God is a man of war,” or “a Master of war.” In both cases, God is intimately involved with our travails, our battles with the forces of nature, and with the destruction caused by human aggression.

So it is that when we come to the episode of Noah’s bout with posttraumatic stress disorder – when he becomes drunk and passes out in his tent, naked and helpless – and later to the equally brief description of the Tower of Babel fiasco – we are prepared for the chaotic reckoning imposed upon man by his own reckless and arrogant behavior. Even the best of men, like Noah, are caught up in it, and certainly the worst bring devastation upon themselves and mar the future for generations to come.

By the end of Parashat Noah, we really need Avraham to come and straighten things out.

Coda: Whatever historicity a character named Noah ever had has been long supplanted by his allegorical significance. As far as the flood is concerned, I support the theory that near the end of the last ice age a replenished Mediterranean Sea breached the land bridge that is now the Bosphorus and formed the Black Sea, in a cataract that lasted for an extended period, covering, of course, whatever human settlements existed there and giving rise to the myth of a worldwide flood. As far as the local inhabitants were concerned, their world was indeed completely submerged by the unstoppable influx and was never the same again. Survivors took the story of what had happened to Sumer, where it became embedded in the Epic of Gilgamesh and flowed into the Torah.

However, this perspective does not in any way diminish my faith in the truth of the Torah. The theme of human responsibility as

Opinion

BY ARI J. KAUFMAN

J Street conference

Unlike much of the world, the preponderance of Americans support Israel's right to exist. However, it's also no secret that, for more than a half-century, individuals and lobbying groups in the USA have held various beliefs on how that support is best implemented.

The "new organization on the block," which has garnered much attention recently, is J Street. Founded in April 2008, they are straightforward about their goals, namely "to change the way the United States government deals with Israel." They also reference themselves as "the political arm of the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement."

Led by executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami, erstwhile national policy director for Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign, J Street has aligned itself with left-leaning dovish groups such as the Israel Policy Forum, Americans for Peace Now, and Brit Teed v'Shalom, among others. All three organizations have previously competed with the more hawkish, right-leaning Zionist lobby groups in our nation's capital.

J Street's name comes from the fact that no such street exists among Washington's alphabetically named roads – but if it did, "J" would run parallel to K Street, which is famous for advocacy groups residing there. On their website, however, J Street does not actually provide a street address.

Having backed Barack Obama in the 2008 election, J Street is very supportive of his efforts pertaining to Israel. Policy-wise, like the president, J Street has been outspoken in its dedication to a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine "living side by side in peace and security." And much as Obama has noted in speeches, they too contend that "Israel's settlements in the occupied territories have, for over 40 years, been an obstacle to peace." J Street also opposed Israel's war to defend herself against Hamas rocket fire in 2006, stating the violence could be stopped with the proverbial "diplomatic solution."

In the 2008 election cycle, J Street's PAC endorsed 41 congressional candidates, 39 of whom were Democrats. It has been suggested that, considering Obama's election, J Street's supporters currently believe that they, not the more established groups, are now more in sync with American foreign policy. While J Street is a nascent operation that does not yet have huge endowments, in its first year of existence it certainly gained a large amount of favorable coverage.

Criticism from the right, as expected, has been intense. Those on the right claim J Street has endorsed the farthest left policies and politicians possible. They cite collaboration with George Soros' "Open Society Institute" to promote "Breaking the Silence": a speaking tour of former Israeli

soldiers critical of the way Israel treats the Palestinians. A multi-billionaire progressive icon, Soros places the blame for the Arab-Israeli conflict squarely on Israel.

To counter, J Street's website is adept at showing concern for Israelis' security by attaching the phrase "pro-Israel" to nearly all statements they profess.

There has also been criticism from the nonpartisan Zionist group StandWithUs, who believe J Street "draws moral equivalence between Israel and Hamas" as well as "frequently endorses anti-Jewish narratives." But vociferous critics also hail from the left, particularly Union of Reform Judaism President Eric Yoffe. He penned an incensed New Years Day 2009 editorial in the left-leaning *Forward*, declaring J Street's foreign policy views, "morally deficient, profoundly out of touch with Jewish sentiment and appallingly naïve."

According to *Commentary Magazine's* Noah Pollack's April 2009 analysis "J Street hopes the president of the United States will tell Israel to immediately commence peace talks with Syria and Hamas, and support the inclusion of Hamas in a Palestinian unity government." Pollack also asserts that, "The group advocates for Israel's adoption of – that is, for the U.S. government to force Israel to adopt – the "Arab Peace Initiative," which requires Israel to evacuate the West Bank, give the Golan Heights to Syria, and admit unspecified thousands of Palestinians currently living in Arab countries into Israel."

In an August expose on the *American Thinker* website, Matthew Hausman opens, "There has been a surge of liberal-to-leftist organizations who claim to be pro-Israel, but who actually boast agendas that undercut the legitimacy of the Jewish State."

The *Jerusalem Post* recently reported that J Street receives some funding from Arab and Muslim donors, along with State Department officials with Saudi and Egyptian connections and a lawyer who once represented the Saudi embassy in Washington. The Arab and Muslim contributors include members of J Street's own finance committee as well as Muslim student groups.

Lenny Ben-David, a former Israeli diplomat, bluntly said it "raises questions as to their banner that they're a pro-Israel organization. Why would people who are not known to be pro-Israel give money to this organization?"

Jeremy Ben-Ami responded that he estimates the amount of Arab and Muslim donors to be at most three percent of the organization's thousands of contributors. He then opined that these supporters show the "broad appeal of J Street's message and its commitment to coexistence."

The right does not buy it.

Within his aforementioned 4,500-word article on J Street, Noah Pollack's conclusion was far from sanguine, claiming, "It is still doubtful that innovative organizational tactics and a reawakened sense of liberal

(see Kaufman, page NAT 14)

Another View

BY SUE SWARTZ

First, national conference of J Street

~ *I'm here because my son is serving in the Israeli army.*

~ *I came from California because what else can I do? We're stuck with an important issue we have to address.*

~ *We young people don't see the world as zero sum. Being pro-something doesn't mean you have to be anti-everyone else. I want peace.*

~ *If we give up on a two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I'm afraid there will be no future for Israel. That's why I came.*

These were some of the introductions made by people gathered around a table on the first evening of the first national conference of J Street – a spirited, inspiring, and occasionally raucous gathering of 1,500 people (mostly Americans, mostly Jews) held in Washington, D.C., Oct. 25–28. We had come with 1,500 stories of our personal relationship to Israel as well as the shared hope that the conference would help change the dynamics of pro-Israel advocacy and American politics regarding the Middle East.

Sitting side by side in plenary sessions and jostling for a place in line to grab a quick lunch were students and retirees, physicists and librarians, accountants and engineers; those who define themselves as Zionist, those who do not, and those who aren't sure; rabbis of every denomination; Jewish communal leaders, members of Knesset, and Palestinian policy experts. From early in the morning until well after the dinner hour, we schmoozed, networked, listened, laughed, and argued in Washington's Grand Hyatt Hotel.

The 18-month-old organization describes itself as "the political arm of the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement," calling for assertive American leadership to end the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts. J Street supports a two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict negotiated by the parties, as well as a regional peace agreement and recognition of Israel by its neighbors.

During our opening session, New Israel Fund Executive Director Daniel Sokatch told the audience what many of us already believed: "We are the American Jewish community. There is no single way to love and support Israel and nobody has a monopoly on being pro-Israel." He encouraged us to engage with the real Israel, a flawed and precious country worth fighting for, and a real place with real problems.

Israeli President Shimon Peres sent a letter of congratulations, as did Kadima's Tzipi Livni (numerical winner of Israel's last election). Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren declined to attend,

citing concerns about J Street's intentions but sent a "monitor" in his stead. The Jewish press and blogosphere was buzzing with opinion, pro and con, left and right, for weeks leading up to the conference – which may be the reason why 500 people registered in the last week alone.

It may also be why the Obama administration sent a high-ranking representative to make its case. National Security Advisor, General James Jones spoke to an overflowing ballroom of the deep foundation of Israeli-American common interests, interests that are both geopolitical and highly personal. A special envoy under President Bush, Jones said that "Without equivocation, Israel's security and peace in the Middle East are inseparable. I would advise the president that if he could solve one problem in foreign policy, this would be it." The time has come, Jones stressed, to relaunch negotiations on final status issues.

Speaker after speaker, in five plenary sessions and 28 workshops, stressed that time is not on the side of a democratic and Jewish Israel if the conflict continues, a position supported by a majority of American Jews in poll after poll. That view was not a hard-sell among the participants.

To my mind, equally as important as its policies, is J Street's stated aim to promote "open, dynamic, and spirited conversation" in the Jewish community. You could see this approach throughout, where neither *Israel-is-always-wrong* or *Israel-is-always-right* found much traction among participants or presenters – including those representing Palestinian and Arab points of view.

The speech of Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, is a case in point. Invited to share the stage with J Street's Executive Director Jeremy Ben-Ami on what it means to be "pro-Israel," Yoffie drew both hearty applause and vocal criticism. He spoke of the difficulty many of us have in our own communities making the case for Israel in the face of expanding Israeli settlements, and he defended President Obama's approach to the Middle East, saying that the status quo doesn't serve Israel's long-term security interests – comments that received sustained applause.

However, when Rabbi Yoffie condemned Richard Goldstone, lead investigator of the U.N. report describing war crimes by both Hamas and the Israeli military in the Gaza war, saying he should be "ashamed of himself," there were boos by – my count – a couple dozen people. There was also scattered applause. To both of their credits, Yoffie and Ben-Ami didn't skip a beat. They continued their conversation in a civil manner – despite differences – ending it with warm words and an embrace.

There were other moments of tension during the three-plus days – how could there not be? Speakers disagreed with each other about diplomatic engagement with Iran, human rights in Israel, Palestinian politics, and the role of anti-Semitism on the American left. There was

(see Swartz, page NAT 15)



As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

This CD rates five stars

My mailman (actually a mail lady, okay, a mail person) recently brought me several CDs, which, while not new, were new to me. Over the next few months I will be pleased to review them. The first of these CDs is called *The 3 Jewish Tenors LIVE*. (I would hope so!) There is no label on the CD, but it does have the number CL-DPR-100, and one could probably either purchase it at one's favorite temple gift shop or directly from Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston, Texas.

After listening to this CD, my only reaction is, how many copies would you want to purchase? One for yourself certainly, one for.... Everyone on your Hanukkah list. Although I have no connection with the producers, I would observe that it would make a wonderful Hanukkah gift.

As you could guess, yes, I liked this CD, I liked it a whole lot. The voices and the singing are simply wonderful. Who are the voices? Hazzanim: David Propis, Meir Finklestein and Alberto Mizrahi. That should be recommendation enough. The arrangements and orchestrations are very, very good, and although I could quibble about the inclusion of one selection, each and every selection is superbly sung.

The three have never been in better voice, and we are fortunate that what started out as a "wouldn't it be nice if..." (during a golf game in 1996) turned into reality in 2003. There have been occasions when I was hard pressed to find some redeeming quality in a CD. My problem here is that I will not be able to find words sufficient enough to praise these gentlemen and their musical efforts. I give it five stars.

There are nine selections performed on this CD.

The first is a "Tribute to Moyshe Oysher." Oysher was a singer of extraordinary musical gifts. He had a lyric baritone voice with a range many tenors would envy and was in great demand from the 1930s through the 1950s. In addition to his concert and recording work, he was an actor (Yiddish movies) as well as a superb cantor. There were many sides to his musical persona, and this tribute is only one of his most endearing and enduring qualities.

Like my father, he came from Bessarabia, and the influence of Romanian flavored melodies he often combined with a style now known as "scat" singing. The arrangement of this spirited medley as well as the orchestration is by Charles Heller. It combines several melodies including "Ki Lo Ho-eh" as well as a swinging "Chad Gadyo." (You won't hear it sung this way at your Seder I'll bet.) The vocal efforts of Propis, Finklestein and

Mizrahi made me wish that this tribute would extend to an entire CD. They are terrific. This is how it ought to be sung. Yasher Koach!

The second cut is a Jerusalem Medley, arranged and orchestrated by Joseph Ness. It includes Shir Lashalom, Jerusalem in Mine, Jerusalem of Gold, and Yerushalayim. The singing is heartfelt and the cut is moving, stirring and as emotional as it should be.

The third cut is "S'u She'arim and was composed and orchestrated by Meir Finklestein. This contemporary setting of Psalm 24 is musically sumptuous and is reflective of the grandeur and beauty of the text.

Of course, it is extremely well sung. One can get used to listening to these three. Wouldn't it be great if all tenors and perhaps all cantors sounded like them? (Maybe more people would go to shul?)



The fourth cut is a Yiddish melody, arranged and orchestrated by Charles Heller. This medley includes: Oif'n Pripitsuk; Rozhinkes Mit Mandln; Sha, Shtil; An Emese Eyshes Chayil; Oy, Oy, Oy Yosl; Die Greene Couzinne; Die Mezinke Oysgegeb; Tum Balalaika; Belz; Mamale; Zol Shoin Kumen Die Geulleh. The thing is that while all of these tunes were very well known and sung at one time, with the exception of perhaps one or two, none are known that well today, if at all. Fine arrangement and fine singing.

The fifth cut is "I Believe." The melody for Ani Ma-amin comes from Wisniz by way of Elie Wiesel and is sung in the most sincere way one can hope for. (If this does not move you to tears....) It is followed by another setting by Finklestein of "A Soul Saved" sung by the trio, and sung beautifully too, I might add.

The sixth cut. We now make a transition from the sacred to the really secular. This medley, arranged and orchestrated by Bill Holcomb, features songs by four Jewish composers, only three of which are very well known in the field of popular music. It starts with "Tell Me Where Can I Go" (by Haime Jacobson) and is followed by Bernstein's "There's a Place for Us," Gershwin's "O Lord I'm on My Way" and concludes with Berlin's "God Bless America." Again, the singing is simply terrific.

Cut #7. "I Have a Little Dreydl." This is a nontraditional composition by Michal Gelbert, arranged by Tyku/Lazar and (see Gold, page NAT 15)



Book Review

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

Jewish American internal struggle and search for identity

Beyond the Golden Door: Jewish American Drama and Jewish American Experience. By Julius Novick. Published by Macmillan (Palgrave Studies in Theatre and Performance History) 200 pp.

Using Jewish American drama, Julius Novick's searching, literate work has hit upon the major dilemma that faces today's American Jews – or Jewish Americans, as he prefers to call them – namely, identity. How does one define oneself as a Jew? This has been a decades-long struggle, which has challenged Jews throughout their history in this country – from the time that the immigrants arrived on these shores to the present day.

As Novick poses the question in his introduction: "How (or whether) to keep faith with their Jewish heritage, while at the same time embracing (or not embracing) American opportunities, moral as well as material? How Jewish? How American? And what does it mean to be Jewish, to be American, anyway?"

Novick traces this theme through Jewish drama, following its chronological development. As he points out in his introduction, much critical attention has been given to the Jewish American novel, but the parallel attention to Jewish American drama has been relatively neglected. Thus his current book *Beyond the Golden Door*.

Looking at the works of Jewish playwrights, he begins with Israel Zangwill's 1908 drama *The Melting Pot* and moves

through the entire 20th century. He skillfully interweaves historic and cultural factors, explaining their impact on the playwrights and their works.

This would appear to be heavy going for the reader, but quite the opposite is true. As it happens, Novick's prose is highly readable. *Beyond the Golden Door* proves to be a treatise that fascinates and entertains even as it stimulates thought. It is education in the best sense. Not surprisingly, Novick's skills shine through. As an author, theater critic, and Professor Emeritus of Drama Studies, Purchase College, SUNY, he has evaluated the theater scene for many years, solid preparation for this book.

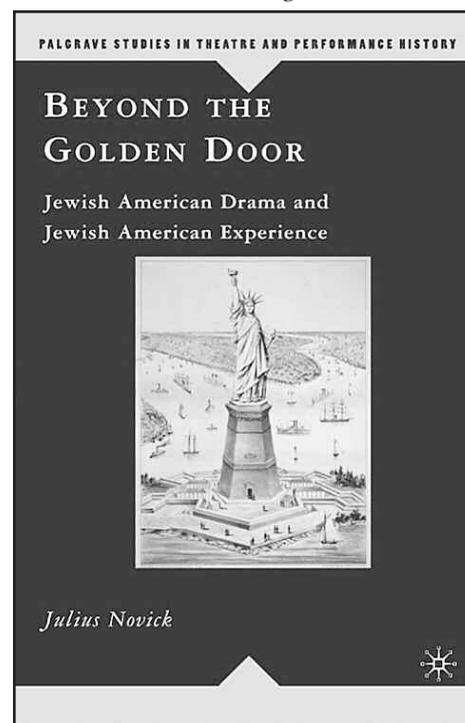
Novick has divided his book into ten chapters: The Golden Land, Elmer Rice's Multiethnic New York, The Bronx, Arthur Miller and the Jews, Prosperity and Its Discontents, Neil Simon – Brighton Beach to Broadway, The Musicals, German Jews – Southern Jews, More Fathers and Sons, Jewish Daughters, and finally, in an epilogue – Tony Kushner: Angels in America. Problems change but are not necessarily simplified, as Jews become more assimilated with each generation.

The chapter on Arthur Miller is particularly provocative. Novick offers both sides of the controversy as to whether Miller's characters are Jewish, especially in his famed *Death of a Salesman*. While Novick takes no side, he does point out that the play's dialogue has typically Yiddish speech cadences. And if Miller did not openly label Willy Loman as Jewish, it was understandable if he chose to avoid the ethnic label in 1949. His overtly Jewish plays would come later, in a more congenial atmosphere.

In a fascinating chapter on Southern Jews, Novick tackles assimilation head on. In examining Alfred Uhry's trilogy about Atlanta's Jews, he has a good look at the contradictions and the snobbery that underlie their way of life. Perhaps such attitudes still exist, even in today's accepting society, Novick suggests. "And yet is the desire 'to kiss their elbows and turn into Episcopalians' – so near the surface in Uhry's play (*The Last Night of Ballyhoo*) – the exclusive property of wealthy German Jews? Has this desire become extinct in the 21st century? Are not unease and ambivalence and uncertainty about being Jewish, and, more broadly about being oneself, still with us?"

The playwrights represent Novick's arbitrary selection, but they are wise choices, as they define the Jews' changing status over the years (with new, more complex dilemmas). He has provided an invaluable examination of the Jewish American playwright's journey through the 20th century. In the process he helps us Jews to a better understanding of our internal struggle and a clearer knowledge of our identity.

Irene Backalenick critiques theater for many publications. She has a Ph.D. in theater criticism from City University Graduate Center. She welcomes comments at IreneBack@sbcglobal.net, and invites you to nytheater-scene.com and jewish-theatre.com. ✨





Media Watch

BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

A Serious Man

A Serious Man is Joel and Ethan Coen's quirky memoir of growing up Jewish in a Minneapolis suburb in the 1960s. It is the story of Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), a Jewish physics professor, a passive, Barton Fink type of guy, whose wife wants to leave him, who barely communicates with his children, who is not sure whether he will receive tenure, whose brother, the permanent house guest, is disintegrating mentally, and who is being harassed by a disgruntled student.

We get to know his Jewish world, a world that, for whatever reason, still centers around the synagogue and looks to rabbis for guidance and for solutions to one's problems. Jewish women and girls in that world are rather unattractive and whiny, except, of course, for the promiscuous neighbor, and Jewish men are not that much better. Jewish professionals charge exorbitant fees for advice and even for friendship, and want to sweep spiritual and moral questions under the rug. The rabbis are either totally aloof, distracted in their listening and in their counseling, or so practical-minded as to dismiss the quest for, and even the possibility of, spiritual answers.

Everyone in the professor's immediately family – his wife, brother, children – is incapable of answering a direct question honestly. The wife/mother has been cheating on her husband for several months, the brother/uncle is engaging in illegal and lewd activities – and the truth comes out only when the family members need attorneys who seem bent on bankrupting the family. The son has been buying marijuana from a vicious Hebrew school classmate, but he gets away with it and the suggestion is that it helps him through his bar mitzvah ceremony, or at least heightens his awareness of the funny faces and rather superficial and off-putting expectations that characterize synagogue life, in particular, and Jewish life, in general.

Hebrew School here is, by the way, all verb declensions and no discussion of ethics. The film is particularly effective at showing how teenage obsession with four-letter words results in the drowning out of sacred words, not only in Hebrew School days and while practicing one's bar mitzvah Torah reading, but in society as a whole.

The Jews in this film are not nice or "serious" people. The most responsive and seemingly sensitive Jewish fellow is trying to steal Gopnik's wife and is falsely accusing the latter of moral turpitude in anonymous letters to the university tenure board. Yet despite, or maybe because of, their own faults, this film's Jews are unable to relate to Gentiles as

people. Gentiles are little more than "the goy" next door or "the goy" who is the paying customer (or patient). The "goy" next door is always playing catch with his son and keeps the boy out of school for hunting trips. Larry has nightmares about him shooting at Jews. Gopnik is incapable of recognizing when his neighbor tries to reach out to him by mowing part of his lawn or attempting to protect him from an unpleasant intruder. Given his sense of superiority to the Gentiles around him, one wonders whether he is capable of envying the closeness between "goy" father and son.

One recognizes enough truths about American Jewish life – Hebrew School, self-indulgence, concern with financial and social status – to realize that some of this rings true. But how true are these depictions of the rank-and-file Jewish community of the 1960s?

Is *A Serious Man* intended as a critique of Jewish life? It is nostalgic. Even the uniform suburban homes here look rather neat and inviting. The film is in keeping with the current fascination with the 1960s in productions like television's *Mad Men*. It certainly shares the preference in that genre for a 1960s in which the parent generation lapsed enough in morality to lower the standard for their even more self-indulgent children. Indeed, Gopnik's son, Danny (Aaron Wolff) regards his father as little more than the repair man for the TV antenna, especially when reception is bad for Danny's favorite show, *F Troop*.

The film is particularly effective at showing how teenage obsession with four-letter words results in the drowning out of sacred words...

A Serious Man has three elements that lead me to believe that it is more paean than critique, and that its nostalgia is less for Jewish life and community in the 1960s than for the genre introduced by Woody Allen. These elements are:

1. A lead character who is an homage incarnate to the Woody Allen nebbish. Actor Stuhlbarg almost makes his character likable even as the rest of the talented cast is all too good at making just about everyone in this Jewish community unlikable and maybe even insufferable.

2. A prologue featuring some ancestral scene from the *shtetl*, the Jewish community of yesteryear. The opening scene solemnizes Woody Allen's use of old world Jews for easy laughs. It adds Yiddish dialogue and subtitles in order to identify the Yiddish language with earthly and innocuous off-color remarks and with quaint superstition. This may well be the way that many who grew up in the 1960s were raised to view

Yiddish. The tragedy is that the classic recordings by Yiddish singer Sidor Belarsky, which give comfort to the lead character and actually give voice to his blues, are not transliterated or explained. Only the *narishkeit* (foolishness) merits transliteration as if to say: What can you expect from the Jewish community of the 1960s when their forebears in Europe were so crazy?

3. Visits to rabbis reminiscent of Woody Allen's rewriting of Hasidic tales. These visits are even highlighted with captions, as in silent movies or anthologies of ancient wisdom: "First Rabbi," "Second Rabbi," "Marshak" (the third rabbi).

The depictions of the rabbis are of interest. The first rabbi, the inexperienced, self-conscious assistant, greets the professor's pained questions with a brief lecture, which puts undue importance on the parking lot as a focus for gaining the perspective to see all one's woes as "expression of God's will."

The senior rabbi has a pat but interesting story about a dentist in the congregation who found, after taking impressions of "a goy's teeth," that there were letters behind some teeth spelling out the Hebrew word, *Hoshieni*, which the Coen brothers translate as "Help me." The dentist searches every denture mold he ever made for Jew and Gentile alike, and finds no such message anywhere. He cannot sleep, thinking of his obligation to understand the message, and is surprised that a "goy" was chosen for such revelation. He takes the gematria of the letters, tallying up their numerical significance, and comes up with a telephone number, which belongs to a grocery store at which he receives no revelations. The senior rabbi puts the dentist's mind at ease by telling him that Hashem (God) does not owe us answers and that searching for answers is like a toothache that will go away, allowing one to return to normal life on the golf course. The rabbi is quick to point out that what happens to a "goy" is not significant, anyway.

The professor never gets to visit the rabbi emeritus, who is too busy "thinking" to see him. Only the bar mitzvah boys receive an audience with the Great Marshak, who is a bit like the Wizard of Oz. Apparently, this rabbi, who is revered because of his old world look, is a lot like Woody Allen's Zelig. He "connects" with the bar mitzvah boys by parroting their favorites pop lyrics, thus making Judaism a reflection of whatever they are into. Young actor Wolff communicates well Danny's sense of affirmation by Marshak, but we all know in our hearts that this will not change his life, and will probably make him more self-indulgent and insensitive as the years roll on.

If this film is a sacred commentary on American Jewish life, then it comes to Allen by way of *Fiddler on the Roof*, perhaps the quintessential expression of Jewish nostalgia of the 1960s, replete with ambivalence toward old world ways and Jewish traditions, not to mention members of the Jewish community from rabbis to

matchmakers. The bar mitzvah scene in *A Serious Man* gushes with wish fulfillments that would have Jewish rites and rituals magically reconcile families and make colleagues and neighbors more sympathetic to one another, even as the scene mocks Torah reading with "druggie humor."

As for religion, I get the impression that the Brothers Coen prefer the senior rabbi ("Second Rabbi"), though they are ambivalent about him. He is smooth. But he does say that while it does not pay to ask the questions, "Helping others couldn't hurt." He's nothing if not practical. At a funeral, which has significance to the plot, he declares that *olam ha-ba*, the "World to Come," is not Heaven or what the Gentiles consider the afterlife (no use of the word, "goy," in public), but it is being in the "bosom of Abraham" – borrowed from an African American spiritual.

Do the Cohen Brothers suggest that the rabbi gets his theology from the civil rights movement? Or are they making the point that even he can't help speculating about the big questions? Or are they saying that he is right despite his being the perfect one to lead such a self-indulgent community because in the end (as the plot goes), tornadoes and illness make all such questions seem small, anyway, and helping others always sounds good and may be the best form of self-indulgence, anyway?

Some things about this film make me wonder whether the Coen Brothers did their research. That word on the affable Gentile's teeth (and this Gentile may be the most affable soul in the film), *Hoshieni* means more than just "Help me." (The Hebrew word, *ezra*, means "help.") It actually means "Save me," "Give me salvation." Are the Coen Brothers telling us that the rabbi rejects any notion of salvation, whether Jewish, Christian or other? Or did they simply choose a far less nuanced translation out of ignorance, indifference, or convenience?

Also, why didn't they seek out a responsive, helpful, decent Jew? If they wanted to wax Kabbalistic, why dabble in gematria alone and not engage in a pursuit of one of the 36 righteous Jews who, according to a legend that began in the Talmud, sustain the world? Was there no figure in the Jewish community of their youth who could provide ethical guidance beyond the common instinct of this movie's Jewish father and Jewish son that if one uses cash for one's own needs or for the family's needs then it does not matter how one acquires said cash?

It is telling that the Brothers Coen could not find in their past one larger-than-life Jew, like their character Walter in *The Big Lebowski*, a shell-shocked but faithful convert to Judaism who defended Sabbath observance, or one Jewish man or woman who, like Marge, the pregnant detective in *Fargo*, pursues evil in a thoughtful and persistent way, mindful of danger but never daunted by it. How could the Coen Brothers have created such characters without some early inspiration?

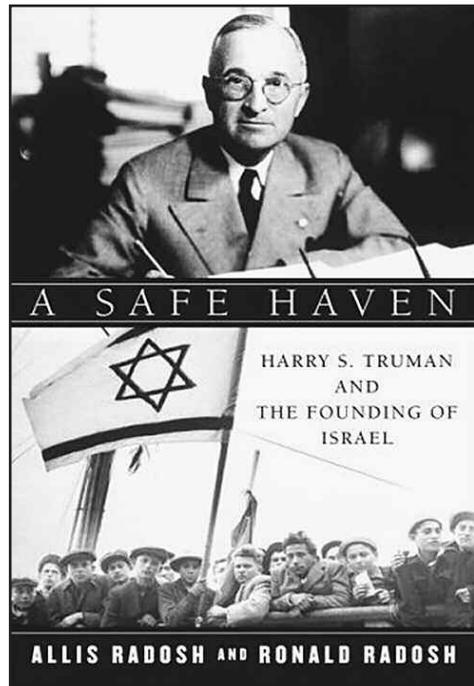
(see Gertel, page NAT 15)

Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

Harry Truman's role in birth of Israel

A Safe Haven. By Allis and Ronald Radosh. New York: HarperCollins, 2009. 431 Pages. \$27.99.



Two historians who are married to each other, Allis and Ronald Radosh, have teamed up to produce this excellent account of Harry Truman's role in the founding of the State of Israel. Readers will be familiar with the end of the story. Just 10 minutes after the Israeli Act of Independence was declared on May 14, 1948, President Truman announced that the United States recognized the new state. What preceded these memorable acts and, to a lesser degree, what followed them, is the subject of this remarkable, thoroughly researched narration.

To go back to the beginning of the saga, the Radoshes open with "FDR's legacy," describing his view of the situation in Palestine as "ambiguous." He vacillated and took "contradictory positions," sometimes favoring the establishment of a Jewish state and sometimes worrying more about placating the Arabs to insure a continued flow of oil. When Truman became president, he was "out of the loop" on the Palestine issue just as he was uninformed about the atom bomb as well as other domestic and foreign policy questions.

An early decision by Truman that proved significant later in his relationship to Jews and Israel was the retention on his staff of two Roosevelt aides, Samuel I. Rosenman and David K. Niles. These two Jews were sympathetic to moderate Zionist views, and they helped to shape Truman's embrace of the idea of a Jewish homeland. Their influence found a positive reception by Truman who had studied the Bible, leading him to a position similar to that of the

Christian Zionists who felt it was right for the Jews to return to Palestine. Buttressing his attitude was sympathy for the plight of those Jews who had survived the Holocaust and who were living in displaced persons camps under poor conditions.

Aside from the Arabs, two major opponents of doing anything about the Holocaust survivors and of supporting a Jewish state were the U.S. State Department and the British government. Known even to this day as favoring the Arabs was the State Department with its large number of Arabists. They influenced Truman's secretaries of state, especially George C. Marshall, who clashed openly with Truman. The British, under Clement Atlee and Ernest Bevin, were implacable foes of a Jewish state and of issuing permits for residents of the displaced persons camps to move to Palestine.

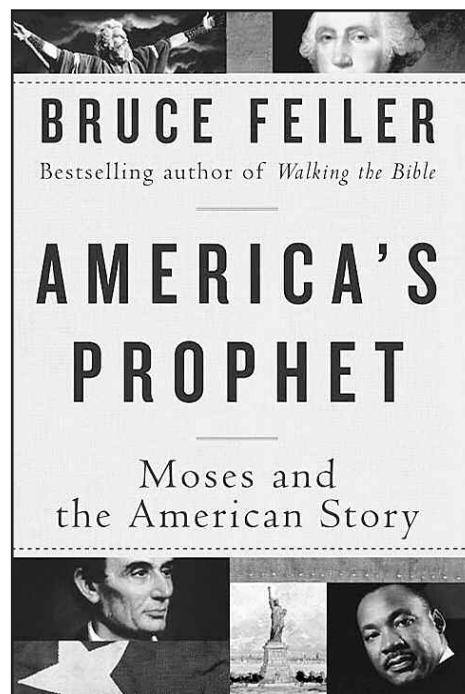
Ultimately, after many twists and turns, the problem was thrown into the hands of the United Nations. Its Special Committee on Palestine recommended in its majority report that an Arab and Jewish state be created in Palestine. The final decision was left to the General Assembly of the United Nations. The State Department opposed this partition plan and refused to urge the delegations in the General Assembly to vote in its favor. Moreover, it tried to make territorial modifications in the borders of the proposed two states that would take land away from Israel and give it to the Arabs. After a visit to the White House by Chaim Weizmann, Truman instructed the American delegation to the UN to withdraw these recommendations and the hands-off policy on lobbying for the partition plan was withdrawn. As a consequence, the General Assembly voted to approve partition. The State Department continued to fight against this action.

Eddie Jacobson, Truman's friend and former business partner, persuaded Truman to see Chaim Weizmann so that he could urge Truman to support partition. Although the State Department persisted in its opposition, Truman's view ultimately prevailed. His steadfast support contributed enormously to the creation of Israel. According to the Radoshes, had "FDR lived and Truman not been president, there probably would not have been an Israel."

This brilliant portrayal of what happened is shored up by insightful analyses of the characters involved – Americans, British, Arabs, Israelis, and Jews. The book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the events surrounding the birth of Israel and Harry Truman's role in that achievement.

Persuasive case: Moses helped shape American history and values

America's Prophet. By Bruce Feiler. New York: William Morrow, 2009. 368 Pages. \$26.99.



Bruce Feiler has published eight books on a variety of subjects. The one that brought him most acclaim was *Walking the Bible*, which was made into a TV series. His interest in the bible has now led him to examine the role of Moses in American history. Struck by the frequent references to Moses, Feiler traveled for two years to identify people, places, and phenomena where Moses plays a role. He was eager to learn why Moses was such an inspirational figure from the days of the Pilgrims in the 17th century until today.

Feiler begins his explorations on Sept. 6, 1620 when the Mayflower set sail from England. He visited New England where the Pilgrims landed, and he points to similarities in the language of Exodus and the memoir written by William Bradford, the leader of the Pilgrims. Seeing America as the "wilderness," they saw themselves as "reenacting Moses' journey."

Feiler moves on to Philadelphia and the Liberty Bell with its words from the story of Moses, "Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land to all the Inhabitants Thereof." Feiler recounts the story of the bell and asserts that its quotation from Leviticus demonstrates America's roots in the Hebrew bible. He reviews some aspects of the American Revolution against England, claiming that "the pace of Mosaic references seemed to escalate as independence drew closer." One example was the reference to King George III as "a pharaoh." Another was the belief of Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams that "Moses was America's true founding father." Feiler goes on to explore the "deep-seated bond" between Moses and George Washington. When Washington died, many of the orations drew parallels between him and Moses.

The failure of Washington to deal with the problem of slavery leads Feiler to explore this issue and the need to "raise up a new kind of Moses." He discusses the Underground Railroad and the degree to which Exodus became an account of slavery and freedom for both the Jews of Egypt and the African-American

slaves. Harriet Tubman, a leader of the Underground Railroad, was known as "the Moses of her people."

Feiler's consideration of slavery inevitably leads to a discussion of the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln who became a Moses. Both the Gettysburg Address and the second inaugural address are analyzed and Lincoln is called "America's Moses." After Lincoln's assassination, twice as many of the eulogies compared him to Moses as those who equated him to Jesus.

According to Feiler, the death of Lincoln helped to pave the way for the Statue of Liberty. He highlights the tablet that Liberty holds just as Moses carried the Ten Commandments down Mount Sinai. Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus," on the pedestal of the statue, implies that Moses as the prophet of exiles is linked to Liberty, the mother of exiles.

In what seems like somewhat of a digression, Feiler devotes a chapter to Cecil B. DeMille who produced versions of The Ten Commandments in 1923 and again in 1956. According to Feiler, "DeMille viewed Moses as a perfect vessel to restore America's values." Further "use of Moses as pro-American propagandist" is the comic book character, Superman, in which the "backstory is taken almost point by point from Moses."

Finally, Feiler devotes a chapter to Martin Luther King, Jr. who "tapped into the long love affair between Americans and Moses." King's famous speech in August 1963 during the March on Washington merged themes from the bible and America. His climax, "Let freedom ring," paid tribute to the inscription on the Liberty Bell from Exodus and his conclusion, "Free at Last" comes from the spiritual that put those words "into the mouths of Israelites as they set out for the Promised Land."

The book ends with the somewhat grandiose declaration that "Moses actually helped shape American history and values, helped define the American dream, and helped create America." Whether or not one agrees with this judgment, it must be acknowledged that Feiler has made out a persuasive case for his conclusion.

What is happening to the Jewish deli?

Save the Deli. By David Sax. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 366 Pages. \$24.

Specialization is often a feature of scholarly inquiry. Defining the question with exquisite specificity is an important first step in research. David Sax, a journalist who has published many magazine articles, meets the requirements for an academic study in his first book, *Save the Deli*. A clear question is posed: What is happening to the Jewish deli? The methodology for seeking an answer is straightforward: Spend three years gathering data by visiting delis throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. But this is not an

(see Teicher, page NAT 15)



Kosher Kuisine

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

Warming the body and soul with soup

There is nothing that makes one feel more warmth than a hot bowl of soup on a cold day or night. Here are some soup recipes for dinners. Add some good bread or rolls and a salad and you have a filling meal. Have one friend bring an appetizer and another dessert, and you've got a company evening.

My Classic Steak Soup (8 servings)

- 2 Tbsp. margarine
- 1 pound steak pieces
- 2 Tbsp. margarine
- 2 chopped onions
- 2 sliced carrots
- 2 chopped ribs of celery
- 1/4 cup flour
- 5 cut-up tomatoes
- 1 Tbsp. beef soup powder
- 6 cups water
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce

Heat 2 Tbsp. margarine in a frying pan. Brown meat; place in a soup pot. Add 2 Tbsp. margarine to a pot and sauté onion, carrot and celery 5 minutes. Add flour and stir. Add tomatoes, beef soup powder, water and Worcestershire sauce. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer one hour.

Meatball Minestrone (6 servings)

- 2 1/2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onions
- 1 minced garlic clove
- 2 sliced carrots
- 1 small chopped fennel bulb
- 1 diced green pepper
- 1 sliced zucchini
- 1 sliced other squash
- 1 sliced celery rib
- 3/4 cup 1-inch green bean pieces
- 2 cups shredded cabbage
- 3 tsp. beef soup powder
- 3 cups water
- 1 1/2 cup canned tomatoes
- 1 cup tomato puree
- 1/3 cup tomato sauce
- 1 1/2 tsp. basil
- 1 1/2 tsp. Italian seasoning
- 1 1/2 tsp. oregano
- 1/2 cup elbow macaroni
- 1/2 cup dry red wine

- 1 1/2 pounds ground beef
- 1 egg
- 1 small chopped onion
- 1/2 cup bread crumbs
- 2 1/2 Tbsp. beef soup
- 1 small minced garlic clove
- 2 Tbsp. minced Italian parsley
- 1 Tbsp. Italian seasoning

Heat oil in a soup pot. Add onion and garlic and sauté 5 minutes. Add carrots,

HOFMANN

(continued from page NAT 5)

leaves had to be taped on them, and tried hard to look solemn when they left the garden in disgrace.

Yes, they had fun. But did they learn? Did they understand anything about the story? Indeed they did. When they left the garden, I asked, did Adam and Eve die like God said they would? Well, no. Well, at least not right away, they realized. But would they get old and die? Oh yes. And they would learn and work and have children and live lives...because people need to learn, even if there are consequences, and they can't stay children forever. Little brain lights were flashing brightly during the debriefing.

I can't wait to find out how it goes with Noah!

Mary Hofmann welcomes comments at: P.O. Box 723, Merced, CA 95340; Mhofwriter@aol.com. ✨



fennel, green pepper, zucchini, other squash, green beans and celery. Cook about 5 minutes. Add cabbage and cook for 5 minutes. Add beef soup powder, water, tomatoes, tomato puree, tomato paste, basil, Italian seasoning and oregano. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 2 1/2 hours.

Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease a baking pan. Mix ground beef, egg, onion, bread crumbs, beef soup, garlic, parsley and Italian seasoning. Shape into 1-inch meatballs and place in baking pan. Bake in preheated oven 15–20 minutes. Line a cookie sheet with paper towels and drain meatballs there. Add meatballs, macaroni and wine to soup. Cook 15 minutes until macaroni is tender.

Vegetable Barley Soup (8 servings)

- 3/4 cup pearl barley
- 3 cups chicken or beef soup
- 3 Tbsp. margarine
- 1/2 cup sliced celery
- 8 cups chicken or beef soup
- chopped parsley

Place barley and 3 cups chicken or beef soup in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 1 hour or until liquid is absorbed. Melt margarine in a soup pot. Sauté onions, mushrooms, carrots and celery 5 minutes. Add chicken or beef soup. Simmer 30 minutes. Add barley and simmer for 15–20 minutes.

Ladle into soup bowls and garnish with parsley.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, book reviewer, food columnist and feature writer who moved from Overland Park, Kan., to Jerusalem one year ago. She has just completed compiling her ninth kosher cookbook, this one for her synagogue, We're Cooking at Kehilat Moreshet Avraham. Copies are available at KMA, P.O. Box 2072, Jerusalem 91290. Each cookbook is an \$18 donation plus \$4 for postage and handling. ✨

GOLDFARB

(continued from page NAT 9)

stewards of the planet and its resources, and the link between human behavior and the blessings and curses that may follow wise or reckless choices is a thread that runs through Scripture. Noah's decision to spend 120 years building a huge boat on dry land is one such example from our earliest sources. Avram's decision to follow God's summons and trek from metropolitan Haran to the wild west of Canaan land is another. There is nothing rational about the decisions these cultural heroes make, though plenty of postfacto rationalizations can be presented. A significant number of our decisions are supra-rational in nature, based on a hunch or intuition or a spiritual call – a leap of faith – regardless of counter-indicative cost-effectiveness analyses. When a new paradigm is being formed, old guidelines are insufficient.

It has often been pointed out that an autobiography that purports to tell the truth is often more fictional than many a novel, more fantasy than honesty. A great novel, no matter how invented its details and storyline might be, reveals more about the essence of its characters' lives than reams of technically correct but self-serving narrative. Such a novel – Moby Dick, for example, the most biblical of all American novels – while based on fact, is not and cannot be a thoroughly detailed and verbatim record of all that transpired (and neither can Scripture), nor is that its purpose. *Emet v'Emunah* – Truth and Faith – do not depend upon reams of data, factual precision, or evidentiary proof, though archaeology provides us with plenty of solid examples. They are themselves convincing support for the claim of a higher source, a transcendent and inclusive reality.

The Torah is much more than a novel, though it has inspired many and has many novelistic properties. It is at once the Hebrew-Jewish epic and revealed Scripture that, like a great work of art, operates on many levels simultaneously. Every element in it – Noah, the ark, the flood, the raven, the dove, the vineyard, the wine, the actions of Noah's sons, the tower, and the dispersion that followed the confusion of tongues – are figures or symbols upon which we project our hopes and fears, our ideals and our skepticism. Its archetypal figures and outrageous episodes and conflicts continue to pique our imaginations. Its arrays of positive and negative examples offer models of conduct for us to emulate or reject, wrestle with or ponder. Its patterns and gradations of good and evil challenge our own standards of behavior. Its image of a merciful and compassionate Creator and Judge reminds us of the hope inherent in the possibility of ultimate redemption. Thus, the Torah's intention is to bring us into its narrative and enable us to connect with its vision of the future.

In Psalm 93, the psalm that is paired with Psalm 92, "a song for the Sabbath day," we read, "Like rivers they raised, O

Hashem, like rivers they raised their voice; like rivers they shall raise their destructiveness. More than the roars of many waters, mightier than the waters of the sea – You are mighty on high, Hashem." The superiority of God over the destructive waters is echoed in Shir HaShirim, where we are told, "Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot drown it." The parallel is instructive. As David sang, "For Your loving-kindness toward me is great, and You rescued my soul from the nethermost depth" (Psalm 86:13).

9-21 Ram-Cheshvan, 5769 / Nov. 7–19, 2008. Final revisions completed on 30 Tishrei, 5770, Rosh Chodesh Aleph / Oct. 18, 2009.

Reuven Goldfarb, Maggid and Rabbinic Deputy, has published his poetry, stories, and essays in scores of magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. He co-founded and edited AGADA, the illustrated Jewish literary magazine (1981–88), in which the work of over 150 artists and writers appeared. He served as an adjunct professor of English at Oakland's Merritt College, a melamed in several Bay Area Hebrew Schools, and an instructor at JCCs, Kallot, and other Jewish venues. He and his wife, Yehudit, live in Tzfat, where he convenes a weekly session called Poetry Immersion. Email: poet-sprogress@gmail.com. ✨



KAPLAN (ISRAEL)

(continued from page NAT 7)

Chinese restaurants, Sheyan. Jerusalem has two windmills. One in Rehavia was built by the Greek Orthodox Church. In recent years, two enterprising Israelis transformed part of the building into a very large, elegant Chinese kosher restaurant with every piece of furniture; serving, eating and cookware and even the chefs coming from China.

As it was my birthday, they offered us complimentary jasmine tea and placed two lit sparklers on our dessert! It truly was a sparking ending for my birthday weekend.

Sybil Kaplan lives in Jerusalem. ✨



KAUFMAN

(continued from page NAT 10)

grievance can make support for engagement with Hamas and acquiescence to a nuclear Iran popular. Because its conception of Israel, the Palestinians, and the obligations of American power are driven by ideological fantasy, J Street will likely remain, like the Oslo Accords, a permanently thwarted ambition, but at least one with a large email list."

A former California schoolteacher, Ari Kaufman is a historian for the Indiana War Memorials Commission and an Associate Fellow at the Sagamore Institute in Indianapolis. His newest fiction book is Marble City, which will be available by the end of 2009. ✨

TEICHER*(continued from page NAT 13)*

arid analysis doomed to gather dust as it lies unread on a library shelf. On the contrary, this a lively account of Sax's findings and a heartfelt plea that we all unite to "Save the Deli." To further the justification for referring to this delightful depiction of the Jewish deli as an academic exercise, it should be noted that the book started out as a term paper in a course that Sax took as an undergraduate at McGill University on the sociology of Jews in North America. He interviewed several deli owners in Montreal, Toronto, and New York, learning that the deli was facing extinction. He earned an A for the paper.

Sax devotes a chapter to the history of the deli in New York, which provided the base for the deli to thrive. During the 1930s, he asserts that there were about 2,000 Jewish delis in New York. Many of them were kosher, but they have not only declined drastically in number, they have given way to the "kosher-style deli." They are "Jewish-owned, Jewish operated, Jewish patronized." Among the best known are Katz's, Carnegie, the Stage, and the recently re-opened 2nd Avenue Deli. They are among the "few dozen Jewish delis scattered around New York City," providing "symbolic representations of a fading past." They face a bleak future because their profit margins are low and their rents are high.

Traveling ten thousand miles from his home in Toronto to Los Angeles by way of Miami, Sax stopped his car and ate at a hundred of delis. (They are all included in an appendix, including those he surveyed in New York.). His descriptions of what he found are mouth-watering, proving that the Jewish deli is not limited to New York. In fact, he claims that "Los Angeles has become America's premier deli city." He is far less enthusiastic about delis in Florida, which are numerous and inexpensive, "but nothing remarkable." The younger Jewish families who are replacing the retirees have no nostalgia for deli and are more inclined to patronize the "bagel-deli."

Outside of the United States, Sax visited delis in Montreal, Toronto, London, Brussels, Antwerp, Paris, and Krakow. This trip reinforced his view that the deli is dying since "the source of all Jewish delicatessen had been systematically extinguished" by the Nazis. This gloomy conclusion is countered by an "epilogue" in which Sax describes the re-opening of the 2nd Avenue Deli, which made him "confident that at least one deli was safe."

Sax's crusade to "Save the Deli" is reinforced by his excellent descriptions of the food he ate and the people he met. Moreover, he convincingly expresses his opinions with great humor and verve. He is a gifted writer who has researched his subject thoroughly, presenting his findings plainly and convincingly. His professor at McGill was undoubtedly right to give him an A for his term paper and he has surely earned an A for this high quality presentation.

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

**ADLAND***(continued from page NAT 2)*

hope and opportunity. The road was not an easy one. We are their legacy and for many of us the blessings in our lives started in a tenement or cheap apartment somewhere in this land.

Other highlights included the infamous dinner at Sammy's Roumanian Steakhouse and the Erev Shabbat service at B'nai Jeshurun. For many of us, the other highlight is the great tour of Borough Park with our guide Jeff Altman. It isn't as much about Borough Park as it is about living a Chassidic or very observant Jewish lifestyle. Jeff tells us about how the community takes care of one another from policing the streets to ambulance services. We learn about the youth's schooling, home life, and eventually how they meet and marry. The youth on the trip are fascinated by this.

At the same time I need to mention how welcoming the people are on our tour around the neighborhood. As we sat on a doorstep listening to our guide, a woman brought out two bottles of water and cups for our youth to drink. Others stop and say hello and wish us a nice trip. It doesn't matter whether we are Chassidic, Orthodox, or Reform. We are Jews to them. It is a nice feeling to be welcomed.

I look forward to leading next year's class and watching their eyes open up to New York City and the Jewish experience of New York.

When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light one for our ancestors – no matter where they came from – who bravely made the trip to this land in search of a new life and new opportunities. We are their blessing and their legacy. Light the other for our youth. They are our future.

Rabbi Adland is senior rabbi of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation. ★

CHASSIDIC RABBI*(continued from page NAT 3)*

However, not everyone is fortunate enough to be a social worker or a therapist. And even the social workers can make their lives incredibly more happy and rewarding by doing the rest of the Mitzvahs. Being a social worker or doing other work involving Mitzvahs is great, but that is only 40 hours a week. What is happening the other 128 hours? (A week is 168 hours.)

Don't take my word for it. Try it yourself. You have everything to gain. The Torah, the Shabbos, and all of the Mitzvahs are wonderful gifts that Hashem has given us. Start learning Chassidus. The world that seems so senseless and chaotic will begin to make sense. Everything in life will have a purpose. Go to Chabad for Shabbos. The Shabbos is a priceless gift that Hashem gives us every week, and it is really a shame to waste it.

Especially now it is really important to do these Mitzvahs, to bring Moshiach now! When Moshiach comes, there will be no more war, sickness or death. So by doing these Mitzvahs you will help to heal all of the sick and end all wars.

Rabbi Cohen lives in K'far Chabad, Israel. He can be reached by email at bzcohen1@neto.bezeqint.net. ★

SHIPLEY*(continued from page NAT 7)*

Look, it is not new. Nations without a single Jew living within their borders condemn Israel and the Jews. The Arabs hold thousands of fellow Muslims in squalid camps and blame the Jews. And now comes Turkey. Welcome to the party. Long, long after Rome and the Persians and the Ottomans, we are still here. So, let Mr. Erdogan protect his business interest in AMAR Construction. Long after Mr. Gul and Mr. Erdogan are gone, we will still be here.

Jim Shipley has had careers in broadcasting, distribution, advertising, and telecommunications. He began his working life in radio in Philadelphia. He has written his JPO column for 20 years and is director of Trading Wise, an international trade and marketing company in Orlando, Fla. ★

SWARTZ*(continued from page NAT 10)*

heated debate in the corridors, healthy and honest debate that sometimes left me shaking my head and most times made me proud. We can bring this respectful debate back into our communities for the sake of Israel, a place we all care deeply about.

Sue Swartz is the national Vice President of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, a grassroots pro-Israel pro-peace organization. She lives in Bloomington, Ind. ★

GOLD*(continued from page NAT 11)*

orchestrated by Erick Loftis. Nu, Nu. Yes, I suppose that this soul-flavored "spiritual" treatment or blues-style selection is entertaining (all right, it is very entertaining). However, one does not require that these three very talented, gifted hazzanim should lend their voices to this trifle.

Cut #8 is "Fugue for Tenors." Lyrics by Robin Forman, arrangement of orchestrated by Aruthus Gottschalk. Music by Frank Loesser from his show *Guys and Dolls*. The music used came from the "Fugue" and "Sit Down, Sit Down, You're Rockin' The Boat." The word "charming" comes most to mind!

The ninth cut is "East Meets West." This was arranged by Richard Neuman and Joshua Jacobson. It features a Sephardi melody (Avram Avinu) and two melodies by Jo Amar (Yom Zeh L'Israel and Yismach Moshe).

These truly Jewish spiritual selections bring this marvelous CD to a close.

To conclude, the singing is superb and the arrangements and orchestrations are right on the mark. Who says that music artistically performed cannot also be entertaining? While I came to this disc a few years after the fact, I am glad I finally heard it. These three hazzanim never sounded any better. Their singing is mah-ve-lus "in every way, so (I) say!"

Dr. Gold is a composer, conductor, pianist and retired educator and may be reached at: 6 Webster Street, Springvale, Maine 04083 or by email at drmortongold@yahoo.com. ★

GERTEL*(continued from page NAT 12)*

The name of one personality in their childhood makes its way into this film, albeit in a somewhat resentful way. We are told that Professor Gopnik cannot visit "Second Rabbi" on the first try because the rabbi has been called to visit the ailing mother of a prominent synagogue member, Ruth Brin. As it happens, Jewish newspapers across the country just announced the death of Ruth Brin, who was indeed a prominent member of a Minneapolis synagogue and was a fine poet who responded to biblical and other spiritual themes in Judaism. Why did that name stick in our filmmakers' minds? As a commentary on Judaism and on what Jewish life can be, Brin's writings are more worthwhile than this movie.

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 National Jewish Post & Opinion since 1979. ★

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Musings from Shiloh

BY BATYA MEDAD

Aliyah to the Land of Israel at 89

Less than a week ago, my father and I boarded an El Al plane to Israel. It was 39 years, one month and 10 days (on the goyish calendar) after my husband and I boarded the Greek Lines ship that took us to Israel.



With the help of Nefesh B'Nefesh, JAFI (the Jewish Agency), Israeli Consulate officials and lots of Siyate D'Shmaya, help from the Almighty, the clerical process took no more time than it had taken me and my husband to cross the oceans from New York to Haifa Port, Israel. Especially when you consider that it was the Succot holiday, when only a minimal staff was working, this was a record-breaking effort.



My mother still hasn't been able to join us, but G-d willing, she will.

The flight was great, and the special service was special, just the way it should be. It's never too late to make aliyah, but it still is easier when you're young. But at this stage in life for my parents, having so many of their grandchildren and all their great-grandchildren here is unbeatable.



The Year of Double Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, and No Simchat Torah

This year I didn't celebrate Simchat Torah. No, it wasn't a private protest against G-d and the Jewish religion.

For family reasons, I had to fly from Israel to New York, and there are differences between the calendars and customs. In Israel, we celebrate the Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals, Succot, Passover and Shavuot with single-day Holy Day restrictions, although in Galut, the Diaspora, they are double-days. The result is that Passover lasts eight days in the Diaspora, rather than the Biblical seven in Israel, and Simchat Torah is a day later abroad, since Succot is a day longer.

This year had another difference, because Succot began on a Shabbat. The usual custom is to read Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, on the Shabbat during the week of Succot. Since there was no Shabbat Chol HaMoed (intermediate day), it was read the first day of Succot in Israel, but in the Diaspora it was the following Shabbat, which was the day before Simchat Torah. Because I'm an Israeli, I wasn't required to observe Simchat Torah on its Diaspora day, and I just walked very discreetly back to my parents' home after Shabbat.

I heard Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, twice, first in my own neighborhood synagogue here in Shiloh and then a week later in the Great Neck Synagogue, where I was a guest. For those who don't know what Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, is about, it was written by King Solomon, King David's son, who built the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. It's a beautiful philosophic testimony in which he admits that he wasted much of his life on material pursuits.

The phrase, "nothing's new under the sun," is repeated many times. Kohelet is also the origin of: *Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3.*

(1) To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; (2) A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; (3) A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; (4) A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (5) A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; (6) A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; (7) A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; (8) A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

For me this was an extra reminder of why I was in New York instead of being at home. My elderly parents need my help. My mother's in the hospital, and I had to bring my father back to Israel with me. They both must leave the house they have lived in since 1962. They have to give up most of the possessions they have amassed in almost half a century. *Havel Havelim*, Vanities of Vanities, is how King Solomon describes it all.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter 12: (6) Before the

silver cord is snapped asunder, and the golden bowl is shattered, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel falleth shattered, into the pit; (7) And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it. (8) Vanity of vanities, saith Koheleth; all is vanity. (9) And besides that Koheleth was wise, he also taught the people knowledge; yea, he pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. (10) Koheleth sought to find out words of delight, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth. (11) The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails well fastened are those that are composed in collections; they are given from one shepherd. (12) And furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (13) The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man. (14) For God shall bring every work into the judgment concerning every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

In the end, what is life all about?

Food changes on El Al

A few months ago, I was shocked to hear that even on coast-to-coast flights in the United States, there aren't proper kosher meals available. I was helping a friend to figure out what to eat on that long leg of her flight from Israel to California. For people like me who live on a reduced carbohydrate diet, it's a real problem. According to American law, it's forbidden to bring fruit and nuts from a foreign country into the states, and security also bans yogurt.



I didn't expect any changes when I boarded my after-midnight flight to New York a couple of weeks ago, but I was unpleasantly surprised by the sandwiches offered for late dinner. I explained to the stewardess that I ate only low-carb foods. Fortunately, she found me this fruit meal. It was fine for me, but diabetics wouldn't have had a good time with it.

I had more fruit and nuts packed with me for the long night's flight and finished it all before we landed. Breakfast was a regular meal, but they no longer serve lox with the bagels, nor was there a choice of main courses.

On my return flight, I ordered a low-sodium meal for my father, which wasn't stocked. And afraid of another sandwich disaster, I tried to order a low-starch meal for myself, but it wasn't on the menu. I could have had a fruit meal, but then they



would have brought me a fruit breakfast, which I didn't want. The dinner, which was served around nine, since our flight was at 7:55 p.m., was a regular airline dinner. We had a choice between pasta and rice, each with some animal protein and minimal salad.

Fearing another sandwich meal and considering that even after eight is late for me and my father to have dinner, I packed us meals to eat in the airport before boarding the plane. We had roasted vegetables, salad and canned salmon.

Sticking to a weight-loss diet when traveling requires planning. You should never expect, take for granted, that your type of diet food will be easily available. If you want to continue losing weight when traveling, you'll have to prepare food and bring it along. You shouldn't be shy about asking for alternative meals. Of course, the same goes for diabetics, food allergies and medical needs.

Batya Medad is a veteran American olah, immigrant in Israel. She and her husband made aliyah in 1970 and have been in Shiloh since 1981. She's a wife, mother, grandmother, EFL Teacher, writer and photographer. Besides her articles and photographs we've been featuring in this publication for a number of years, Batya is very involved in the international cyber community as a Jewish blogger. She has two active blogs, <http://shilohmusings.blogspot.com> and <http://me-ander.blogspot.com>, besides having established the Kosher Cooking Carnival; details on me-ander. You can contact her at shilohmuse@yahoo.com. ☆

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