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Cover art by Shirah Eliashiv
(see About the Cover, p.2).

Editorial

A 'holler out' to Anne Kodicek in Delray Beach, Fla., who turned 104 on March 15. She started reading *The Jewish Post* in 1940, so she must be our longest running subscriber – it has been 74 years! Another more important part of Mrs. Kodicek's life, that spanned 74 years, is being married to the same man. Her husband Rudy died at age 97 in 2004 when she was 94.

I have a pretty good idea why she has such longevity. When I talk to her by telephone at this time of year, before I get a chance to wish her a happy birthday, she utters an abundance of blessings over me, my brother, and this newspaper. Some character traits may deteriorate with age, but each year her blessings get stronger.

This reminds me of a Jewish prayer where one asks God for good health in order to have the strength to continue praising God. I frequently visit a woman who will be 100 in May. She is a Holocaust survivor from Hungary. She did not want to leave there without her family in the 1930s when she was in her early 20s but her father, who 'saw the writing on the wall', insisted she come to the United States. She was able to do so because she had a cousin in Detroit who agreed to sponsor her.

She has had many joys in her life but besides losing the rest of her family in the Holocaust, she has endured challenges involving years of physical pain. The last time I saw her, she spoke about that, but something I said made her laugh. When I saw her whole face light up, I thought laughter coming from someone in pain also has to be a form of blessing to God. As long as one is able to laugh, his or her life is worth living.

Since this is a Passover edition, I will discuss some thoughts about the holiday. For starters more Jews celebrate Passover than any other Jewish holiday. Their *seders* may be held on a different nights and they may include different foods – especially considering grains and legumes are permitted for Sephardic Jews – but the differences are more far reaching.

The past few years I have attended seders led by my nephews, the children of baby boomers. They have been very different from the seders of my parents and their peers.

The seders I have led tend to be similar to those of my parents but I have changed some of the language to make it gender neutral. For example, even though I use their *Haggadah*, I recite the word 'ancestors' in place of 'forefathers'.

I have an older brother in Connecticut who has a big pot-luck seder at his house every year. I have never attended but I recently heard that a big part of those

About the Cover

"Freedom"

This art by Shirah Eliashiv is a combination of watercolor, calligraphy pens and colored inks. Eliashiv stressed the parting of the seas as not just the way out of Egypt in the Passover Haggadah, but also the way forward through the desert, the giving of the Torah and the formation of the Jewish people. She wanted to avoid the usual images of Moses leading the way and settled for the staff. Since this is a time of celebration she also included matzos and pyramids in addition to the water theme.



Eliashiv is an Indy artist Shirah Eliashiv glad to be living in Indianapolis, but with a chunk of her heart in Israel, where she lived for most of her adult life and raised a large family. Shirah enjoys doing small poster art on Jewish subjects because it connects her to both her Jewish faith and to Israel. The colorful posters are on a variety of themes from *ahava* (love) to the Books of Ruth and Esther. They are also affordable and easy to mat and frame.

Eliashiv received her BFA from The Herron School of Art and Design and is currently completing an MA in painting from The University of Indianapolis, where she is preparing an exhibition of oil on canvas works related to water and the oceans. Two of her paintings recently appeared in the Herron Alumni Exhibition at the Harrison Center in Indianapolis. Shirah's paintings and portraits in various mediums can be found in homes in Indianapolis and in Israel. She is equally at ease with graphite, watercolors, pastels and acrylics. She can be reached by email at shirarte@gmail.com. ★

seders involves reading the writings of African American slaves from this country.

When I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area with a Jewish population about 30 times bigger than that of Indianapolis, there were unique seders for every type of Jewish person and I am not talking about the different Jewish denominations. To name a few, seders took place for singles; vegetarians and vegans; lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT); hikers and environmentalists; and those in twelve-step recovery programs.

At first I thought these cannot be authentic seders, but this may be what is traditional for those observers. My nephews grew up in a different time in history and have created Passover seders meaningful for their values and lifestyles. Now as their children, 'the millinnials'

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grow up celebrating the holiday, these new seders will be what is familiar to them. Eventually their seders may be
(see Editorial, page 3)

Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN



Yiddish for Everyday

BY HENYA CHAIET

My first income – 25 cents a day

Hyent vil ich dertzaylen eyeach ah myseh fun myne kinder yoren. (Today I will tell you a story about my childhood.)

Mein mutter haut gehat finif shvester, un mir hauben gehvaint zayer naunt tzuzamen. (My mother had five sisters and we all lived very close together.)

Dee tante Anneh is gehven dee reicheh. Ear man haut gehat ah gehsheft fun allerlay essen varg. Dry maul ah vauch fleckt zee gain oyshelfen em in gehsheft. (My aunt Anna was the rich aunt. Her husband had a small supermarket. Three times a week she would go to the shop to help him.)

Ich haub gehven ah maydel fun tzen auder elef yor alt ven zee haut gehbetten mein mutter effsher ken ich zein ah nonsheh far ear tauchter duchen zummer. Dee maydel is gehven dry auder fear yor alt. Mein mutter haut dos nisht gehvault lauzen mir gain, nor ich haub ear eingehret. Dee tante haut mir gehzaught zee vet mir bah tzaulen finif un tzvantzik cent ah taug. Ich haub daus zayer gehvault. (I was a girl of ten or eleven years when my aunt asked my mother if I could babysit her daughter that summer. The girl was three or four years

what will be when Moshiach comes.

Chassidus is a taste of Moshiach. Learning Chassidus is the best way to bring Moshiach. Chassidus teaches us the meaning of life, and of everything that happens in the world. We begin to understand what exile is, and why we are in exile. We learn what will be when Moshiach comes, and we get a little taste of it. Once we taste Moshiach, we want more and more. Then we will do everything that we can to bring Moshiach now!

We wish everyone a *kosher* and a happy *Pesach*. We hope that this year we will all celebrate together in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, together with Moshiach. It is up to us to make it happen, to learn more *Torah* and do more *Mitzvahs* to bring Moshiach now!

Rabbi Cohen lives in K'far Chabad, Israel. He can be reached by email at bzcohen@orange.net.il. (Originally published Mar. 24, 2010. The first sentence was updated for this edition.) ★

old. My mother did not want me to do this, but I persuaded her. My aunt said she would pay me 25 cents a day and I really wanted this very much.)

Dee maydel is gehven zayer ah gooteh un fleckt shlofen mit taug. Dee tante fleckt mir gehben andehreh arbeit tzu taun. Ich fleg aus pressen dee maydelehs clayder un zee fleckt mir lauzen arbeit in kich, aupshalen dee cartaufel, un farshaydeneh andereh zachen. (The little girl was a very good child, and would sleep all afternoon. My aunt would ask me to press the child's dresses. I would also help in the kitchen peeling potatoes and other small tasks.)

Ich haub nisht gezaught mein mutter (see Chaiet, page 6)

EDITORIAL

(continued from page 2)

even more different or they may end up reverting back to observing Passover in a similar fashion to what their great-grandparents did.

A new tradition I would like to start this year is to have a place for forgiveness in the seder. We already have time in the fall leading up to *Yom Kippur* to ask for forgiveness from our fellow humans and God. We have prayers in the daily *Amidah* that asks for forgiveness for all sins, and praises God as being a God of forgiveness.

There is also a bedtime prayer: "I forgive all those who may have hurt or aggravated me either physically, monetarily, or emotionally, whether unknowingly or willfully, whether accidentally or intentionally, whether in speech or in action, whether in this incarnation or another, and may no person be punished on account of me..."

When perusing the English during the *Megillah* reading on *Purim* I noticed that we remember in great detail the story of Mordecai and Esther and how our people were treated badly simply for being Jews. Likewise 3,000 year later in Passover seders, we remember the story of Moses and our people and all the harsh details of slavery. However, we don't have a lot of examples in our history of forgiveness.

It would be nice to unload our burden of carrying around resentment for all that cruelty. On this holiday where more Jews observe than any other, it might be a relief to say yes, slavery took place and I am not going to forget that, but I will no longer be filled with bitterness toward Pharaoh and the Egyptians. We can free ourselves from our own personal enslavement to past hurts and then it will be easier to deal with our present ones.

We wish you, our dear readers a happy and *kosher Pesach* 5774!

Jennie Cohen, March 19, 2014 ★

Nissan, the month of redemption, begins on April 1. Our sages said that in Nissan our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt, and in Nissan we will be redeemed from our present state of exile. We want *Moshiach* now. Every day we wait for Moshiach, especially now, in the month of Nissan. What can we do to make it really happen? First, we have to really want Moshiach.

The other day I approached the internal medicine ward in our local hospital. A patient called out to me: "Rabbi! I'm so happy to see you! I knew you were going to come." This warm greeting was a pleasant surprise. I looked up and saw Yaakov. Yaakov has been hospitalized several times these past two years. He is around 40 years old and seriously ill. Whenever we meet I try to help him as much as I can, to strengthen his faith and cheer him up. He started to put on *tefillin* every day at home, but when he is hospitalized he often needs my assistance because of an infusion in his arm or other treatments.

I helped Yaakov to put on *tefillin*. He read the *Shema*. Then he read out loud "I believe with complete faith in the coming of Moshiach, and even if he delays, I will wait every day for him to come." "Long live our master, our teacher and our Rebbe, Moshiach!" He looked at me and said "Rabbi! Where is Moshiach?" I assured him that Moshiach is coming soon. My answer did not satisfy him. "But Rabbi, I want him to come today! Now! This second!"

I was inspired, and a little embarrassed. It was quite obvious that Yaakov really wants Moshiach. I am a rabbi, and try to inspire people. Now I was being inspired. Now I was learning what Moshiach now really means. It doesn't mean soon, it means now, this second!

Yaakov understands that when Moshiach comes, he will get well. His suffering and all suffering will end. However, I also have good reasons to want Moshiach. So that Yaakov and all who are sick will get well. So that there will be no more suffering and death. All will enjoy great prosperity. There will not be war or any evil. We will find inner peace and be close to *Hashem*.

This is the beauty that I found in Lubavitch. The Rebbe, his followers, and the *Chassidus* that I learned helped me to find a degree of inner peace and come closer to *Hashem*. But whatever I have learned and achieved is only a taste of

Fight poverty, promote sex ed to reduce abortions



BY RABBI
SANDY E. SASSO

The debate about reproductive rights taking place on Capitol Hill and in many state legislatures has elicited a great deal of emotional and inflammatory rhetoric. It is time to take a look at some facts.

The most important fact is that no one is “pro-abortion.” Ideally, pregnancies are planned, wanted and healthy; there are no threats to the life or to the physical or emotional well-being of the mother and no serious abnormality of the fetus. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world. We know that there are tragic fetal abnormalities, conceptions that result from rape and incest, and dangerous pregnancies that threaten a woman’s health. Most people would agree on the sad need to terminate such pregnancies.

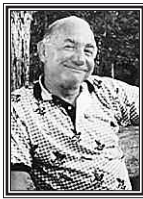
No matter what side of the debate we are on, we all want to reduce the number of abortions. The conversation should focus on how to do that.

What if we actually decided to think clearly about what might work? The most significant steps would be: decreasing poverty, increasing the availability of high-quality sex education and ensuring affordable access to contraception. Yet those who propose laws to restrict reproductive rights seem uninterested in legislation that might actually reduce the number of unintended pregnancies, thus reducing the number of abortions.

The opponents of reproductive rights have found a new argument to promote their cause: fiscal conservatism. They want to ensure that the federal government pays neither for abortions nor contraception, regardless of the fact

that these are constitutionally protected rights. Focusing on financial concerns certainly plays better in the media than discussions of “legitimate rape.”

The U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice recently held a hearing on the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act.” Unbelievably, the committee is all male! In an attempt to prevent any federal money from covering abortion (already prohibited by the Hyde Amendment), the subcommittee also seeks to eliminate the medical-expense deductions for abortion care, except in cases of rape, incest or danger to a mother’s life. Who, in the end, would decide the definition of rape, incest and life-threatening conditions? The Internal Revenue Service! Not surprisingly,



Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

Modesty and other virtues

The Bible is full of mysteries. Aside from its poetry, philosophy, theology, history, it’s brimming with mysteries that have baffled the rabbis, theologians, and secular scholars of the ages. Some are well known and have been explored for centuries. Let me pose one which slapped my face as I read the familiar story of disobedience by the first newlyweds: Adam and Eve. Such a simple story crowned by an anomaly that mystifies this scribbler and a schoolroom full of scholars. What is this obsession with nudity?

As we know, the snake, so to speak, seduces Eve. She and naïve Adam swallow



no one suggests eliminating federal funding to cover Viagra. Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, once suggested that women should be forced to give birth to a fetus without brain function if that fetal abnormality is found after 20 weeks. We have to wonder what a difference having women on the committee would make.

There is a difference between personal opposition to abortion and allowing government to be the agency that makes the decision. It is incomprehensible that those individuals who want less government involvement in business and social programs want more government intrusion into our doctors’ offices. Perhaps if they paid less attention to what is happening in our bedrooms and more to what is taking place in our boardrooms, we might solve many of the problems that plague our cities and our nation.

Perhaps the answer is an ultrasound to find out what is going on with women’s paychecks, job opportunities and promotions before we decide to require a medically invasive ultrasound to see what is going on in their wombs. Such an ultrasound would tell us that the answer to reducing abortion is access to sex education in schools, access to contraception, affordable child care, pay equity and reasonable maternity and sick leave. It is time to fill that prescription.

Sasso is rabbi emerita of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis and director of the Religion, Spirituality and the Arts Initiative at Butler University. Reprinted from the Indianapolis Star Feb. 4, 2014. ★

his marketing speech. Now they both metaphorically have ingested the wisdom of the Tree of Good and Evil. But to us, the ban on such a luncheon is already a puzzle. Why should G-d’s finest creation not know the difference between good and evil? It would seem the finest ingredient of mankind. Sin – the ingestion of the fruit of the tree – why the connection with nudity? There wasn’t a single tailor in Eden.

First a strange interlude BEFORE they indulged their passion for the fruit of the tree: “they were both naked, the man and his wife and they were not ashamed”. How strange. Why should they be ashamed? What’s blameful about nudity thousands of years ago? And who was to view their nakedness – the bluejays, the snake, the brown bear? A conundrum if there ever was one. And why would their disobedience bring on nakedness?

But we are not through. They do eat of the Tree of Good and Evil. And immediately they see something evil in their “nekkidness”, as we say down here. Why? They sew up underwear from fig leaves. Why does their violation affect the lower reaches of their bodies and not their minds? Why are they suddenly sensitive to the revelation of their body? They just violated G-d’s command and they’re worried about the world’s first burlesque show! How irrelevant. What an imbalance.

The charade – this relevance to the disobedience of an all powerful G-d and underwear continues. It’s a puzzle.

G-d calls out to Adam – basically “where are you” – as though He doesn’t know. Adam, now wearing a fig leaf suit and matching vest, tells his Creator that he was afraid to answer, “because I was naked”. Shocking. Adam is afraid to stand nekkid (as we say down here) in front of his G-d. And furthermore his nudity evidently reveals the fact that for the sake of an apple he has shattered one of the only two commandments that G-d has levied upon him. Little does he know that centuries later his kin will receive 613 more! The dialogue that we and all mankind are familiar with follows. The punishment: Adam has to get a job. Poor Eve is plagued with childbirth pain.

And when the lecture is over unbelievably, G-d, Himself, “made tunics of skin and clothed them”. Why? Why is the Designer and Master of the galaxy shocked by nudity? Every living creature is naked!

This is mind bending. Evidently, the newlyweds’ lack of wardrobe even impresses the Creator. And it loudly announces to G-d that the two naked ones have broken the only sanctions imposed on them.

Why is it so important? We’re talking (see Roberts, page 7)



Book Excerpt

BY BERNIE DE KOVEN

Being blessed

When my wonderful friend Zalman and his amazing wife were last in town, we arranged to meet in West LA for some hugs and Indian food. After dinner he and I and our delicious wives (Rocky, mine, Eve, his) were almost actually accosted by a briefcase carrying, suit-wearing man wielding a paperback book. Being the warm and terminally polite people we like to be, we were immediately subjected to a sales pitch of stunning complexity and only minimal coherence. He had written and published a book proving that Abraham's little-known wife Keturah was the progenitor of most of the civilized world and Denmark (something about the tribe of Dan).



Now, Zalman is a biblical scholar of great depth and high repute. When the bookseller asked rhetorically, "and, how many people know who Abraham's other wife was?" Zalman answered his question immediately. And yet never once in his entire monologue did the impassioned author deign to find out with whom he was actually speaking.

At the end of the pitch, the guy explained to us that he was going to offer us a very special opportunity. That for \$20 dollars, he'd not only sell us his book, but sign it, personally.

"All right," said Zalman, "I'll make you a bargain. I'll buy your book, but I want something extra."

"Of course," replied the self-proclaimed proclaimer, "I'll be happy to dedicate it to you or any person of your choosing."

"Thank you," said Zalman, "but I want something else. Something even more special. I want your blessing."

The fact is, I don't remember what the blessing was. But I do remember how Zalman, with his simple request, transformed this whole somewhat seamy encounter into a profoundly moving spiritual experience. From that day on, I've made the Out-Blessing Game an integral part of my work.

The Out-Blessing game

Trying to out-bless people is much more

fun than trying to outguess them. For this reason, I give you: The Blessing Game.

Sit in a circle. Whoever is so moved makes a blessing – any nice wish that that person wishes to wish on anyone else. Anyone else who is now so moved makes an even better blessing, trying to out-bless the previous blessing.

Or, get in pairs. Put your hands on each other's heads. Take turns out-blessing each other. Continue until you both feel truly blessed or have had enough of this loving playfulness.

A round of out-blessing might go like this:

• You say: May the fruits of your labors never spoil • And I say: Amen. And may they all be delicious? • You say: Amen. And may they be always ripe? • And I say: Amen. May they be available in your local supermarket • You say: On sale

Alternative Blessing Cycles

But if you do (or don't, or isn't)

• I say: May you never run out of toilet paper • You say: Amen. But if you do, may there be a box of tissues near by • I say: Amen. And if there isn't, may there at least be a sink in easy reach ?

Combined with the standard out-blessing exchange:

• You say: With a clean towel right over it • I say: And a bottle of antibacterial soap • You say: And a can of deodorant

Followed by a return to the But If You Do or Don't or Isn't play:

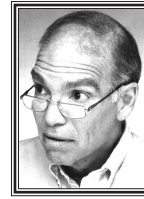
• I say: And if there isn't any deodorant, may there be a window • You say: Amen. And may it be easy to open • I say: Amen. And may it lead to someplace outside the building • You say: Amen. And may there not be a hurricane.

Blessing Game Starters

Here are some out-blessing starters, to help you get, well, started:

May you be happier than a lark. May you never be taken to be sillier than you want to be or more seriously than you think you are. May this blessing make more sense to you than it does to me. May your optimism be based in realism and your pessimism totally unfounded. May you be wise enough to know how lucky you are, and vice versa. May all your accidents be happy. May you have as much money as you know what to do with. May you look happier than you have a right to be, and feel happier than you look. May your injuries heal before anyone adds insult to them. May all those who bless you be blessed. May your misery have company.

And finally, from a traditional Hebrew prayer: "May all the holes in your body that are supposed to be open stay open, and may all the other ones that should be closed stay closed."



Shipley Speaks

BY JIM SHIPLEY

Tikkun olam

So, what does that mean? If it is the duty of the Jewish people to "Heal the World," where would you start? Is it up to us to finally wake the world up to the fact that the world – our world really needs healing?

Yes, it is. No one in this winter of snowy discontent will disagree that something is really changing. That the snows, where they are, are deeper and more frequent and where they are not the drought gets worse. That we know. That is a given. That last year was the warmest on record and this year, despite a brutal winter will probably be worse is also a given.

There are those few mouth breathers who still might believe that this is a natural sequence of the world chilling and heating. That might not find it different. But the cycles are now in years not centuries. There are 30 million automobiles spewing carbon monoxide in the air that were not there 50 years ago. The science is strong. The threat is real. Read *The Sixth Extinction* if you have any doubt.

Each of us might feel a bit helpless with our feeble attempts at recycling while the Indonesian government allows vast swaths of rainforest to be cut down each day so rich folks can have the kind of hardwood floor they fancy. And why do we as Jews have to take particular interest and action about this? Is it really our job?

Yes, it is.

There have always been floods and droughts. People have always starved in parts of the earth. Bad guys have ruled and the government of this nation has often been stupid and short sighted. So what is different now? The difference is that we know better now. And we know so much more about stuff than we used to.

We live in a 24 hour news cycle. Nobody waits until the morning paper shows up to

(see Shipley, page 7)

Bernie De Koven is the author of *The Well-Played Game*, *A Playful Path*, and *Junkyard Sports*. This is an excerpt from *A Playful Path* ("The best self-help book I've ever read," says Peter Gray in *Psychology Today*) which is available at: press.etc.cmu.edu/content/playful-path. One can also purchase and download the book from aplayfulpath.com where one can also be entertained and learn more about the author. ★



Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

Keeping a Jewish component in your "End of Life" plans

If I had to describe a category for all of the pieces that I have written for The National Jewish Post & Opinion over all these years, it would definitely be "Opinion Pieces." I would, of course, want to add that I believed in what I was writing about. I took it seriously, and I did enough fact-checking to maintain my integrity. This present essay has proved to be among the most challenging, because I wanted it to be clear, knowing that the piece was one that is often difficult to get "your hands around." Although the issue is uncomfortable, it needed to be fairly written.

One disclaimer for readers who are unaware of my Jewish positions: I am a practicing Orthodox Jew, who believes that G-d needs to be our guide in all decisions of life and death.

In general, we all accept that we are finite human beings, that there is a beginning and an ending to all things, and we are not exceptions to that rule. The real challenge that we face is when the issues of dying become specific to ourselves, our families, and those we care about. We find that it cannot be treated casually, for if it is, and we face death without a plan in force, an orderly and productive life can end up in a mess and even a tragedy of errors.

My specific interest in the general matter happened within the last months when two men whom I knew elected to choose the time and method of their deaths. They knew each other, were both in their 80s, and were living in a terminal phase of their lives. At the same time, both were under successful palliative care, and it appears, decided that they had had enough. In one of the cases an internist tried to undo the decision. For a few days he was able to convince his patient to start eating and drinking and taking his medications. But days later, the patient opted out, refused nourishment and medications, and entered hospice with the support of his family and doctors. It appears that there was no communication with rabbis, except to help plan their funerals.

I have an 83 year old sister in Denver, and when I tried to talk with her about their decisions, she insisted that they were

CHAIET

(continued from page 3)

veefil arbeit ich haub gehtaun. (I never told my mother how much work I had to do.)

Dos is gehven dee airshteh gelt vaus ich haub ahlayn fardint un ich haub gehven zayer tzufreeden mit zich ahlayn. (This was the first money I earned myself and I was very happy and proud of myself.)

Henya Chalet is the Yiddish name for Mrs. A. Helen Feinn. Born in 1924 ten days before Passover, her parents had come to America one year prior. They spoke only Yiddish at home so that is all she spoke until age five when she started kindergarten. She then learned English, but has always loved Yiddish and speaks it whenever possible. Chalet lived in La Porte and Michigan City, Ind., from 1952 to 1978 and currently resides in Walnut Creek, Calif. Email: afeinn87@gmail.com. ★

entitled to do what they wanted, and further, without judgment. I heard in her comments that she felt, under the circumstances, that they had done the right thing.

I was uncomfortable because she is my sister who is in good health, sounding like she had made her own decision, and was not willing to struggle physically or emotionally at the end of her life. She desperately wanted to spare her children from their pain. My sister is a righteous secular Jew who has never made judgments about anyone's rights to live their lives in the manner they wish, and that includes mine.

I came to believe that there was a clear affect of living in a society today, very different than the one in which we had grown up. In those years, we did not believe that women had an "inherent right" over their bodies, which included the right to "abort at will."

We were not called upon to "ratify" gay marriages as an acceptable alternative life. We did not think that death was our decision.

In every part of our lives, societal values have changed. Much of what we have seen is determined by tax revenues. Casinos are no longer evaluated for the probable effect they will have on people lives, but on the revenue they will generate. The Indian casinos in Wisconsin are as well a respected part of state philanthropy. Governor John Hickenlooper of Colorado said recently that part of the tax from the sale of "legal marijuana" is going to help Colorado better public education.

The determination of regulations about (see Karsh, page 15)



Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

A time to share blessings and miracles

Erev Pesach is on April 14

As Passover is quickly approaching, it is such a busy and intense time. Whether we are rushing around either preparing for the holiday or simply living our lives doing what we need to do, it is important to remember to give ourselves some time to simply be each day and focus our intention. Just like we eat to nourish the physical body each day, every day our souls require a time for prayer, centering, meditation and attunement.

At the Passover seder, take some time to share with others the blessings and the miracles that you have already experienced in this last year as well as what blessings you would like to receive in the coming year. We each have so much to be grateful for. Miracles are taking place all the time.

Hashem tells us to eat *matzah* on Passover in the Torah. Mitzah is called the bread of affliction, the bread of humility, the bread of healing, the bread of faith. How special to share this bread with others. We need to become like matzah, simple and humble.

When you go to the seder and it becomes time to eat matzah, eat it without talking. Hashem is feeding you all that you need at this time. Do not waste this precious time with idle talk.

During the seder, I heard that some people even kiss the *maror*. Wow! That takes faith, love and humility to be grateful for all the hardship because it brought us to where we are in this moment. Try kissing the maror this Pesach. It feels liberating and expansive just to think about doing it.

Though The Holy One has taken us out of ancient Egypt, we now await the final redemption when all hatred will be ended. In this glorious future time the Jewish people will be able to live peacefully in our holy land with Jerusalem as our capital. Israel has been such a blessing to the world, even as it has had to fight so much opposition within and without its borders.

May this holiday be beautiful, healing, transforming for you and all of Israel.

Melinda Ribner L.C.S.W. is the author of The Secret Legacy of Biblical Women, Everyday Kabbalah, Kabbalah Month (see Ribner, page 19)



Wiener's Wisdom

By RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

Regrets

How many times have we whispered to ourselves and even discussed with others, the opportunities that were missed? All of us, at one time or another feel pangs of regret – I should have – I could have – I would have. Each path we take in our journey for the best that life has to offer is strewn with many possibilities, some accomplishments, major and minor disappointments and, of course, defeats.

However, we lose sight of the things that we experienced that gave us joy and feelings of purpose. Somehow our tendency is to concentrate on the things that escaped us. It is even more prominent when we lose someone who crossed our path during their lifetime. Instead of remembering the fun and excitement, we gravitate to the endless bitterness and missed chances.

Even our deathbed confessional expresses contrition and the need for forgiveness. We pronounce the affirmation of faith in fear of what lies ahead, not as a declaration of acceptance. Living and dying represent the sum total of creation. Some would say that we are born to die. Perhaps we should realize that we are mortal and that mortality has a beginning and an end. The one ray of hope is that when we die the journey is not over we just enter into the next phase of that wondrous adventure of eternalness.

If all there is to life is birth and death, then what is the purpose of our existence? Each of us is endowed with gifts, some more prominent than others, but worthy of having been given the gift of life and the promise of eternal life. Just as Creation is never ending and continually changing, so it is with us because we are part of Creation – a vital part. Without us there would be no purpose to creation.

The sages teach us this through a parable which states that when God was creating all things and then determined that humans were part of the creation, the last on His blueprint, the angels began to argue with God. They inquired as to why God would want to spoil all that was created by situating humanity in the midst of all this glory. God then replies that to what end creation if there is no one to enjoy it.

We were not created last as an after-thought, but rather after all had been prepared for us. Remember when we were about to have children, we made preparations

SHIPLEY

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get the news. Turn your phone at any hour and there it is. There were once celebrated news anchors like Cronkite and Brokaw and the giant Tim Russert, of blessed memory.

News is a 24 hour business. So, would you not think we would be better informed, better educated? Not a chance. Not when college dropouts like Sean Hannity opine every day on radio and on that silly excuse for a news channel called FOX.

But through it all. Through the clutter and cacophony and the bias and the lack of talent and brains, the story is there for all to see. We see the icebergs melting. We see the huge traffic jams and the carbon monoxide rising from the cars in them. We hear the scientists and we know. Oh yes, we know.

Jews are tasked with healing the world. No other people were given this mandate directly from God – and now we know why. We in this nation of ours will surpass 300 million people very soon. And they all eat and drive and pollute and are totally in favor of greening and stopping global warming as long as it does not cost them anything.

Never mind that the cost of not doing anything a generation or so down the line will be triple the cost of reversing the trend now. Our congress thinks in two-year segments and outside interests have more clout than either party.

But we are Jews and we are supposed to do better. We are supposed to really care



such as the purchase of a crib, layettes, and diapers, to name a few. So it was with God, everything was created for our arrival. Formed for us to enjoy and marvel at the beauty of creation and the elegance of our birth into this wondrous setting.

This is the sum total of the importance of creation and the place designated for us in this conceived design. Why then do we purposely ignore the destiny ordained for us? Why do we hesitate to enjoy the moment? After all, our lives are but just moments in time. Our sages taught us another important lesson when they exclaimed that when we die God and the angels will hold us accountable for all the pleasures we were allowed in life and denied ourselves. Depriving ourselves negates the purpose of creation.

Of course there are instances where we find ourselves in a dark place, perhaps many dark places, however they can be overcome with determination and perseverance. We can return to normalcy and

(see Wiener, page 9)

about feeding the hungry and keeping this planet of ours as God intended it. We have risen from the Holocaust to create the State of Israel whose greatest export is brains.

We are Jews and we are not supposed to sit idly by, driving our Lexus cars and our SUVs and watering our lawns five times a week and grabbing our plastic bags and keeping our Florida houses at 70 degrees in the summertime.

We are the Jews. We have been put here by God for *Tikkun Olam*. We are supposed to cut through the clutter of the talking heads on all those channels and seek the truth. We are supposed to take action once we have the facts. And friends, we have the facts.

There are still those who believe we have too much influence. Great. Let's use it. On our congress people and our state which allows a California water company to draw more than a million – a million – gallons of water out of our aquifer *every day*.

It's time. Let us begin to heal the world. Turn up the thermostat; get the heavy bag for your groceries. Get involved locally and beyond. Yes, your word, your voice, your vote counts. You are a Jew? It is your heritage and your mission. Do not ignore it. We are Jews. We are here to heal the world. Hillel said it best: "If not me, then who? If not now, then when?" Today.

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



ROBERTS

(continued from page 4)

about a primeval wilderness, not Times Square. And why would the G-d of all creation worry how his children are dressed? There is some meaning behind here that we are missing. I mean, if you carved the Alps and scooped out the trench for the Pacific Ocean and hung the planets in the virgin sky, what difference does a fig leaf here or there make? Clearly, the translation misses something. Modesty is far from the top of the virtue chain. But I'm just a scribbler. Go ask your rabbi.

Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner, is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. When he's not writing, Ted worships at Etz Chayim Synagogue in Huntsville, Ala. Check out his Web site: www.wonderwordworks.com. Blogsite: www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com. His collected works The Scribbler on The Roof can be bought at Amazon.com or lulu.com/content/127641. ★



Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Passover and Bobby McGee

In the summer of 1968, just before I entered the 9th grade, I finagled my mother into driving over two hours to Atlantic City to take me and my best friend Cheryl to our very first rock concert. As we fled from the car to make sure that none of the cute older boys saw who the chauffeur was, our path was lit by the marquee with the name “Janis Joplin” emblazoned in yellow and orange lights.

Cheryl and I pretended to be nonchalant about being at the concert until Janis opened with “Me and Bobby McGee.” From there on in, I screamed my way through the show, much to the chagrin of the college kids who were toking up a storm behind me. My mother fussed about how late it was as she drove us home, but joined in as we sang late into the night the one verse we knew by heart: “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.”

That line has resurfaced in my life repeatedly as a sort of mantra, especially when I was younger and things didn’t work out the way I had planned. During times when I had no job, no boyfriend, or not much money, I was calmed by the thought that what I really had was “freedom.” Freedom to do whatever I wanted, however I wanted, with whomever I wanted. Yeah, right!

Over the years, I have come to view freedom as something entirely different than the “nothing left to lose” concept of my youth. I now understand that freedom is quite the opposite of having no responsibility or ties. Genuine freedom comes with a large price tag because at the heart of freedom is free choice, the personal autonomy to exercise our will in the decisions we make in life.

The concept of freedom is essential to being human and being Jewish. It is what enables each of us, despite heredity, social conditions, and environment, to choose to do good or evil. If we did not have free will, then it would make little sense to have a book like the Torah, which is our guide on how to act and live. We are free – to follow its laws or not to follow its laws – but the choice is ours. The freedom we have to decide, to elect to seek goodness, justice and mercy over evil, injustice and intolerance is what makes the choice significant and meaningful.



Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

Pirke Avot 1:5 – Yosi ben Yochanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be wide open and let the poor be members of thy household; and do not talk much with women. This was said about one’s own wife; how much more so about the wife of one’s neighbor. Therefore the sages have said: He who talks too much with women brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Torah and will in the end inherit Gehenna.

**February 28, 2014, Pekudei
Exodus 39:1–40:38; Shekalim Exodus
30:11–16, 28 Adar I 5774**

I felt very uncomfortable, maybe even angry or a bit scared, as the events in Arizona played out this week. What is with the lawmakers in this country that they think they can pass laws that are discriminatory? Allowing business owners to deny service or sales to someone because they are gay! I believe that 80 years ago some of these same laws were passed in the emerging Third Reich barring shop owners from doing business with Jews or laws in this country that said Blacks or Jews couldn’t sleep here, drink there, or eat at this counter.

I think what got me angrier was the fact that the Governor of Arizona had to even think about vetoing this bill. She should have said upfront to the lawmakers that this bill is dead in the water, it is wrong, and it is anti-American. Whatever happened to the verse from Leviticus, “Love your neighbor as yourself”? The attitude, the beliefs, the real bigotry that is rearing its ugly head in this country is both scary and disgusting. Let me be perfectly clear though, it isn’t only in America.

Recently a rabbi and member of the Knesset in Israel said that Reform Jews aren’t Jews. The attitude promulgated by the ultra-Orthodox Haredi Jews toward the “Women of the Wall” is bigoted and sexist. In Europe anti-Semitism is on the rise and anti-Jewish slurs and anti-Jewish attitudes are being played out in the streets of Europe’s major cities where less than a century ago these same twisted beliefs led to the deaths of millions. It is as if the world has no memory of the events of two generations ago and as the

greatest generation fades into the past the new generation is right back where we started 1,000 years ago or 500 years ago or 80 years ago.

I have to admit that the Pirke Avot verse at the top of the page is one of my least favorite as this attitude of denigrating women just leads people to feelings of superiority over any people or part of the population that appears weaker. Arizona seems to be leading the way in bringing forth the most bigoted laws in the country. Anti-women, anti-gay, anti-immigrant legislation fly right under Arizona’s flag on its official flagpole. I would never deny anyone the right to think however they choose, but to act on those thoughts in ways that harm others is just wrong.

As Jews, we know that the things people say about us are wrong and, yes, stupid and ignorant at times. This is no less wrong than what people say about the gay community. Really, when was the last time someone gay harmed you or trampled on your freedom to be the person you are? Does a married same-sex couple hurt the life or lifestyle of the fundamentalist Christian couple? We need to learn from the emerging young adult community in this country who support the rights of gays to marry, have children, and live life just as we live our lives. We need to learn from our children whose friends are based on the content of their character and not on the color of their skin. The Bible was once used to justify slavery. The Bible cannot be and should not be used to justify bigoted attitudes toward gays and homosexuals. It is just wrong.

Our Torah portion this week has an incredible moment at the end. The Tabernacle, the Mishkan, is completed. The presence of God in the form of a cloud covers the Mishkan such that Moses couldn’t even enter it. When the cloud lifted the people could move forward. It is time for the cloud to lift from people’s veiled attitudes that harm others. It is time for all of us to be able to enter God’s tent. We are all children of God and we are all different in some beautiful way. The Mishkan is big enough for everyone. Let us follow the cloud to a better tomorrow.

When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light one for the day when we can all see each other as human beings and not as some label. Light the other candle for all those in power so that they can see more clearly how the decisions they make truly do and can make a difference toward a better tomorrow.

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

It is fascinating to note that Hebrew has three distinct words for freedom. *Hofesh* refers to physical freedom, such as a
(see Lederman, page 13)

Gather the People



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

Living a moral spiritual life

Why buy and eat *kosher* meat and poultry? Is there any point to it, especially if one is *not* keeping kosher?

We all know that kosher meat and poultry come from animals that have been ritually slaughtered by a *shochet*, one who has been *religiously* trained for the job. Presumably, somehow, the *shochet* raises up the act of *shechita* (slaughtering) to a spiritual purpose through a number of steps that each have unique spiritual significance: The *shochet* ensures that the animal has no disqualifying defects, that the animal is slaughtered according to *halakhah*, which requires that it suffer the least shock and pain possible, and that virtually all the blood has been drained from the animal.

Certainly there are Jews who buy and eat kosher meat and poultry simply out of habit, but there are also those of us who do so as a spiritual discipline. In the most basic understanding of it, we do so to remind ourselves day-in and day-out to show kindness to living creatures, which follows from the commandment, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." (Deuteronomy 14:21) And we do so to remind ourselves that we want to live up to our higher spiritual capacities, for which the animal's life is sacrificed, and thus take its life inflicting as little shock and pain as possible.

But to comprehend the deeper meanings and origins of *shechita*, it's helpful to consider its ancient forerunners. Our Torah portion *Vayikra* introduces us once again to the subject, which is particularly illuminated through the commentary of Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808–1888).

Shechita generally symbolizes giving up one's personality, subordinating one's will to God and Torah. It's the opposite of what *chametz* represents, which is independence, asserting the superiority of one's own will. So the first condition of *shechita* is giving up living for one's self.

The *shechitat korban*, the offering that brings one near to God, isn't understood as an act of destruction, but one that elevates both the animal and the offerer to a higher existence.

"Elevates the animal? – not hardly!" we imagine you're saying to yourself.

But consider how some 15 billion animals are slaughtered every year in this country. Their deaths aren't dedicated or consecrated to any purpose higher than the meat-packers' profits and the all-too-often high-cholesterol diets of consumers.

In the ancient ritual, however, and to some extent in its modern *kashrut* counterpart, the consumers – those in whose name the animals are slaughtered – dedicate themselves to a higher vision and path. The one who brings the offering is dedicated to respond not to the animal drives within, but to the vision of the written Torah and the path of the oral Torah. The animal's death represents giving up the animal-like life one has been living. Practically that means giving up living as if one's own survival and success are the most important things in the world, as if material acquisition and sensory pleasure are the end-all and be-all of life. The bringer is consecrated to use the life-energy gained from the lower animal for a higher, godly purpose. It means exchanging selfishness for a sanctified life, one in which the person is set apart for a special godly purpose.

The animal is raised up from a fate of meaningless slaughter or worse, to serve and literally energize the mission of the Jewish people to be a light to the nations that transforms the world.

Part of the offering process is *semicha*. The term may be familiar from its connection with the laying on of hands for rabbinic ordination. But *semicha* in the process of making an offering expresses the identification of the bringer with the animal. It involves not simply laying one's hands on the head of the animal, but receiving support, even power, from the resolution of future betterment symbolized by the offering. It signifies gaining strength symbolically so as to enable one to stand up for the will of God and thereby carry on the Jewish mission. And in the case of a *shelamim* offering, it represents standing up for God by one who already has everything materially that life can offer.

It's not hard to see how, if we imagine ourselves laying hands on the animals slaughtered in our name today – for the spiritual purposes already noted – the experience would affect us deeply.

The traditional idea was that *semicha* had to be performed by one who was seeking atonement, to be at one again with God. We can easily understand how the experience of laying our hands on the heads of the animals that are slaughtered for our benefit would strengthen our commitment to living a moral spiritual

(see Ben Asher/Bat Sarah, page 19)

WIENER

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enjoyment by understanding that to do otherwise can hasten the conclusion of this part of the journey.

I have witnessed people stealing from themselves the very essence of survival. Sharing meals or not enjoying comfortable temperatures in their homes. I have counseled others on the need for fulfillment at whatever age because this is the only trip on this leg of the journey. All too often I hear that people will go without so that the next generation will benefit from their frugality. How sad because when all is over there is joy in the moment of receiving and then forgetfulness. All too often I joke about the need to be remembered – how? – Not leaving anything. No one will forget you. It is humorous and we laugh, but as it is said, there is a great deal of truth in humor.

Some may remember the song made famous by Frank Sinatra titled "My Way" – it speaks to these very issues: "Regrets. I've had a few, too few to mention." Our emphasis should be on the "too few to mention" because we need to live as life was meant to be lived. We are accountable for those things we do for self-gratification that hurt others, but we are responsible to ourselves for not taking advantage of what is right in front of us. Concentrating on what could have been will only lead us into despair, sometimes without end.

The one ingredient in the gifts given to us by God that surmounts all others is a simple word – love. The worst regret of all is to never have loved or been loved. It is the glue that connects all that we do in our lives. Without love there can be no fulfillment. There are all forms of love, but perhaps the greatest of these is pure love, not formed by beauty of others or by professing such for particular gains, but rather a love that transcends beauty and possessions. As the poet once said, "Tell me whom you love, and I will tell you who you are."

This is the lesson of regret – to be accepting and be acceptable to each other, to those whom you know and will meet. Above all be accepting of God who gave us this life, commanded us to enjoy it so that the legacy we leave will not be measured by what possessions we amassed, but rather by the way we lived of our lives. That is the purpose of creation and that is our purpose in this beautifully designed world bequeathed to us by a loving and caring God.

Rabbi Wiener is spiritual leader of the Sun Lakes Jewish Congregation near Phoenix, Ariz. He welcomes comments at ravyitz@cox.net. His new book *Living with Faith* can be obtained on Amazon.com. ★



Seen on the Israel Scene

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

PHOTOS BY BARRY A. KAPLAN

The Vicar of Baghdad visits Jerusalem

From time to time, our good friend, the Pastor of the Jerusalem Baptist Church, Al Nucciarone invites us to hear special speakers. This was the occasion to hear Andrew White, the vicar of Baghdad last week.



Andrew White, the vicar of Baghdad.

What a treat! The 49-year-old, extremely charismatic, British-born vicar grew up in a very religious family. At the age of 20, he qualified as an operating department practitioner and worked in both anesthetics and cardiac arrest departments. Some time later, he decided to become a Church of England priest. Then he decided to learn about Islam and Judaism, including studying at Hebrew University. After being ordained at the age of 25, he worked as a curate (a parish priest) then as a vicar (a representative of the church).

In 1998, at the age of 33, he was appointed a canon (a senior parish priest) and diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He became director of International Ministry in Coventry (95 miles northwest of London) until 2005 when he moved to Baghdad to become Anglican Chaplain to Iraq. Today, he is vicar of St. George's Church and he is called "vicar of Baghdad" because his church is the only Anglican church in Iraq. In 2007, he fled to England because of threats on his life but then he returned. Many of his staff have been kidnapped or killed.

Speaking to the members of the Jerusalem Baptist church recently, he referred to the story of Jonah whose story

takes place in Ninevah which is in modern-day Iraq. Ninevah is today next to Mosul, capital of the Ninevah province and Iraq's third largest city, 220 miles north of Baghdad. The vicar said that "Iraq is one of the earliest Christian countries in the world." (It dates to the first century, supposedly founded by St. Thomas ["doubting Thomas"], one of the disciples of Jesus.)

"Everybody in my church is from Ninevah," he says. "God is with us in Iraq. Our church, our people in Iraq are the most wonderful people God has sent me to serve."

When he asked God what the people of his church needed, he learned it was food so they gave them food; health care, so he started a health clinic and education, so he built a school. "Iraq has only two types of people – the very, very poor and the very, very rich."

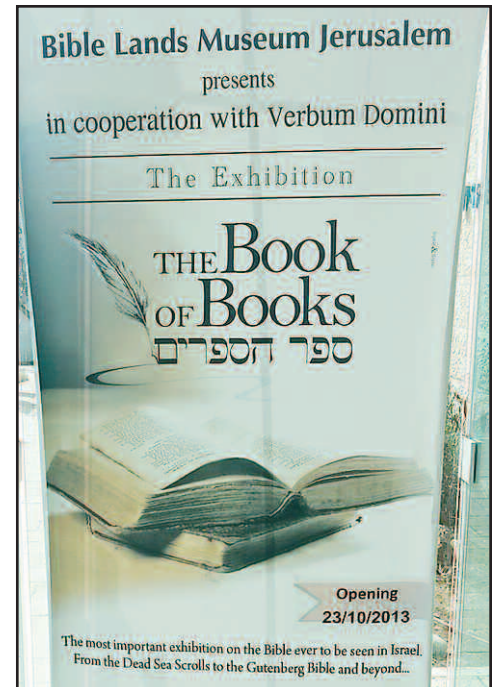
The vicar also spends a great deal of his time doing reconciliation between various groups. For a long time, he said, he had a desire to get people in Israel to meet with those in Iraq. The week before, in Cyprus, he organized a meeting of ayatollahs from Iraq and some rabbis from Israel.

Fox News recently published a feature on the vicar by Lela Gilbert entitled "Why 'Vicar of Baghdad' is 21st Century Hero. She writes his comment that "1,096 of his own parishioners have been killed in the past five years....Christians are vanishing, going the way of the Jews before them. There were once 135,000 Jews in Iraq; according to White, only six remain."

Book of Books

The Bible is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book. The "Book of Books" exhibition, which has been attracting thousands of Jews and Christians to the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem since October, shows "the powerful link between Judaism and Christianity," said Amanda Weiss, director.

The exhibition also marks "the first comprehensive presentation on the Bible – both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament – in Israel," adds Ms Weiss.



The exhibition will continue until May 24; then it will be on display as "Verbum Domini" at the Vatican; and finally it will be moved to its permanent home in Washington, D.C.

On the lower third level of the museum, past the Classical Court exhibit, one approaches what appears to be a library but is really paper pasted on the walls to resemble a library. On the side is a long desk with chairs and reading lamps where one can peruse the books which tell the story of the Jewish and Christian texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls to the 19th century. The goal of the publication is "to serve as an introduction for those interested in the Bible and its development."

A particular eye-catching case nearby holds a Hebrew bible, with a chain which attached it to a lectern. From 1535 Basel, Switzerland, the leather bound, printed Bible was chained to prevent its theft, as was the custom in synagogues and churches.

With that background, one then enters double doors to what museum curator Filip Vukosovavic calls the "juxtaposition" of Judaism and Christianity because the roots of Christianity are Judaism. But the exhibition is not about theology, he said; it's about the Bible as a book.

Parts of the linoleum-like floor are letters in different languages; another part is a map; on the walls are pages from Bibles. On a wall in the beginning are essays on Judaism during the Second Temple Period and the origins of Christianity. Nearby are showcases of coins, artifacts and facsimiles of scroll fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the first archaeological evidence of the Bible. The earliest known manuscripts of material from the Bible are also on display. For example, here is a translation of the

(see Kaplan/Israel, page 14)

The big snow

BY REUVEN GOLDFARB



"He Who gives snow like fleece, He scatters frost like ashes. He hurls His ice like crumbs – before His cold, who can stand? He issues His command and it melts them. He blows His wind – the waters flow." ~ Psalm 147:16–18

"Praise HaShem from the earth, sea giants and all watery depths – fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling His word." ~ Psalm 148:7–8

We got the word from the weather service the first week of December, while it was still Chanukah, that an immense trough of cold air from Russia would descend on us the following week – and not be halted in Turkey, as is usually the case. Heavy precipitation would accompany it, we were told, probably bringing us a lot of snow.

Israelis are used to hearing snow predictions, many of which do not come to pass, or, if they do, only brief flurries and light accumulations follow. Naturally, then, many people did not believe what they were being told. Furthermore, Israeli cities are so ill-prepared for snow, that even light amounts can cause schools to be closed and traffic jams to develop.

On Wed., Dec. 11, the local temperature dropped to between -2 and +2 C. Flurries fell that night, leaving a layer of white on metal and glass, windshields and car tops, two surfaces that absorbed the cold air faster than stone and asphalt. Then there was a lull, while in Jerusalem the snow continued to fall. On Thursday afternoon, the snow began falling again. There was hardly any wind, but the snow fell steadily for the next two nights and days, only tapering off on Saturday morning. Here in Tzfat, about a meter of snow fell – perhaps six feet or more in high altitude neighborhoods, down to two feet in the *darom* (the South), and rain in Nof Kinneret – at a yet lower elevation. Where my wife Yehudit and I are located, in the Artists Quarter, over three feet of heavy, wet snow accumulated.

Besides the stark, surreal beauty of the cityscape and landscape, the weight of the snow broke many boughs and branches and even felled several tall trees. Once such tree was in our neighbor's yard. It toppled and fell while my wife and I were out at dinner that Friday night, Dec. 13. When we came home, in the midst of a steadily falling snow, we discovered that we could not enter our front gate. An entire section of wall separating our two

courtyards had been knocked over, by the weight and momentum of the falling pine tree, into the area behind the gate, preventing it from being opened. The tree had also torn down the electrical and phone lines and broken a water pipe that now emitted a powerful spray into the air. We were dumbfounded.

We considered where to spend the night. Our first thought was to go up to our friend Elana's, but as her space is small – and the snowed-over steps would be challenging to climb – we decided to trek to the Flatauers, a long block away, in the direction from which we had just come. Halfway there we began to wonder whether the Zamlers, upon whose property the tree had stood, and where a portion of it was now lying (most of it was spread across the street), were aware of the situation.



Where the gate had been was turned to piles of stones.

So we turned back, opened their front gate, walked up to their house, and knocked. The three daughters, the youngest son, and their mother, plus a caregiver for their disabled father, were clustered around the wheelchair-bound *paterfamilias*, by the light of a temporary generator-powered set of lamps. They were glad and excited to see us because they had feared that we were trapped in our house. They offered to put us up for the night, and started to make arrangements, but I demurred, thinking there must still be a way to get into our house.

Aaron the caregiver, who lived in the ground floor apartment of our home, suggested that we try to scale the wall with the aid of a stepladder. I stood on the lid that covered their two gas balloons, placed the stepladder he gave me on the other side of the wall, near the base of our olive tree, and managed to climb over and down. Yehudit followed. We entered the house and found it was still warm inside, even though the electricity that powered the under-floor heating had gone off about two hours before. The thick stone walls of our dwelling provide excellent insulation in both summer and winter and enable the house to retain heat or stay relatively cool, depending on the season.

Our *Shabbat* candles, which we had lit

using olive oil as fuel, instead of wax – a carryover from *Chanukah* (which had ended on Thursday of the previous week) – burned brightly. We slept upstairs in our cold bedroom (cold because the top floor does not have thick stone walls) between our flannel sheets, under a heavy layer of quilts.

The next morning we saw the extent of the damage. As we were leaving the previous night, some branches had already fallen, and others were bowed down by the weight of the snow. A thick olive branch and several bay tree branches partially blocked our way out, but I had propped up the biggest branch with a stray piece of lumber so we could duck under it. Such remedies were no longer effective. Now the entire yard was covered with clusters of fallen branches and boughs, preventing descent to both the wall and the gate via the steps and the ramp. We had to clamber through the terraces where herbs and roses grow to reach ground level and then climb back over the wall to reach our neighbor's courtyard and, through it, the street. On Shabbat morning Yehudit went to *Abuhav*, her favorite *Sephardic Beit Kneset*, and I stayed home.

This was supposed to be a reunion Shabbat for the 13 women – minus the two that flew from New York – who had made a journey together to the *keverim* – the gravesites – of *tzaddikim* in the Ukraine. Rebbetzin Falk and her husband were hosting the evening, and we were hosting the Shabbat day meal. Of the other expected guests, only Karyn Bernstein was able to reach the Falks, through the snow that covered the stairs in Kiryat Breslov, and only she was able to reach and climb the wall to our house and join us for Second Meal.

The next day was easier. When the wall had been rebuilt, before the fire in the Zamler family's courtyard two years previously, they had left a window-size opening that they thought might someday be enclosed with glass blocks, in order to allow more light to filter through to their side. In the meantime, someone had filled it in with plywood and a piece of lumber. It was a simple matter to knock the panel out and squeeze through the wall instead of climbing over it.

We had gas for cooking, but not for heating, and did not have landline phone or internet service, nor the ability to recharge Yehudit's cell phones. Our electricity was restored early Monday morning, shortly after midnight. Our phone and internet didn't come back on until a week later. On Thursday night we went up to Elana's to use her internet and catch up on important emails. Otherwise we did without.

I'm on a sub-committee of the newly
(see Goldfarb, page 12)

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(continued from page 11)

formed Anglo group that was supposed to meet with the mayor on Sunday the 15th at 5 p.m. Our intention was to ask the mayor to reactivate the government-mandated environmental advisory committee, which we could then use as a funnel for bringing our environmental concerns to his attention. However, with the city inundated by snow, I assumed the mayor would have his hands full with coordinating emergency services and would not have leisure time for meeting with an interest group, even one focused on long-term environmental concerns. Moreover, simple mobility and communications were thwarted by the forces of nature. Without internet and phone I couldn't write or call my colleagues on the committee nor reach the mayor via email. The fact that I had never sent him an agenda for the meeting weighed on me, too.

Shmuel Ofanansky, a key member of our committee, in distant and snow-bound Kadita, would, I assumed, be unable to reach Tzfat. For me and the other locals, Mimi Semucha and Laurie Rappeport, even trudging up the hills and steps to Rechov Yerushalayim and the *Iriyah* (City Hall) seemed formidable. I trusted that everyone else on the committee would likewise assume that the meeting had, *de facto*, been cancelled. A day later, through a chance meeting with Mimi, who was out walking her dog, I learned that she and Laurie had consulted by phone and reached the same conclusion. Thus, the meeting did not take place – and hasn't yet been rescheduled.

As one of the major concerns of our Anglo group had been excessive and inept pruning of the town's trees, I saw a huge irony in Nature's wholesale destruction of those very branches, boughs, and whole trees that our group had striven to protect.

In the next few days, help arrived, due in no small part to Zev Padway's summons on TzfatHevra, our local Facebook page. Andy came with his chain saw and began cutting the clusters of branches that covered our *chatzair*. Diane and Eliezer arrived to help move the stones piled behind our gate. Hevron and his helper Avraham removed the remainder and severed the tilted gate's support beams from their bases, with the intention of re-soldering them in their places later, after the wall had been rebuilt.

Yehudit and I started picking thousands of olives from the fallen branches that we could not normally have reached. As we picked them bare, I hauled them outside onto the very high brush piles on both

sides of the street.

As of this writing, the snow has all melted, most of the brush piles have been collected; we've submitted a bill for wall and gate repair to our insurance agent – who has promised us a first installment of 10,000 shekels toward the mason's bill of 16,000; and more than 25 trays of olives have been cured in grey Atlantic sea salt, filling our broad window niches and any other level surface Yehudit can clear. They are delicious. (See olive-curing method to the right.)

And here's something most ironic – more like *bashert* – meant to be, or in our case, synchronous with Scripture and history. Friday, the first full day of the big snow – the biggest snow in living memory for this part of the world – was also a fast day, the 10th of *Tevet*, a minor fast day, to be sure, a dawn to dusk rather than a full 24-hour fast like *Yom Kippur* and *Tisha b'Av*, but still a fast day, in commemoration of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. And, as on the afternoon of every minor fast day, there is a *Haftarah* from the Prophet Isaiah, 55:6–56:8, that is read in the morning and the afternoon. In that *Haftarah*, verses 55:8–11 read:

*For My plans are not your plans,
Nor are My ways your ways –
declares the Lord.
But as the heavens are high above the earth,
So are My ways high above your ways
And My plans above your plans.
For as the rain or snow drops from heaven
And returns not there
But soaks the earth
And makes it bring forth vegetation,
Yielding seed for sowing and bread for eating,
So is the word that issues from My mouth:
It comes not back to Me its task undone,
But performs what I purpose,
Achieves what I sent it to do.
– H. L. Ginsberg translation*

And those learning *Daf Yomi*, the daily seven-year cycle of Talmud study, this year on this day read the famous story of the impecunious, not-yet-Rabbi Hillel, who in his eagerness to learn Torah, though not yet eligible to be formally admitted to the nearest school, lay on the skylight to listen and remained in place even when the snow began to fall. Toward the end of their study session, one of the scholars noticed a shadow cast by some obstruction on the skylight. They went outside and found the half-frozen Hillel. They brought him inside, revived him, and henceforward allowed him to join their circle. This event occurred on *Erev Shabbat* during *Tevet* over 2000 years ago.

But there's another connection with the Tenth of *Tevet* from the TaNaKH. In Second Samuel, 23:20, we read about an

Yehudit's olive-curing method

(see Goldfarb p. 11 for story that goes with this)

1. Cover a tray of clean olives one layer deep with boiling water. (If aluminum, line the tray with baking paper first.)
2. Let stand for 24 hours.
3. Drain and spread out one layer deep on baking paper in whatever kind of tray is available.
4. Cover completely with Celtic salt (that's the same grey Atlantic salt mentioned in the story to the left).
5. After about four days turn the olives over. Yehudit now has a new way to do this, with only a minimum of new salt required:
 - a. Empty the contents into another tray.
 - b. Take out the baking paper, rinse it, and set it aside to dry for re-use.
 - c. Put fresh or dried baking paper in the bottom of the rinsed and dried original tray – or in another dry tray.
 - d. Take olives out of the salt and place them on the dry baking paper in the bottom of the tray.
 - e. Cover with the original sea salt (or, with dry salt, if dry salt from a previous batch is available).
6. Taste test after 4–5 additional days. If ready for eating, rinse off all the salt.
7. Air-dry the olives on a fine mesh screen.
8. Serve with a light coating of olive oil and keep the balance in a tightly closed jar. Add spices to the closed jar if you wish. ★

exceptionally valiant man, a "*ben ish chai*," named *V'naiyahu*. The passage reads, "*V'naiyahu, son of Y'ho-yada, was a valiant man of many achievements, from Kav-tz'ayl; he struck down the two commanders of Moav, and he [also] went down and slew a lion in the middle of a pit on a snowy day.*" A commentary recently came across my desk, which identifies that day as the Tenth of *Tevet*, and accords status to it as the coldest day of the year, as opposed to *Tisha b'Av*, ostensibly the hottest day.

It's been a year of extremes here in the Middle East – of heat and cold, of drought and flood, of prosperity and poverty, of war and peace. And our *Chug Tanakh* has been studying *Kohelet*, with its famous verses, "To everything there is a season, And a time for every purpose under Heaven."

Maggid and Rabbinic Deputy Reuven Goldfarb's poetry, stories, and essays have been published in scores of magazines, newspapers, and anthologies including this one. 9 Adar I, 5774 / Feb. 9, 2014, Tzfat, HaGalil HaElyon, Shevet Naftali, Eretz Yisrael. ★



Holocaust Educator

By MIRIAM L. ZIMMERMAN

Jury "selection" conjures images of Auschwitz-Birkenau

Guilty as charged: Count 1a, driving a vehicle. Count 1b, driving while under the influence of alcohol. Count 2a, driving a vehicle. Count 2b, driving with a blood alcohol level of .08% (the legal limit in California) or greater. From Feb. 13–19, 2014, a week out my life was devoted to mind-numbing expert testimony on the effects of alcohol on the human body and how the body metabolizes alcohol. I was a member of a jury panel to decide the fate of a man charged with a DUI (driving while under the influence of alcohol).

On the morning of jury selection, Judge Richard Livermore of the San Mateo County Criminal Court called for 60 potential jurors. At the end of the day, after the judge and both attorneys finally agreed on twelve jurors and one alternate, there were fewer than a half dozen others remaining in the wood-paneled courtroom. One by one, the judge or the attorneys dismissed most of the original 60. I was one of the lucky ones chosen to be on the jury; "lucky" depends on one's point of view.

Mixed feelings – I wanted to do my civic duty, yet I had pressing medical concerns about my spouse's current health crisis. I requested dismissal based on his upcoming neurological exam and potentially fragile medical condition. The judge's response was to give me the private telephone number that went directly to the courtroom; if my husband had a problem, he could reach me.

Later, two of my fellow panelists expressed their concerns to me privately that the judge had not let me go. They pointed out that he had dismissed others for less serious reasons. Thus was I selected for jury duty.

For me, any form of the word "select" conjures images of the long ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, dazed Jews tumbling out of smelly cattle cars to be accosted by SS guards with whips and dogs, and *kapos* shouting, "*Schnell, schnell* (quickly, quickly)," or "*Raus, raus* (out, out)!"

Holocaust activist and survivor Eva Kor teaches that the ramp in Birkenau is the site where more families have been broken up than on any other piece of real

estate in the world. My adult children seem to be correct in their collective observation that I can relate any topic, any life experience, to the Holocaust – even the process of jury selection.

The right to a trial by a jury of one's peers is one hallmark of our country's democratic tradition, guaranteed by the Sixth and Seventh Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. In my earliest training on teaching the Holocaust, I learned that Holocaust scholars agree that keeping democratic institutions strong will help prevent totalitarian takeovers such as Hitler's 1933 ascension to power in Germany.

It was in the 1980's. One of my children's teachers, knowing that I am a second generation German-Jew, asked me to talk about the Holocaust in her classroom. Thus began of my career as a Holocaust educator. On the San Francisco Bay Area Peninsula at that time, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) offered one-day seminars in Holocaust education explicitly designed for parents who, like me, had been invited to do so.

There were many takeaways from that day. I continue to use the "Importance of Democratic Institutions" topic at the end of my Holocaust class, under the general rubric, "Preventing Genocide." A viable democracy will not only prevent totalitarian takeovers, but will also keep populations from needing to revolt, as we see happening in the Ukraine today; or, devolve into civil war, as occurring in Syria.

The U.S. says it is fighting for democracy in such remote places as Iraq and Afghanistan. Recently, a political pundit on National Public Radio estimated that a third of Afghani soldiers will defect, once the U.S. pulls out of that beleaguered country. What part of "puppet regime" do our leaders not understand? How can we expect democracy to take hold in countries with a history of tribal cultures and autocratic leadership? Merely holding elections does not create a democracy.

An uncredited lecturer on Stanford University's website lists four elements of a democracy: a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

In the JCRC seminar, we were taught that a democracy must have freely elected political leaders by an educated electorate. Pause after writing this sentence. If I were speaking, the phrase "an educated electorate" would stick in my throat. Arguably, our broken education system has resulted in a nation of uncritical thinkers, with an illiteracy rate of 14 percent, a total of 32 million adults in the

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vacation from work. *Dror* is the name of a bird and, like a bird that soars and migrates, it refers to mental freedom. *Cherut* describes the kind of freedom we have to pursue a higher purpose in life: It signifies spiritual freedom.

Passover is the Jewish holiday that commemorates our freedom from Egyptian bondage. The Hebrews who fled Egypt in the middle of the night had been slaves for over 400 years. Moses led them to physical freedom, but it would take another 40 years of wandering in the Sinai desert before they would be able to relinquish their slave mentality and become free-thinking men and women. What would enable them to make this difficult transition?

The answer came seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt at the foot of Mount Sinai, where the Hebrew people gathered to experience the most profound moment in Jewish history, the Revelation of the Torah. It was here that the people became unified as a *spiritual* nation, when they entered into the covenant with the God that brought them out of Egypt "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm." They were given freedom for a distinct and special purpose – to love God, to follow the laws of the Torah and to become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Passover is *Ziman Cherutanu*, which in Hebrew means the "time of our spiritual freedom." It is intricately linked to *Shavuot*, the holiday in which we celebrate the giving of the Torah. The journey of the Jewish people from redemption to Revelation is also the story of our redemption through Revelation. We are given our freedom so that we can become a holy people with a unique spiritual destiny.

This year, when we sit together at the Seder table and read the story of the Exodus from Egypt, let us remember that it is only because we are free, physically, mentally and spiritually, that we have the privilege of choosing how to live. And because of that freedom, we are never free from our responsibility to choose what is good and just.

Amy Hirshberg Lederman is an author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney who lives in Tucson. Her columns in the AJP have won awards from the American Jewish Press Association, the Arizona Newspapers Association and the Arizona Press Club for excellence in commentary. Visit her website at amyhirshberglederman.com. This column was published previously in this newspaper. ★



U.S. who can't read. An additional 21 (see Zimmerman, page 14)

KAPLAN/ISRAEL

(continued from page 10)

Bible from Hebrew, found in Egypt.

A wide variety of Torah scrolls are in more cases – 15th century Yemen, 14–19th centuries Ethiopia, 5–9th centuries Egypt, 9–11th centuries Iraq, 12–13th centuries Samaritan. Moroccan Torahs are from the 17th and 20th centuries; and Spanish Torah scrolls are from the 15th and 17th centuries.

Greek versions of the gospels date from the 11–14th centuries; Armenian gospels are from the 11–17th centuries; Italian Bibles come from the 9–15th centuries.

An illuminated scroll of Esther in Hebrew, done in ink and pigment on parchment shows comic-book style illustrations and dates to 1615 Italy. The Book of Ezekiel, in Latin, comes from 9th century Tours, France.

The earliest version of the New Testament is 14th century Ethiopic, written in ink and pigment on parchment in Ge'ez. All 27 books of the New Testament were written in Greek but may have been originally in Hebrew or Aramaic.

One of the most unusual pieces is the Codex Climaci Rescriptus, one of the oldest copies of the Bible, with Old and New Testament sections in Aramaic and Greek, dating from the 6th to 9th centuries. Another piece, which has never been on exhibit before, is a 14th century illuminated manuscript chronicling the lineage of Jesus from the prophets to Adam.

There are also some documents which were found in the Cairo Genizah, the collection of Jewish fragments discovered in 1896 in the storeroom of a Cairo synagogue, dating from the 9th to the 19th centuries. Handwritten Bibles come from Germany from the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries; among the Medieval Christian Biblical manuscripts is one from the 11th century Armenia.

With the advent of the Gutenberg printing press, which printed the first full Bible 1452–1455, there are printed Bibles from Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, England and Spain in one case as well as two leaves of that original printed Bible. The King James version of the Bible commissioned by King James dates from 1604.

In another case are 18th to 19th century Bibles from England, Russia, Holland, Switzerland, Turkey, France, Ireland and Philadelphia. Most exciting is a replica of the Gutenberg Press where the process of how it was used is demonstrated by someone in 15th century dress. State-of-the-art technology finds a place in this exhibition through iPads which visitors can use to interact with various artifacts.

All of the works are original except facsimiles of the Dead Sea Scrolls

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percent of U.S. adults read below a 5th grade level, and 19 percent of high school graduates can't read.

These statistics come from an April 2013 study by the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Literacy. A very readable table of results can be found here: www.statisticbrain.com/number-of-american-adults-who-cant-read/. Given these appalling statistics, how can the vote of such a populace result in the best possible political decisions? I stipulate that, as a people, we are more vulnerable to propaganda than we are able to respond critically to well-crafted persuasion by thoughtful politicians.

Majority rules in a democracy. Yet, not all eligible voters in the U.S. bother even to register to vote. Voting rates of registered voters are abysmally low. Further, the intricacies of the electoral college make it possible to elect presidents with a minority of those who actually vote. Given this dismal picture, does our democracy truly reflect majority rule?

Another hallmark of a democracy is a free press, uncorrupted by monetary interests or political pressure. Much has been written about when, in the 1980s, the big network corporations (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) no longer regarded their news divisions as loss leaders. Instead, they mandated that their news divisions generate a profit like every other aspect of media.

Marketing professionals replaced journalists in the newsrooms. Ratings became the litmus test for a viable newsroom. The line between a news item and a feature story blurred. The word "infotainment" describes the results. Can such a media environment adequately serve the interests of democracy, that is, keeping the electorate politically and economically informed in an unbiased manner?

Perhaps Marxist philosopher and



fragments and the 11th century Khabouris Codex (a manuscript of the New Testament in Aramaic, with only 22 of the 27 books).

The primary patron of this exhibition is Baptist, Steve Green, president of the crafts store chain, Hobby Lobby, who assembled 40,000 biblical texts and antiquities which are part of a collection in Oklahoma City, Okla. Their team of curators collaborated with the Bible Lands Museum on this exhibition.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food writer, lecturer and cookbook author. She also leads walks through Machaneh Yehudah, the Jewish produce market in English. ★

economist Rosa Luxemburg described it best: "Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element." – *Prison notes*, 1918; *The Russian Revolution*, 1922.

The recent spate of voter suppression laws further undermines our democratic system. Republicans use the pretext of voter fraud to justify voter suppression laws. The reality is that such fraud simply does not exist at any meaningful level. To deny the vote to many out of concern over very few fraudulent votes does not serve the interests of democracy.

"So Republican officials, especially but not only in the South, want to reduce early voting; impose voter-identification requirements; restrict voter registration; and, critically, draw districts either to crowd as many minority voters into as few districts as possible, or dilute concentrations of minority voters by dispersing them into as many white-controlled districts as possible," (*New York Times* online, Nov. 15, 2013).

Every Holocaust survivor and every Holocaust educator should shout out against such practices. Only one institution that I know of, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) does so. The ACLU has a "Voting Rights Project" that fights laws that disenfranchise millions of eligible voters without any legitimate justification.

The U.S. constitution declares that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State...on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude..." Fifteenth Amendment; "... on account of sex," Nineteenth Amendment; "... by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax," Twenty-Fourth Amendment; "... on account of age," Twenty-Sixth Amendment.

Before going to another Afghanistan or Iraq (think Crimea or Syria) to fight for democracy, let's fight for democracy here at home. Yesterday, a check for my week of jury service from the Superior Court of California County of San Mateo arrived in the amount of \$58.26. The cost of democracy is cheap; its value: priceless.

Even more priceless: the results of Richard's medical tests were good. What we thought at first was very serious, was ultimately diagnosed as a relatively benign event that will probably not reoccur.

Dr. Zimmerman is professor emerita at Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU) in Belmont, Calif., where she continues to teach the Holocaust course. She can be reached at mzimmerman@ndnu.edu. ★

Passover Seder – Bibliodrama

By BRUCE DAVID



Imagine we're sitting around the table with our ancestors having our meal at the original Seder in Egypt. Remember, these people were humans, too. What were they thinking? If you are them, what are you thinking?

1) "Man, this is all so crazy. We've always been slaves. Our parents were slaves, and their parents were slaves. Now, this guy Moses appears, saying that God spoke with him. Then all these crazy things start happening, although the flaming ice falling from the sky was pretty cool. Plus, I mean the Egyptians are the strongest most powerful army in the world. We do all their work for them! No way they are going to let us go! But now, Moses tells us that we are going to be free and that we should follow him out into the desert. What's out there? There's nothing out there but sand."

2) "The desert? Who the heck goes into the desert? The heat is crazy intense. We are going to get fried! I've heard rumors of recent reports saying that being out in the sun isn't good for your skin. How are they going to have enough sunscreen for all these people?"

3) "Even if they do, I'm in big trouble. I'm just not in the best shape. I should have stayed on my diet and exercised regularly. I also still have some pain in my legs and lower back from trying to move that last pyramid block. Sucker was heavy! Sure hope I'm going to be ok to walk for a distance."

4) "You? What about me? My bladder control has been getting weaker and weaker. I have to use the facilities a lot, if you know what I mean? What am I going to do if I have to pee and there are all these people everywhere and we are surrounded by nothing but sand? Hey, I mean when we get out there in the desert 'Let my people go!' is going to take on a new meaning."

5) "Chill out! Don't worry! Be happy! Nothing we can do. For now, let's just enjoy this delicious meal and see what happens. Ummm! The lamb sure smells and tastes so good! But I'm a little concerned about all this unleavened breadstuff. Foods like this really cramp me up."

7) "I just hope that all that sand doesn't ruin my cool sandals. If something happens to them, like, I just don't know what I would do. You know what I mean? Do you think we will be passing any malls?"

8) "It's just not fair. Once we leave, the

Egyptians will probably take credit for all our hard work. We built those pyramids. They are probably like one of the great wonders of the world!"

9) "Hey! Did you hear the latest? Aaron said he heard Moses mumbling in his sleep. And Aaron thinks Moses was having some kind of vision and that sometime in the future they will say that the bottom base of our pyramids are the size of ten football fields. I don't really know what that means, but Aaron seemed to think it meant that the pyramids are really, really big."

10) "Hey, were you there the other day when Moses told Pharaoh what God said?"

"Yeah! But what was that thing he added on afterwards. Something like: 'I am Moses, and I approve this message.' I mean what's up with that dog?"

11) "This looks like we could be in for more than just a walk in the desert. I saw where they were starting some preparations earlier today. There was some guy out there in the desert and he kept moving around and yelling: 'Can you hear me now?'"

12) "Yeah, I saw that too! It also seems like some people were out there marking their territory. One guy put up a sign that said 'MySpace.'"

13) "You know, I didn't quite get the plague of frogs. I mean they're not dangerous. But someone told me that it had something to do with the future and 'going green', whatever that means? A green Passover? What gives?"

14) "Yeah! I heard something about future Passovers too! They are supposed to have these special meals 'Seders' where they eat this real hot horseradish to remind them of all the hell we went through here. But then, they put this same stuff on their gefilte fish and eat it again. I mean how bad could it be? I don't get it. And besides, someone had told me that we weren't going to be able to eat horses in the future, that it isn't kosher, whatever that mean?"

15) "Speaking of food, be careful when you hand out that soup. You know I love my wife, and I'm not insinuating anything bad about her cooking, but her *matzah* balls may be a little heavy. I mean, 'one rolled off the table and killed a friend of mine.'"

"Honey, don't talk like that! That's just the way things get started. Next thing you know they'll be using it in a camp song and everyone will thank my *matzah* balls are terrible."

16) "One good thing. Surely with all the people we have they will let us use the car-pooling lanes."

17) "Hey! I've got a question."

"Questions! Questions! Questions! What is it with you? Enough already! That's like your fourth question already."

KARSH

(continued from page 8)

death, seem in large part to be based on Medicare determinations and other insurances, and the doctors who write the orders of admission and the script of necessary drugs. The hospice workers are simply the agents of the death business.

There are many conversations about "End of Life", and material to guide the process. La Crosse, Wisconsin has gained national attention for its success in fostering these conversations, and as well for the dramatic cost saving results. In the background we hear and read about the movements in countries around the world to ration medicine and surgical procedures, and using an age-related scale of benefits to costs.

Faith issues are not excluded from the decision making process, but in the "religious-cafeteria" world in which live, there are many less stringencies when it comes to making moral decisions.

We are routinely asked for "medical directives," "end-of-life covenants," and other documents which describe what we want and do not want. What it omits is that at the very moment of implementation, someone else is interpreting the medical situation.

Finally, in the same way that "on demand abortions" cheapens the value of life; in the same way that "gay marriage" calls into question the intention of marriage and family; in the very same way that anonymous super-PACS have intruded on the power of people to be in charge of their own governmental lives, we are faced with movements with overt-covert agendas, billionaires who feel that they have a monetary right to guide political reality, all destroying the bedrock of morality on which we stood.

These are serious issues of our times, and we need to talk to each other about them.

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What do they have to do with anything anyways? I mean that last one was a beauty. 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' Who knows? Who cares? It's not like something people are going to stay up late at night talking about!"

18) "Hey! What's with you? Is that some kind of fashion statement? Didn't you hear we were supposed to be ready to leave and to have our staff in our hand and our 'waist belted?'"

"Hic! Oh, is that what they said. I thought they said that we were all supposed to have a belt and get wasted."

(see David, page 19)



Book Review

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

Soviet Jews heroic struggle

Jewish Luck (A True Story of Friendship, Deception, and Risky Business). By Leslie Levine Adler and Meryll Levine Page. Salt Mine Press. 2013. pp. 371.

What a painstaking labor of love to weave an unforgettable account of a penetrating model friendship that has survived the critical test of time. This took place in the most harrowing context of the Soviet Jews' heroic struggle for freedom to leave their native land. In it their mere Jewish identity – weak as it was – subjected them to additional hardships. However, the anti-Semitic discrimination they encountered rekindled in them their Jewish attachment and a fortified yearning to break oppressive Soviet chains.

The book's drama began in 1976 with Leslie Levine of Minneapolis who was a student at the University of Michigan majoring in Russian Area Studies. She excitedly embarks on a study opportunity at the prestigious Leningrad State University. She was not connected to the Refusniks movement and the equally admirable visits by American Jews offering indispensable support and basic Jewish supplies, though Leslie proved no less courageous and resourceful. She was buoyed by the human rights Helsinki Accords of August 1975, representing a thaw in the Cold War and the closing of circle of sorts for Leslie whose paternal grandparents arrived in the United States from Russia's Pale of Settlement in 1905.

The both serendipitous and providential appearance of Vera, a Russian Jewish student, to help Leslie and fellow American traveler Lars with directions in the foreign and impressive city of Leningrad (St. Petersburg), commenced a clandestine bond protected from the ever present and feared KGB. Soon Vera and her fellow Russian Jewish student and friend Alisa (Alla), along with their families, would become deeply involved with Leslie and her fellow American students Lars Peterson and R. D. Zimmerman.



Opinion

PROFESSOR ARNOLD AGES

Why are Abbas and The Arab League opposed to recognizing Israel as a Jewish State?

Theology used to be called "The Queen of the Sciences" in the medieval university, indicating its primacy during that epoch. In the modern period this concept has more or less been replaced, except among

Following much challenge and upheaval for both tenacious Russian Jewish women, Alisa ends up happily married with a daughter in Stockholm, Sweden, imbued with a strong sense of her Jewishness, while Vera (an assumed name for her safety) along with her loving husband and son end up in the Caribbean Cayman Island. This was mainly for tax purposes and peaceful living. Vera becomes a very wealthy business woman though not as Jewishly motivated as Alisa. Vera reflects the ambivalent "Jewish condition" of so many former Soviet Jews who were deprived of a positive Jewish experience.

In more than one way, this illuminating book containing multiple dramas. Unfolding and fit for a film production, the book ought to be required reading for students and all those interested in this pivotal period in Jewish history. It is also an enjoyable, delightful reading experience. The remarkable and gifted co-authors deserve our gratitude. They are sisters, Dr. Leslie Levine Adler, a psychologist and Meryll Levine Page, a Yale University graduate who taught Soviet history. The rich bibliography, historical information and photos are valuable assets.

The title of the book, *Jewish Luck* traditionally and historically implies lack of luck, but in this case actually conveys good luck for the protagonists in a true tale of imaginary proportions. My father Yechiel, a Polish Holocaust survivor, fought outside Leningrad as a Red Army soldier and I was born in Kazakhstan in 1945 when it was still part of the USSR.

Rabbi Israel Zoberman is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach. ★

ecclesiastical circles, by political science, international law and dispute resolution.

I have a lingering unease that one of the few areas in which theology still dominates is in the Arab world and in the Middle East imbroglio. (The Irish case seems to have diminished somewhat.) The violent clashes between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq and several other Muslim jurisdictions over the succession to the Prophet Mohammed are based on a theological disagreement about family lineage. Outsiders might deem this to be a minor family dispute but for the true believer succession rights are thought to be worth dying for.

The obdurateness of segments of the Presbyterian synod in the United States and the United Church in Canada towards Israel shows that theological rigidity about Jews and Judaism is also very much alive today as both groups issue condemnations of Israel redolent of 20 centuries of Christian anti-Semitism. Their librettos – the BDS propaganda and the Israel Apartheid charge – are more nuanced today but the odious music is exactly the same.

But since 1963–1964 and the Second Vatican Council we have learned that deeply held theological biases and the strident teaching of contempt towards Judaism can be neutralized and the proof lies in the righteous leadership of several of the recent Popes in Rome who have uttered the *chatanu* prayer – we have sinned towards Jews. Yes it took almost 2,000 years and the Holocaust to produce this repentance but it is nonetheless a welcome gesture, as is the Vatican's recognition of the State of Israel in the 1980s.

We can learn from the above that congealed theology can be thawed and reconfigured to reveal more positive and spiritually nuanced thinking.

But not, it appears, in the Arab Middle East where frozen ideas about Jews resist any kind of reconsideration and where anti-Jewish myths and stereotypes unfortunately form part of the psychic image of Jews and Judaism. This syndrome is augmented by the availability of Arab versions of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the scurrilous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in a wide array of book-stores in the Arab Levant. Anti-Semitic rhetoric is all too common, moreover, among some Muslim preachers.

It is instructive that Abbas and his advisors have made it clear that in any two state solution, the Palestinian State would be Judenrein (no Jews allowed) – the concept embraced by Nazi executioners Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Goebbels and Adolf Eichmann. This is a very sad commentary inasmuch as Jews once lived in relative amity in Muslim cultures in Iraq, Egypt, Yemen and Syria. It appears

(see Ages, page 17)



Book Excerpt

By TAMAR CASPI

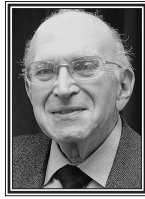
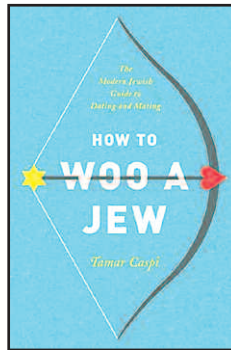
Advice from JDate's expert

How to Woo a Jew: The Modern Jewish Guide to Dating and Mating. By Tamar Caspi. Available from Seal Press, a member of the Perseus Books Group. © 2014. pp. 275.

From pages 55-57

Let's start off with some old school Jewish guilt: A 2001 survey published in *Haaretz* found the Jewish population in the United States decreased by half a million people due to an interfaith marriage rate of 50 percent. So do you want to date – and marry – a Jew? How committed to the Jew are you? Obviously you will have far less prospects, but you will also know those prospects have already been narrowed down by a commonality far more important than loving the same football team. Of course, there are many other incredibly important values which you can find in common with someone who isn't Jewish, and many successful marriages have been built upon those commonalities, and many of those interfaith marriages include a non-Jewish spouse dedicated to the support of raising a Jewish family.

Even if you grow up in a Jewish household, religion isn't likely the first thing you consider when you start dating. Your childhood fantasies don't necessarily include religion as the ruling factor in your love life. As you reach your late teens and begin dating, you probably still don't think about religion and your future when you fall in love for the first time with someone who isn't Jewish. As you go through your twenties and thirties and forties looking for your *beshtet*, you may begin to think about whether or not you want to marry a Jew. Maybe you think religion doesn't matter and love will conquer all. Maybe you believe that all you need is love and love is all that matters and so many other clichés. Eventually, though, you may begin to rethink your priorities and realize sharing a religion is important, not because it makes life easier (which it does) but because it means you share so many



As I Heard It

By MORTON GOLD

Keeping busy

Last May I had several performances of my works, some new and some old. I wrote a Suite for Trumpet and Wind Symphony that received a very fine performance by the Stratford, New Hampshire Wind Symphony and Matthew Doiron, the soloist.

The last movement of my clarinet concerto was performed by the Maine Youth Symphony with Ray Libby as

other important commonalities. You may also question how important religion is to you if you don't plan to have children – without the need to pass your cultural and spiritual beliefs on to another generation, it may be that finding a Jewish partner is less a priority. But maybe it's not, too.

Your parents more than likely imagined you marrying someone Jewish, making a Jewish home, raising Jewish children, and inviting them over to share Shabbat dinner. Unfortunately your parents can in no way prepare you for the unknown and unusual difficulties Jewish dating currently presents. The pressures put on you by your doting parents (not to mention grandparents) can instead have the reverse effect. Many Jews will rebel and date outside the Jewish faith until something brings them back to the fray. For some it may be the death of a grandparent, the birth of a niece or nephew, or some other momentous life event. When someone Jewish passes away or someone is born into the Jewish faith, the family rarely has to discuss how to mourn or celebrate, respectively. Faith-based traditions and values are ingrained from birth – specifically, your *Brit Milah*, or baby naming. Just know that even if you find a non-Jewish partner who says he or she will support you in raising a Jewish family, it's not the same. There's something comforting about knowing the words to "I Have a Little Dreidel" and the perfect way to cook *matzo breit*.

Hopefully I have you convinced by now that you do want to stay committed to dating Jews. So how do you go about finding the specimens coined by Jewish mothers as their "perfect children"? You've got to use three things: your G-D given Jewdar powers, G-D's Chosen People, and the place where you go to connect to G-D: temple. ✨

soloist. It seems that a friend of Rabbi Braun who is the rabbi of the temple I attend "raved" about the music. The good rabbi wondered if it might be performed at a concert at the temple and I readily agreed. Things seemed to be going my way as a date was selected (Nov. 3, 2013) that did not conflict with the alignment of the planets.

The tenor, Wayne Hobbs who was the soloist in many of my concerts in Vermont readily agreed to come and perform at the concert. Hobbs is presently teaching at a college in Spartanburg, South Carolina and pursuing his masters degree there. Traveling to Maine was not a mere ride across town for him. A former student of mine, Olivia Gawet who lives in Rutland, Vermont and a superb singer in her own right, answered my summons and also agreed to sing at this concert. Did I say that none of these professional musicians asked, "What's in it for me?" This kind of thing rarely occurs these days if it occurs at all. So, things seemed to be all set for this "Retrospective Concert" of my music, new as well as old.

Then as September proceeded to October I got word that my clarinet soloist had a conflict and could not perform on Nov. 3. Changing the date was a non-starter. I had been rehearsing with flutist Mary Kennedy who was planning on performing my flute concerto the following May. After a bit of arm twisting, she readily agreed to advance her time table and play the work three weeks later. After this scare there was

(see Gold, page 19)

AGES

(continued from page 16)

that in our own day in a future Palestinian state Jews would not be able to exist even as Dhimis, that is to say, "protected citizens."

Palestinian negotiators are adamant about refusing to grant legitimacy to Israel as a Jewish entity, forgetting all the Arab states that advertise their Islamic patrimony proudly in their constitutions. Why this refusal of a Jewish charter to the State of Israel. In this regard they seem to be infected by British historian Arnold Toynbee and his myopic references to Jews as a "fossilized relic of an ancient Syriac civilization." This so-called fossil, however, was never a fossil and has emerged miraculously from a twilight journey across the centuries and is a vibrant living entity now dwelling in the Land of Israel. We hope that Abbas and company will grasp this truth and act upon it.

Arnold Ages is "Distinguished Emeritus Professor" University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and the Scholar-in-Residence at the Beth Tzedec Synagogue, Toronto Canada. ✨



My Kosher Kitchen

REVIEWED BY SYBIL KAPLAN

Cookbook review and Passover recipes

Eating the Bible. By Rena Rossner: Skyhorse Publishing. \$24.95 hardcover. November 2013.

Titles are very important in the book world, and if I were not a cookbook collector and food writer, I might not have wanted to read it because the title really turned me off. I tried to not let it influence my reading and reviewing of the book.

Wouldn't *Eating in the Bible*, *Eating from the Bible* or *Biblical Eating* have been more inviting, attractive titles? Even more accurate, it could have been called *Eating from the Torah* or *Torah Eating*.

The author says that "the ability to bring the Bible alive in such a tactile way motivated [her] to begin work on a cookbook..." She writes, "I wanted to find a way to make the Bible relevant to the modern kitchen."

This cookbook offers serious consideration of biblical texts rather than anecdotes as she then goes through the Torah, using only Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Each recipe is introduced by a quote from that book of the Torah, a commentary, the recipe (metric and regular measurements), and paragraphed instructions (not as easy to follow as numbered).

On the side is a paragraph titled "Alternatives" where she simply provides short cuts or easy ideas "to bring the Bible to your table." To make the recipes more relevant to one's family and to children, there is an additional paragraph called "Questions" – things to think about and discuss relative to the recipe and the Biblical selection.

In Genesis, there are 12 recipes such as Reft lentil soup, Technicolor salad, and Rice blessed with Arrabbiata-style fish. In Exodus, there are 11 recipes including Hidden treasure midnight brownies, Festive golden brisket, and Woven tapestry bread. Leviticus has 10 recipes including

Anointed vegetables, Vineyard chicken and Aged strawberry liqueur. The Numbers chapter has 10 recipes such as Half-shekel carrot coins, Crater cake, and Golden cornbread. Finally is Deuteronomy with 11 recipes including Tuna with olive-wine sauce, Hearts of palm soup, and Jelly-roll Bible scroll cake.

The idea is great and certainly interesting for families to use with their children. There are a number of appealing recipes which I certainly will try. This would make a wonderful gift for a new bride, a house gift for a family or just a no-special reason gift for a friend.

Beautifully enhancing the book by Boaz Lavi are: 9 instructional sets of photographs ranging from 2 to 12 photos for a recipe; 136 other color photographs – some full page, some smaller; photographs of one of her five children; and a photograph of the author.

Rosner has a BA in nonfiction writing and an MA in history; she was raised in Miami but lived in Canada and Ireland and now lives in Jerusalem. She once wrote a column for the *Jerusalem Post* which combined biblical verses with a recipe.

Here are a few of the recipes and notes of their relation to the Bible.

From the Book of Numbers (13:23) describing the spies returning with the cluster of grapes and other fruit:

Spy Fruit Salad

(Serves 4–6)

- 1/4 cup fresh lime or lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp. honey
- 3 Tbsp. minced fresh mint
- Zest of 1 lime or lemon, grated
- 1 cup red grapes
- 1 cup green grapes
- 8 fresh figs, green or purple
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds or
- 2 Tbsp. pomegranate juice
- 1 honeydew melon, peeled and cut into chunks

In a large bowl, combine the lime or lemon juice, honey, mint and zest and mix well. Add the grapes, figs and pomegranate seeds. Allow the fruit to marinate for 30 minutes.

In another large serving bowl place the honeydew. Pour fruit mixture over honeydew and mix.

From the Book of Deuteronomy (26:9) discussing "the land flowing with milk and honey" followed by this recipe:

Milk and Honey Kugel

(Serves 8–10)

- 1 16 oz. pkg. medium egg noodles for Passover
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/2 cup honey

Book Review

REVIEWED BY SYBIL KAPLAN

Exceptional and beautifully illustrated

Creations First Light. By Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. Illustrated by Joani Rothenberg. IBJ Custom and Book Publishing. October 2013. 36 pp. \$17.95 hardcover.

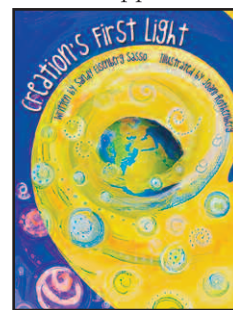
Sandy Eisenberg Sasso was the first woman to be ordained from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College as a rabbi in 1974. She and her rabbi-husband were the first husband-wife team to serve a congregation, Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis, beginning in 1977.

This mother of two and grandmother of three recently retired after serving as senior rabbi for 36 years. Over the years, she wrote about 17 children's books that were all unique and very special. This latest book is addressed to the child reader and seems like a *midrash*-based story as it relates the work of G-d in creating.

It then focuses on what happened to the light created on the first day that differs from the light of the sun and the moon. This focus is related in a rather mystical or spiritual style. Finally, Rabbi Sasso discusses how the light can be seen by the reader and what it really means.

The book concludes with a guide for parents or teachers to help children better understand the meaning of the book. The illustrations by Indianapolis art therapist and book illustrator, Joani Rothenberg are amazingly colorful and beautiful.

Children and parents who have enjoyed Rabbi Sasso's previous books, particularly those that dealt with the mystery of G-d as explained for young readers, will find this book just as exceptional and distinctive. ★



Sandy Sasso



J. Rothenberg

- 2 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. vanilla sugar
- 1/2 cup cream or milk
- 5 eggs

(see Kaplan/recipes, page 19)

RIBNER

(continued from page 6)

by Month, and New Age Judaism. Internationally known for her pioneering work in kabbalistic meditation and healing, she is also a spiritual psychotherapist and for more than 30 years has used kabbalistic wisdom as part of treatment. She offers a free newsletter on meditation, healing, kabbalistic energies of the months, holidays, and so forth. www.kabbalahoftheheart.com. ★

**BEN ASHER/BAT SARAH**

(continued from page 9)

life. And while that semicha experience is no longer available to us, we do have the option of buying and eating kosher meat and poultry to serve the same moral spirituality.

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

**DAVID**

(continued from page 15)

Our Four Questions:

- Who are we?
- How did we get here?
- What is our purpose?
- Where are we going?

To answer these questions, we need to look at what we know. There is some type of Powerful Intelligence responsible for creation and life. Historically, and spiritually, something very rare and different is going on relating to the Jewish people and their world purpose and function. These all seem to suggest a personal connection and relationship with this Divine Entity.

Judaism teaches us to take care of all the life and to join together in our efforts to achieve a time of harmony and peace. Our life purpose is one of universal concern for all life, to be a "light of the nations," a reflection of light and love to the world, to bring light to the darkness. We are instructed to do "*tikkun olam*," to help heal and repair a world in need and to strive for the time when God's "house of prayer will be for all people." To be "*Betza'im Eloh'im*" in the image of the Creator, partners with the Source of Life in preserving this magnificent world as a healthy, happy space for the life to grow to the best of its ability.

Bruce David is a Judaic artist and Jewish educator from Bloomington, Ind. His art may be viewed by visiting www.davidart.com. He also welcomes comments there, too. ★

GOLD

(continued from page 17)

a very happy ending. The concerto was performed, both singers sang beautifully, individually and collectively, the flutist and myself at the piano as well performed admirably, the piano was tuned, the event recorded and there was a respectable audience for the concert.

The following week my wife and I had the pleasure of attending our granddaughter's *Bat Mitzvah* in Albany, New York. I might add that she sang my new setting of *Eyl Adon* as well as the new setting of *Eyn Keloheynu*. Very soon after this, my unusual run of good fortune ran out. I do not want to go into the unhappy details but my son and his wife decided to go their separate ways. There were some school concerts I was committed to in December and the calendar morphed into January and here we are almost in February. Life does go on and as Spock might have concluded: "Live Long and Prosper."

Dr. Gold is a composer/conductor and a long time columnist for the Post & Opinion. ★

**KAPLAN/RECIPES**

(continued from page 18)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Boil and drain noodles and return to pot. Add butter, honey, salt and vanilla sugar. Mix well. Add cream or milk and eggs. Pour mixture into a baking dish and bake for 1 hour or until kugel is golden brown and firm to the touch. [Note from reviewer: grease the baking dish.]

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food writer, lecturer and cookbook author who lives in Jerusalem. If you're planning a visit to Jerusalem soon, she leads weekly walks through the Jewish produce market, Machaneh Yehudah. ★

**GERTEL**

(continued from page 20)

paraphrase): "Always accept in any way a good opportunity that comes your way."

Once Richie has Irving and Edith in his clutches, he pressures them to assist him in busts for white collar crimes. With delusions of fame and adulation, he exposes them and himself to possible mob hits. It will take all the charm, savvy and knowledge of the gray that Irving can muster to get everybody out alive. There is added expense in Irving having to assume all the stress of the situation while struggling with heart disease.

Rigid Richie, who lied to entrap Irving and Edith/Sydney, brags in one breath

about a grandmother who lived until 92 and never lied, and in the next breath flirts with Edith. Richie is also manipulative and frighteningly violent toward his supervisor in the Bureau. Unlike Richie's supervisor, Irving knows how to hit back when Richie crosses the line. Because he is self-assured, Irving knows how to exercise self-control when necessary. Because he is so measured, his outbursts are effective; we want to cheer when he tells Richie that if the country were run by people like him, "liars like you," then it would be another Eastern Bloc or Guatemala.

Brilliantly, writers Eric Warren Singer and David O. Russell keep us hoping that Richie's supervisor will save him from his own stupidity with some guidance from an ice fishing story that Richie keeps interrupting. But in the end, salvation must come from Irving with roundabout unintended help from his screwy but charming and self-assured wife. In her own way Rosalyn is a worthy help mate for Irving, even though in retaliation for his infidelity, she takes up with an enforcer associated with the mob boss whom Richie is trying to get Irving and Edith to bring down.

Rosalyn and Irving have befriended the good-natured, beloved mayor of Camden, a good man of Italian origin with a wife and five children, who seeks to better Atlantic City even if that means having to deal with the mob. The mayor is genuinely concerned about all the community, including the black community.

Richie wants to bring down the mayor, who becomes the only good friend that Irving has ever had. (One gets the impression that at an earlier point in time, Irving's relationship with the mayor and his wife might have saved his own marriage.) Irving is disgusted that Richie is going after a good politician, especially after all the post-Watergate disillusionment. But he is forced to participate in the entrapment of a friend whom he loves and admires. In the end, however, he finds a way to do what he thinks is right, even if that means some brilliant chicanery in service of the gray areas of life and in defiance of "law enforcement."

Irving is flawed, but he assumes responsibility for anyone who matters to him or has mattered to him. He does not represent Jewish values and teachings, but in the end he does some good when faced with the consequences of his bad ethics and decisions.

Rabbi Gertel 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. ★



Media Watch

By RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

The Jewish Post & Opinion

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Saving Mr. Banks and American Hustle

Saving Mr. Banks is a touching, engaging, well-acted, sensitively written and finely produced, at times poignant and rousing film about a determined Walt Disney (Tom Hanks) trying to coax away the rights to *Mary Poppins* stories from Australian-born author Pamela P.L. Travers (Emma Thompson). For reasons gradually revealed in the film, Travers is a bitter, angry and acerbic personality, who, although financially strapped, cannot warm up to Disney's generous offer and to the world of song, animation, imagination and wonder that should appeal to a writer of children's books, whose own father had observed, "The world is just an illusion."

The sad story of Travers' childhood unfolds, and we learn that the woman after whom *Mary Poppins* was modeled could be both buoyant and daunting and was comforting only to a point.

Biographers of Disney have noted that the film takes some liberties in that Travers had already granted rights before production began, and that she never approved of the songs or of the animation and felt that the *Mary Poppins* character was too simply and lightly drawn.



(L-R) Emma Thompson and Tom Hanks star in *Saving Mr. Banks*.

Noteworthy is the depiction of Richard and Robert Sherman (Jason Schwartzman and B.J. Novak), the brothers who wrote the uplifting and memorable music for *Mary Poppins*. At one point Travers asks about Bob Sherman's limp, and when he responds that he "got shot," she quips, "That's not surprising." But later Travers exclaims, "Those Sherman boys have turned my head," after the brothers get her to dance to the "Let's Go Fly a Kite" song. I, for one, would have liked to have known a little more about these brothers, and to have seen a bit more made of the

background of two nice Jewish boys who, in this film at least, were able to pierce the armor of a very self-guarded woman. Was Bob's injury a war wound? Was there anything in their Jewish background that made their music so engaging?

American Hustle

In writing, direction, acting and spirit, David O. Russell's is a thought-provoking and impressive film, the riveting and strangely uplifting story of a consummate con man, his girlfriend, his wife, and an ambitious FBI agent. The con man here happens to be Jewish, but there is no stereotyping in this film, which is based on real life events.

The film's Irving Rosenfeld (Christian Bale) is a born hustler, instinctively keeping afloat the family business by breaking windows. Irving finds his soul mate in Sydney (Amy Adams) who deceives even him with a phony British accent and identity, "Lady Edith." She recognizes "an air about him and...this confidence that... he was who he was, and he didn't care."

Irving knows that he is a Jew; hence, the Star of David that he wears on his chest. Yet he is vain enough to sport a hairpiece. He is capable enough to run legitimate businesses, but he relishes the challenge of an elaborate swindle. Even in a profitable cleaning business he will collect good clothes that people "left" through the years. That is how he first woos Edith/Sydney, with whom he bonds over Duke Ellington recordings. "Like me," Irving says approvingly of Edith/Sydney's talents as con artist, "she knew how to survive and to reinvent herself. She knew you had to have a vision."

Irving's world-view is straightforward: "As far as I can see, people are always conning each other to get what they want. We con ourselves." He feels perfectly entitled to shake people down for fake certificates of deposit or for false loans at \$5,000. He assumes that people embrace get-rich-quick schemes because of their conning or mismanagement, from which

he intends to profit. Conning is an art: "Who's the master, the painter or the forger. That's the way the world works – no black and white, only gray."



(L-R) Jeremy Renner, Jennifer Lawrence, Christian Bale, Amy Adams, and Bradley Cooper star in *American Hustle*.

Standing between Irving and larcenous bliss with his girlfriend is his wife, Rosalyn (Jennifer Lawrence), who is also very comfortable in her own Long Island skin and has her own rather idiosyncratic vision of reality. Irving moans, "You might say she was my karma for how I take advantage of people." Simply by reading Wayne Dyer's self-help literature and interpreting it in her own skewered way, Rosalyn unwittingly endangers the family on many levels. Irving wants to divorce Rosalyn, but he loves his adopted son and feels responsible for both of them.

The suspenseful turning of the wheels of justice comes when Irving and Edith fall prey to an ambitious young FBI agent, Richie (Bradley Cooper), who, while pontificating about trying to do the right thing, is a con artist whose zealotry can lead to destruction, death and, maybe worst of all, according to Irving, mass disillusionment.

Richie pontificates more than the pope, who is mentioned in the film when Richie's mother prays that he will marry his fiancée so that the Archbishop of Rome will have more followers. But Richie is not guided by his mother's religious faith or by Irving's emphasis on shades of gray, regarding which Irving paraphrases Jesus's teaching, "Treat people the way you want to be treated," as (and here I

(see Gertel, page 19)