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לשנה טובה



## Editorial

In the *Indianapolis Star* on Sat., Aug. 29, 2009, a man wrote to Billy Graham that he was hurt by someone in his family, but that person will not admit that he or she has done anything wrong, let alone ask for forgiveness. The questioner wanted to know how to forgive this family member.

On occasion I read Graham's "My Answer" column to see what advice he will give to spiritual questions like this. I don't agree with him when he writes that there is only one way to salvation, but his answer to this question is very appropriate for Jewish people at this time of year. Graham's response:

*It's easier, of course, to forgive someone who knows he or she has hurt us and is asking for forgiveness. But life isn't always that easy, and sometimes the whole burden rests on our shoulders.*

*But that doesn't mean we don't need to forgive. After all, when someone hurts us, we begin carrying a burden, and we need to get rid of it. Imagine it as a heavy basket filled with emotions that weigh you down: anger, hurt, jealousy, a desire for revenge, guilt, bitterness and so forth.*

*You have only two choices: carry it or get rid of it. Every object in that basket hurts you. So what is the best thing to do? The Bible is clear: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (Ephesians 4:31).*

*This only happens as you forgive. And this becomes possible as we realize how much God has forgiven us.*

Our tradition teaches that for sins against a fellow human, we cannot ask God for forgiveness until we have asked the person whom we have hurt. We may then ask God for forgiveness even if the person refuses.

In Hebrew the word for sin is translated as "missing the mark." This suggests that one is aiming to hit the mark – do what is right – but simply missed. This implies that perhaps people do not begin with the intention to purposely hurt another. Realizing this may make it easier to forgive those who have hurt us.

I like Graham's analogy of looking at hurt as a heavy basket, and it is similar to what my aunt has Diane said. (The following paragraph was originally published in my editorial from July 9, 2003 and was reprinted here in the July 29, 2009 issue.)

"If one is constantly bitter, filled with anger, hatred, resentment, and regrets, eventually that will affect other areas in one's life and could lead to health problems. My aunt, Diane Arnold from Tampa, has a unique way of expressing this. She said, 'When someone hates another, it is as if they carry that person on their back. The one being carried is not sweating. The one who hates has to struggle with the extra weight.'"

Then in Nov. 22, 2006, Charles Roth of New York who was the executive editor

and vice president of this newspaper from 1953–1983 wrote the following on the subject. This is another creative way to help one realize what he or she is doing by not practicing forgiveness.

"Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi teaches that when one holds a grudge, it is as though you are holding the person against whom you have the grudge in jail. But if you are holding the person in jail, you are the jailor and have to sit in jail, keeping your prisoner there. And you will have to remain in that jail so long as you keep the grudge. So drop the grudge and let yourself out of prison."

In *Finding a Way to Forgive* from a series called Life Lights (brief essays on wholeness and healing), published by Jewish Lights and written by Rabbi David Wolpe, he writes: "We forgive, in part, because we need forgiveness. Every one of us has bruised another, betrayed and ill-treated even those whom we love. Can any marriage or any friendship endure without constant forgiveness? What we hope for in the world we must create. We cannot have what we will not give."

He suggests developing strategies and practices of forgiveness. "Lifting ourselves out of the here-and-now can give us a truer perspective on our predicament. Will this insult matter in 30 years, or even in 30 days? If you could fly and take an eagle's view of the crisis, would it still matter so much? In short, is what happened as grievous as it seems?"

"Judaism teaches those who have done wrong to seek forgiveness. It mandates that the offenders must sincerely ask pardon and seek to correct the wrongs they have done. But it also teaches that after a certain point – three sincere apologies, an attempt at restitution, and a clear indication that the person has changed – it becomes the obligation of the wronged party to forgive."

Rabbi Wolpe advises us to take heart, take time, and begin the journey. "Forgiveness takes time. Forgiving is a process we go through to attain the state of forgiveness. There will be anger and backsliding. But like all true journeys, we cannot now exactly imagine where we will end up once we have taken the journey. To forgive another is to open up a new pathway in your spirit."

Seeking and granting forgiveness is a major focus for Jews at this time year. Even though it is better to resolve these situations as soon as possible after they take place – there is a prayer for forgiveness in the daily *Amidah* – sometimes it is a little easier when everyone else is engaged in the same activity.

Therefore, lighten up by emptying that heavy basket off your shoulders and releasing yourself from prison by asking for forgiveness from those you have hurt and granting forgiveness to those who have hurt you. Then we can all enter into 5770 with a clean slate.

*L'shana Tova* to each of you and your families!

Jennie Cohen 9-9-09 ✨

## Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

Sept. 4, 2009, Ki Tavo  
(Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8), 15 Elul 5769

There is a curious passage at the beginning of this week's Torah portion. It is a passage we've heard many times, but most likely on Pesach. It reads, "My father was a wandering Aramean." What and who this passage is referring to is not really known. Our ancestors weren't necessarily Arameans, but the best guess is that it somehow refers to Abraham, but more likely Jacob as the passage talks about going down to Egypt and sojourning there.

The passage continues with a reminder of our difficult lives in Egypt that ended when God brought us out of slavery and to the promised land. The text reads, "He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, God, have given me."

What a beautiful picture! Our ancestors saying thank you to God for the blessing of having reached the end of this part of their journey by offering something special: the first fruits. Our lives are journeys, too. We can't always define beginnings and endings, but they are there. It could be the bar or bat mitzvah of a child marking the end of raising a child. It could be the end of one job and the beginning of another. It could be marriage or the death of a loved one. These moments mark all of our lives. What is wonderful about Judaism is that we have or can find ways to mark all of them with ceremony, blessings, or holy moments.

For me though, it is Shabbat that allows me to mark time, find blessing, and be thankful for all the good things that infuse my life week by week. I love being at temple with friends and members of the community on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. It is a time to greet

people with Shabbat Shalom, inquire about family, communicate good wishes, and worship together. Our lives are so busy each and every day that we don't always stop to think about the blessings that are surrounding us or infusing our lives. I believe that being part of a community is critical to the well-being in our lives. Sitting with and worshipping with friends can decrease our level of stress, focus our positive energies, and enable us to see the beauty and blessings that are all around us.

Shabbat doesn't have to end with worship. The relaxation of a Friday evening Shabbat dinner with family and/or friends can extend the evening a bit longer. The warmth of seeing Shabbat candles lit at a table, saying *l'chayim* over a glass of wine, or eating delicious *challah* after saying *motzi* link us to the generations that came before us and to all those of our Jewish community around us.

Shabbat doesn't end with Friday night, but continues through Saturday. Outside of those who adhere strictly to the Biblical and rabbinic dictums of Shabbat, this day can take any variety of direction. I believe what is most important is to make this day different from the other days of the week.

Find something that can be spiritually satisfying or relaxing. Make time for friends and family. Take a walk and enjoy the sounds of nature. Read the week's Torah portion and ponder its meaning to our lives today. Be thankful for the blessings we have and take Shabbat to think about them. As our ancestors did by bringing the first fruit as thanks to God for reaching the promised land, so too should we give thanks to God for bringing us to the promised land of Shabbat each week. It is a blessing for all of us to share.

When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light one for the blessings we have in our lives. Light the other candle for the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat and to give thanks for everything around us.

Rabbi Adland is senior rabbi of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation. ✨

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# Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

Rosh Hashanah is coming. So first, we bless you and yours, and all Israel to be inscribed for a good and sweet year, a year of happiness and peace, health and prosperity, beginning with our complete and final redemption. I realize that this is a big order. However, this is my job. I'm a Cohen, a member of the priestly tribe, and part of our job is to bless people.

In my last editorial I wrote that peace, health, and prosperity are ultimately in the hands of Hashem. Of course we also have to work on these things ourselves. We first need to find a Cohen and ask him for a blessing. Then we need to do a lot of mitzvahs to earn the blessing. Then, if we want health, we should eat and exercise properly. If we want prosperity, we should make efforts to find a good way to make money. Then we have to put our trust in Hashem, our Merciful Father, and be happy with all that He gives us.

The same applies to peace.

Here are parts of one of the responses that I received:

*I don't know if I would leave it up to Hashem to bring peace in the world. There are many people on the planet who think only within their little world. They don't get to know their neighbors, so they don't understand the wants and needs of others around them. I am not only referring to Israelites or Palestinians. I am referring to all countries, all states, all neighborhoods, and yes, even all families worldwide. I don't put the blame on us (since I am also one of the people who may not fully understand all of my neighbors, relatives, people from other countries – and on and on, even though I communicate with people in my family and community on a daily basis).*

*If we want to get things done in the world we have to start talking to others in our neighborhood and find out what they want, what their needs and desires are, not just ours. That is a job for all of us, all governments and all people. Until we recognize that "we (our country, our friends, our community, our family) are just another life form that dwells on this planet and must get along with its neighbors, we will never be able to solve any problems to mutual satisfaction of all parties. I'm sorry, but I think the burden is on us, not Hashem.*

*Love to all*

I agree that the burden is on us. We have to do what we can to bring peace in the world. But before we can bring peace in the world, we have to first bring peace to ourselves. If we haven't found inner peace for ourselves, if we don't have peace of mind, how can we help others to find peace? If we don't fully understand ourselves, how can we hope to understand our spouse, siblings or neighbors? Until we understand the workings of our inner world, we have little chance of really understanding someone else's world.

How do we find inner peace? Anyone can do it, with the help of Hashem. Hashem gave us the Torah. Part of the Torah is Chassidus, which teaches us the meaning of life and the ways that our souls work. What is the meaning of life? Hashem put us into this world to make it better, to make it holy. We do this by learning Torah and fulfilling the mitzvahs. We first make ourselves better and holier. Then we will have strength to go out and make the world better.

In order to make ourselves better and holier, we have to understand how our inner world works. Basically our soul powers are divided into seven categories. Pleasure, will, intellect, emotions, thought, speech and action. Our speech and actions are controlled by our thoughts. Our thoughts are controlled by our emotions.

We have good emotions, for example love, mercy, modesty and kindness. We have bad emotions, for example hate, anger, selfishness and pride. Our emotions can be controlled by our intellect. If we understand that a certain emotion is good, we can work on strengthening it. If we decide that a certain emotion is bad, we can work on avoiding it.

Our intellect can be controlled by our will. If we want to live a good life, do good things and find inner peace, our mind will search for ways to accomplish this. And our will can be controlled by our pleasure. If we just imagine what a pleasure it is to have peace of mind, we will want it.

To have peace of mind, we first must know what life is all about. Then we need to understand what is happening in our inner world, and how we can make ourselves better and holier. This isn't done overnight. We must work on this all of our life. But just knowing that we are on the right path and making progress gives us peace. Once we have found inner peace, it is easier to live in peace with our spouse, parents, siblings, kids, neighbors, and so forth. Once we understand what makes us tick, it is easier to understand what makes them tick.

Once we have inner peace and have learned to live in peace with our family and community, then we can work on bringing peace to the world. We can share what we have learned with others and help them also to find peace.

Go to your local Chabad House and start learning Chassidus. If you don't have one, you can learn Chassidus at one of the Chabad websites. Start doing more mitzvahs. The immediate reward will be peace of mind, a taste of the peace that all of the world will soon experience. Moshiach is coming. Every mitzvah that we do will bring our redemption that much sooner.

*Rabbi Cohen lives in K'far Chabad, Israel. He can be reached by email at [bzcohen1@neto.bezeqint.net](mailto:bzcohen1@neto.bezeqint.net). He and his wife Malka now have 10 children and 26 grandchildren. ✨*



## Return ourselves

BY RABBI AUDREY S. POLLACK

Each year, we approach the High Holy Days with a flurry of activity and organization. This time of year is for many of us the start of school, of scheduled activities, the time when our obligations intensify after the relative peace of the summer months. Yet, as we enter the month of Elul, the month leading up to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we are commanded as Jews to take the time to think – be introspective and self-reflective – to prepare ourselves for the *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe.

This is not an easy task. Every year, at this time I am reminded of the story about a great sage, Rabbi Moshe of Novordno. Walking down the street, Rabbi Moshe passed a colleague who was in a great hurry. "Why are you rushing so?" he asked his friend. "I must hurry," replied the other, "for the High Holidays are fast approaching, and I must get the *machzor* (prayer book) in order. Moshe responded, "The *machzor* is the same as last year, and the same as it has always been. You know it well. Better put your transgressions in order, and prepare your heart for repentance."

(see Pollack, page NAT 16)

## On Rosh Hashanah, the hero is the individual

Tishri, the month in which Rosh Hashanah occurs, is the beginning of our religious year. Unlike all other major Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashanah is not connected with any story or hero in Jewish history, neither is it connected with festivities of the soil.

The real hero of this Holy Day is each individual Jew. The story is the story of each life.

This is the time for reflection and for personal evaluation. The Holy Day awakens each one of us to the mistakes we have made in the past and reminds us that it takes real effort to change for the better. Instead of trying to find excuses for bad habits, it urges that we replace them with good ones.

One name for this holiday is *Yom Ha-Din*, Day of Trial or Judgment. This is the main aspect of the Holy Day, whereon the Almighty sits as Judge and decrees the destiny of each person for the year just begun. The traditional Jew prays for mercy and forgiveness, convinced that God will answer the Congregation of Israel and inscribe him in the Book of Life, Health, and Happiness.

To others the Judge is that "Still Small Voice" within each of us that we often try not to hear. On this day we are moved to listen and to try to learn the right path upon which to proceed through life. ✨

## Jewish Community Heroes

Jewish Community Heroes, a program of the United Jewish Communities, Jewish Federations of North America, has announced that Jennie Cohen, editor of the *Indiana Jewish Post & Opinion* and the *National Jewish Post & Opinion* has been nominated as a "Jewish Community Hero."

The program, which has been designed to honor the efforts of outstanding Jews in America, will culminate in the naming of the 2009 Jewish American Hero at its General Assembly to be held in Washington, D.C., in November. Nominees are listed at [JewishCommunityHeroes.com](http://JewishCommunityHeroes.com), and 10 semi-finalists will be selected by public vote, five will then be selected by a special committee and presented at the General Assembly in Washington, D.C., and finally one will carry off this prestigious award.

Readers of all the editions of the *Jewish Post & Opinion* are asked to go to the site and help us bring the award to Jennie Cohen, who serves as editor, in the most general and expanded sense of that word, and who represents a generation of dedication begun by her father, Gabriel Cohen, and carried on by his devoted daughter, Jennie.

But, what you might ask is heroic about being a Jewish newspaper editor? The list is long, and in these days, continuity and survival of any Jewish newspaper is threatened by the severe economic times we are experiencing. Great and once powerful newspapers have closed. Many others are on life support. Even the giant *New York Times* and its *Boston Globe* required the infusion of outside investment to insure its continuation. The marketing opportunities for small Jewish publications are even more constricted.

The Cohens recognized both a local and national need for a publication that would serve the broadest segments of the Jewish population, and what they have created and presented is the broadest range of Jewish views possible, perhaps the broadest range being published today in the Jewish world. Their concern has been to bring a paper to the entire blend of Jewish thought and practice, and when you read the bimonthly editions, you are getting just that.

At a time in Jewish history in the United States, when there is no consensus about any Jewish issue, Jennie Cohen is dedicated to the concept of "One Jewish People," and that action is heroic. The norm today is single-view publications, where columns and reporting reflect a monochromatic view of Jewish life. Nothing could be further from the actual reality.

If Jennie's readers get motivated, one of "The Best Kept Secret" in the American Jewish Press, the *Indiana and National Jewish Post & Opinion*, won't be secret anymore. Indianapolis, Indiana, and loyal readers of the National edition ought to spread the word. Jennie Cohen

(see Heroes, page NAT 7)



## Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

### This Rosh Hashanah, Be Safe and Go to Shul!

I know I'm not the only one who feels anxious these days and a recent report about the most likely causes of accidents hasn't helped me one bit. I read that I should: Avoid riding in cars because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents, stop walking on streets and sidewalks because 14% of all calamities occur to pedestrians, and never, ever go to a hospital, even to visit a sick friend, because 32% of all deaths occur in hospitals. Great. From the looks of it, I will be spending my days at home behind the computer. But wait, 17% of all mishaps occur at home so maybe that's not such a good idea, either!

There are ways to fight my anxiety and I'm determined to muddle through. The Internet offers an abundance of suggestions ranging from meditation and yoga to chamomile tea and aromatherapy massage. And of course I can always join the more than 27 million Americans who turn to prescription drugs for help.

But good news comes from surprising research that states that only 0.01% of all deaths occur in a synagogue, and these are usually related to previous physical disorders. And the number of deaths related to Jewish text study is so small that they are not even recorded! My conclusion? The safest place for me to be at any given time is in shul, studying Torah! Won't the rabbis be pleased to find out that they are doing more than their fair share in alleviating the medical crisis facing our country?

On a serious note, the idea that being in community with other Jews will keep us "safe" is not a new concept. Rabbi Hillel taught in Ethics of the Fathers: "Do not separate yourself from the community." But Hillel's maxim requires us to ask ourselves two questions: What is the Jewish community and what am I doing to be a part of it?

The Jewish tradition gives us wonderful images of what community can and should be. Imagine this scene, depicted in Exodus: You are camped at the bottom of a mountain called Sinai, in the middle of the desert through which you have been hiking for the past three months after narrowly escaping the Egyptian army. You are with your family and friends, your teachers and fellow slaves. You have been preparing yourself for three days – washing your clothes, cleaning your tent, becoming as pure as you can. Then, on the third day, you look up. A heavy cloud covers the mountain and lightning and thunder rock the sky. Shofars are blowing all around you as fire and smoke pour

down from the mountaintop. Suddenly, without notice, the world becomes still. Not a bird chirps, not a baby cries. You stand in total silence as a witness to the most important event in Jewish history. And in that moment you become a part of the community that receives the Torah. And along with everyone there, you agree to enter into the Covenant with God and become a member of the People of Israel.

Our tradition teaches us that everyone was present on that day – 600,000 people – from the leaders and the elders to the wood choppers and the water carriers, from the oldest sages to the newborns. The Torah says that we were encamped at Mt. Sinai but the verb "encamped" is in the singular form, not the plural. Why would the Torah use a singular verb to describe the actions of more than half a million people? Did the scribes make a grammatical error?

The sages asked this same question and this is what we are taught: That when the

Jewish people stood together for the very first time to enter into the Covenant with God, it was a transformational moment in history. Individuals who had known each other their entire lives saw each other as

...good news comes from surprising research that states that only 0.01 % of all deaths occur in a synagogue...

if for the first time. In that moment, they realized that they belonged to each other and that they belonged together. They were connected in a way they had never been before. And even though each person saw, heard and understood the word of God uniquely, when they stood

together at Sinai as a group, they understood and felt the power of what it means to be a community. A singular, awe-inspired Jewish community.

What does this text teach us today? That our connection to other Jews, those with whom we are close and those we do not know at all, dates back thousands of years. And that the relationship we have with each other is based on something much deeper than mere acquaintance, circumstance or convenience. It is a sacred relationship, grounded in what happened between God and the Jewish people at Sinai. In English we call this relationship a covenant; in Hebrew, a Brit.

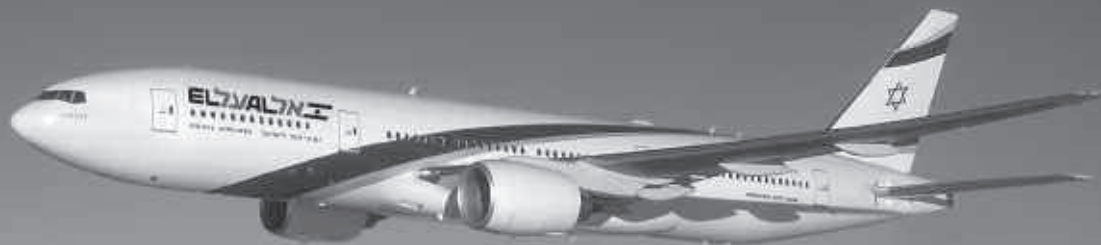
This covenant means that the Jewish community to which you belong is the same one for which you are responsible. Likewise, because you belong to the Jewish community, it is responsible to you. A heavy burden to be sure, which is why the rabbis of the Talmud said:

(see Lederman, page NAT 16)

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## Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

### A glimpse into the future

Recently I watched a movie in which a man took 4,000 pictures (photos) of the same street scene over a period of 4,000 days. At first I thought about how strange this is. But after reviewing in my mind that particular scene, I began to realize that even though the picture was of the same street scene, the characters changed because different people walked in front of the camera.

What does this have to do with Rosh Hashanah? A lot! Year after year we offer the same prayers, request the same kindness from a caring and loving God, hope that our lives will be less complicated – we pray for peace and justice – and it seems that the picture remains the same – different characters appear in each snapshot of life, but basically we are the same as our ancestors before us and if we could fast forward we probably would see the same ahead.

Each year we read either the *Akedah* – the binding of Isaac, or Genesis – the beginning of everything. They are really connected – one deals with obedience and sacrifice, and the other with how we got to the point of understanding the need for duty and honor and destiny.

Abraham is asked to submit to the will of God and present his son Isaac as the ultimate offering of fealty. Can anyone here imagine answering such a call? If we know anything about who we are as a people, we surely accept the fact that we bend over backward to offer our children the best that we can and attempt to shield them from harm and danger. We invented the “yiddisher momma.” We are the first to show pictures of our children and grandchildren ad nauseam. Can anyone really believe that we would take our child and kill him or her in the name of God?

Well, neither could Abraham, and for that matter, neither could Sarah – she dies soon after this encounter – not clear in her mind as to what was happening or why or how God, who so lovingly granted her wish for a child, would want to retake that which was given. So much has been written about this chapter, and the opinions vary. But the one clear message, to me, is that while God may not really require such obedience, it is evident that our mind can suggest ways for us to exonerate ourselves from our misgivings and in so doing cast the burden on our progeny. We do it all the time – we scape-goat instead of taking responsibility – we blame others for our shortcomings.

And then there is the belief that we learn from this episode that we have a responsibility to a higher calling. And as

we learn from the Rambam, we must understand that our conscience should be the deciding factor in our dealings with one another. We all have the potential to do good, which rates higher than the actual deed.

The second reading suggested is *Bereshit* (as interpreted in the *Etz Haim*) – Genesis – the creation of existence as we know it. It emphasizes God's role in history. It sets forth our views and values on civilization and how we deem it part and parcel of the religion of Israel. It describes God as wholly sufficient, independent of nature – the unchallenged sovereign of the world who is involved in human affairs – He is the God of history and He is the God of creation – the creation of the human spirit, and the two – God and the spirit of humanity are woven together to complete the event of creation.

### On the one hand, we are asked to make sacrifices and on the other we are asked to take responsibility...

The lesson we learn from the “Beginning” is that we are born with free will, moral responsibility and accountability. There is no free ride. If we wanted a free ride, God would have left us in the Garden. If, however, we want to be a partner with God in perfecting that which He put before us, then we need to accept the duty that is incumbent upon us.

On the one hand, we are asked to make sacrifices and on the other we are asked to take responsibility – they are in fact connected – sometimes being responsible requires sacrifice.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur deal with acknowledgement and willingness – admitting that we are who we are and therefore must answer for our actions and be eager to submit to the task of saying we are sorry.

And, God doesn't really want us to complete the deed – just make the attempt. Maybe then we won't be so hard on ourselves and our supplications and contrition will have meaning for us.

Yes, it is the same picture year after year, but while the scenery doesn't change, the people in the foreground do – each new generation seeking to find the answer – each generation seeking the understanding of God.

A rabbi, wishing to instruct a small boy on God's ability to be everywhere, said to the boy:

“Show me every place that God is, and I will give you a penny.”

“Rabbi,” answered the boy, with the insight of youth, “show me any place that God isn't, and I will give you two pennies.”

Is there a better answer?

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



## Jews by Choice

BY MARY HOFMANN

### The upside of being... disenfranchised

This Rosh Hashanah, how about considering adding a whole different element to your list of New Year goals? How about, at least metaphorically, throwing your arms around somebody who's been Jewishly disenfranchised, or at least marginalized, and see how good it feels?

For those of you who've read my columns over the years, I hope you've picked up on the fact that I'm basically a pretty upbeat person, even though with age I've become less of an idealist and more a person with little faith in mankind in general.

As someone who became Jewish nearly 40 years ago (now there's a symbolic number!) and who lives in a small, relatively isolated city in California, I've found my upbeat nature supported most by Judaism. Sound ironic? It's not. I believe in Judaism. The Judaism of learning, of loving, of hope for the future and our responsibility to make that future happen.

### People like me, of course, who adopted Judaism and found that not all Jews adopted me.

I read *The Forward* and the *Jewish Post*, much of which contain news and columns that deal largely with *Yiddishkeit*, with history and the Holocaust, with Israel, with issues of halachah and survival – all important and necessary. But many of us are Jewish sometimes despite issues of great Jewish angst, and perhaps we can bring something good to modern Judaism. Something essentially positive, upbeat and optimistic. Of course we accept the burdens along with the inspiration and joy, but our emphasis is on the joy. On the elegance. On, dare I say it, the fun!

Who do I include in the ranks of the disenfranchised (a term I'm using very loosely)? People like me, of course, who adopted Judaism and found that not all Jews adopted me. I remember the kindly and revered old rebbitzin from Fresno who said I was doing wonderful things and it was just too bad I could never really be Jewish. Everyone in the room probably heard the whoosh as the air in my happy balloon deflated.

People like my fabulously Jewish 23-year-old granddaughter, who went to Israel and loved it (and was loved and accepted by the Israelis who met her), and who revels in being Jewish – as well

as being half Mexican and gay.

People like the many other gays and lesbians and people “of color” (what an odd term) I've become close to in the Reform Movement, both Jewish professionals and lay people. God loves them and so do I.

And the children. Always the children. Certainly they aren't disenfranchised, but they come to me Jewishly unformed and eagerly joyful. Some of you know that I'm in my second avocational stint teaching religious school. We call it Shabbat School, since we hold it every Saturday, and our tiny congregation of 25 or so families has managed to produce a crop of nine wonderful kidlets who I get to play with, ranging in age from two to eleven. They come with no baggage, with no sad Jewish memories, and are eager to celebrate being Jewish. They're excelling at Hebrew, they love Israel, love learning more and more each year about Torah, Avodah, and G'milut Chasadim. They know who they are and they're happy about it. They can learn about the tragedy as they're ready to absorb it. I want them to start by emphasizing the joy.

And so, with this New Year, newly retired from teaching public school, I find myself at the grand old age of 63 and looking ahead with gusto and enthusiasm, renewed, refreshed, and alive, eager to concentrate on the upside of being... being Jewish (by choice), loving being a positive teacher and an enthusiastic Jewish grandmother, and getting back to writing for the *JPO*...writing about the upside of being!

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



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## Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

### Compartmentalized morality

Senator Edward Kennedy's death opens a platform for an important discussion in the world, in general, and in the Jewish World in particular. Senator John McCain, in his tribute to the senator, speculated that in history, the senator's achievements may outdistance those of his two brothers, President John F. Kennedy and Senator, Attorney General and presidential candidate, Robert Kennedy.

It well may be, but what place did power and money play in the life of the three brothers and their father, all four of whom who led lives of gross, public immorality. Had they been less prominent, less powerful or less moneyed, their careers might have ended. There is no reason to argue with what they were able to achieve, but at what price to the moral fabric of this generation and to their families and friends. What is the measurement for the human casualties they left behind in their rise to and use of power.

This occasion calls into question, I believe, "how" and "if" anyone can live morally and ethically in a corrupted society. Everywhere we turn, we are faced with moral and ethical bankruptcy. Michael Vick is reinstated in the National Football League. He is sorry. Mostly, I believe, because he was caught, sent to jail, and lost income. His sport's "Halls of Fame" may have to close temporarily to determine how to react to what they have found out about some of the people they have already installed and those who will come up for election. If they decide that there is no moral clause, they have no problem, but at the same time, they have to redefine what the title denotes. Was it only yards, passes, catches and tackles?

Presidents, U.S. senators and representatives, governors and mayors have now joined a parade of actors and actresses, singers and dancers, painters and sculptures who believe and act as if there is no moral and ethical code. When they are caught, or their actions are reported, there is no long-term shame, it is an evanescent act, now it is here and now it isn't.

The question we face is how to live morally and ethically in a corrupted society as sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, teachers and leaders. Where are the boundaries that we are willing to erect and respect, given the fact that there is no longer an apparent code of conduct? Adultery is no longer an act, but argued in a context of unhappiness. The guilty parties simply acted out of their pain. Lying, cheating and stealing are to be seen as limited behaviors, acts that are limited to the situation and not present on the golf

course. Men and women are honored for their prominence and money, and their private lives or sometimes even their public lives, are set aside, often out of convenience.

We once felt bound by a legacy and tradition, but for the majority of Jews today, the legacy and tradition are not operative. And so what is the basis that we raise our children, honor our marriages, honor life itself. Has our life come to the same place as our finances? Is there a moral-bankruptcy court? If we are questioned, if not for our faith and our heritage, how do we answer with integrity? Is there anything in your life that is fixed, right and wrong?

Everyone would agree that Bernard Madoff went too far. Everyone is happy that he is in jail, and hopefully will die there, but in our day and age, even that is not certain. Michael Vick is playing football, resurrected because of the Philadelphia Eagle's bottom line. President Clinton really did not suffer from his private-public transgressions. In fact his victims suffered more.

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**...every family needs an "operative" reality, and that it needs to be expressed...**

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If we reject the eternal, the codes that do not change, what do we replace them with? What are a bride and groom really saying to each other under the chuppah? What is a handshake worth?

In his autobiography, the famous biker Lance Armstrong let it "all hang out." He describes himself as a moral "low-life." Barbara Walters ran from one interview to another to announce to the world her immoral escapades, all simply to sell a book; and Hillary Clinton simply kept moving forward in the aftermath of her husbands indiscretions, a practical life decision to do what was best for her career.

I have been privileged to meet people who have elevated their lives and their families as the universe sank into a deeper moral morass, but in every case, whether they were Jewish or not, whether they were rich or poor, powerful or just one of the folks, they lived by a standard.

George Will recently wrote that when history is written, it may be that Eunice Shriver will be seen as the outstanding child of Joseph and Rose Kennedy, outdistancing her more famous brothers. Writing still before Senator Kennedy's funeral, he did not elaborate on why, but it should be clear to anyone who read and knew about the Shriver family, that it was built on faith that was actualized on a daily basis. They walked the walk of their "life philosophy."

A great part of our personal "life philosophy" remains unspoken and unwritten, and I think that is one of the reasons that so many young Jews travel (see Karsh, page NAT 15)



## An Observant Eye

BY RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

### The matrix

Your child damages a neighbor's property, you are responsible.

But that can mean two distinct things. Either, simply, that as the child's parent you are where the buck stops.

Or it may mean something deeper. If the boy didn't just accidentally hit a ball through the Jones' picture window but rather aimed a rock at it – and had been influenced in his disregard for the property of others by some remarks you made – you are responsible in much more than the buck-stopping sense.

The Jewish concept of "arvut," – the "interdependence" of all Jews – is sometimes understood as akin to the first, simple sense of responsibility. Jews are to regard other Jews as family, and therefore to feel responsible for one another.

But, the celebrated Jewish thinker Rabbi E.E. Dessler teaches, Jews are responsible for one another in the word's deeper sense, too. When a Jew does something good, it reflects the entire Jewish people's goodness. And the converse is no less true. Thus, when Achan, one man, misappropriated spoils after the first battle of Joshua's conquest of Canaan, the siege of Jericho, it is described as the sin of the entire people (Joshua, 7:1). Explains Rabbi Dessler: Had the people as a whole been sufficiently sensitive to the Divine commandment to shun the city's spoils, Achan would never have been able to commit his sin.

The much-publicized arrests last month of several Jews, amid a larger group, on a variety of financial charges caused all sensitive Jews acute embarrassment. But the vivid image of Jews – religious ones, no less – being carted off by federal agents needs to do something more than embarrass us. It needs to spur us.

Not because we have any right to assume the worst about the accused; we don't. And if in fact there were violations of the law, we don't know the circumstances, the motivations of the accused or even if they were aware of the pertinent laws (which might not make a difference to a trial judge but should to the rest of us). Trial by Tabloid is not Jewish jurisprudence.

But the images themselves must make us think. In particular about other, confirmed, cases of Jews – including religiously observant ones – who have in fact engaged in "white collar" crime. Not to mention several identifiably Jewish, if not particularly religious, Jews who have even achieved broad notoriety for their societal sins.

And so, the deeper concept of arvut leaves us to ponder the possibility that some less blatant and less outrageous – but still sinful – actions of other Jews,

ourselves perhaps included, may have, little by little, provided a matrix on which greater sins subsequently came to grow.

Every child who received a Jewish education knows that even a small coin placed in a pushke, or charity box, is the fulfillment of a mitzvah, the commandment to give charity. It should be equally apparent, especially to all us grown-up children, that the misappropriation of even a similarly small amount of money is a sin.

And so Jews, whoever and wherever they are, who cut corners for financial gain – who underreport their income or avoid taxes illegally or are less than fully honest in their business dealings – contribute thereby to the thievery-matrix. And they bear responsibility, in however small the ways, for larger crimes committed by their fellows.

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**And so Jews, whoever and wherever they are, who cut corners for financial gain... contribute thereby to the thievery-matrix.**

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What is more, even those of us who are innocent of any financial indiscretions might also be unwitting contributors to the critical criminal mass. Because things other than money can also be "stolen."

The Torah speaks, for example, about two forms of oppressive practices (ona'ah): financial (as in overcharging) and personal (as in causing pain to others with words). The Talmud also calls the act of misleading another person "stealing knowledge" (g'neivat da'at); and considers it "robbery" to not return another's greeting. Halachic decisors, moreover, note the forbiddance to "steal sleep" – to wake someone unnecessarily or to keep him up when he wants to retire.

So even those of us whose financial ledgers are in order would do well to introspect. Are we sufficiently careful not to use words in hurtful ways, entirely meticulous in advice we offer, fully responsive to the good will of others, truly cautious about not disturbing their peace? If not, then we are – in a subtle but real way – part of the perp-walk ourselves.

The Jewish month of Elul is here. Leading as it does to next month's High Holy Days, it is a time when the Jewishly conscious take spiritual stock of their lives. On Yom Kippur, Jews the world over will repeatedly recite two confessional prayers, "Ashamnu" and "Al Chet Shechatanu." Both, oddly, are in the first person plural. It is a collective "we" who have sinned. As the commentaries explain, that is because, among Jews, even sins of which the individual supplicant may be personally innocent, implicate us all.

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 Rabbi Shafran is director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America. ✪



## Seen on the Israel Scene

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

### Here one year!

As I look at the calendar, I am totally amazed that on Aug. 31, we celebrate one year living in Israel. What changes have occurred in our lives? We went from an eight-room, two-bathroom, 1800-square-foot house to a five-room, one-bath, 1184-square-foot apartment (616 square feet less!).

We collected garbage and trash in large cans, which we put out for pick up twice a week. Here, our daily trek is carrying down the trash and garbage to a dumpster down the street.

We had a two-car garage and two cars to fit it. Here we purchase senior citizen bus passes for \$30 each and ride unlimited for a month. We haven't yet bought a car but think about it a lot. Barry got his license on the first try. I succumbed to the macho situation many females have found and was failed on my first test. We also know which buses go where, where the stops are and how often they run.

We owned a fax machine, two computers, two printers and five phones. Here we go to the lottery vendor to send our faxes, we still have two computers and two printers and two phones, but we have a phone plan exclusively to make and receive calls to and from the U.S.

We shopped once or twice a week at grocery stores or discount grocers, plus at the grocery that had the large selection of kosher products and a kosher meat and deli department.

Here we take the bus with our wheeled cart two to three times a week to the outdoor market where we buy fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, deli items, bread, dairy products and groceries. Once a week we take the cart to the supermarket to buy bottled drinks and eggs.

We used to visit friends, go out to dinner with friends in restaurants, have friends in to dine and go to activities at our synagogue primarily on the weekend. Here we do all of that but go to press conferences, performances and all kinds of events courtesy of invitations to my government press card several times during the regular week and on the weekend.

We always knew how much was in our checking account and how much we owed on our credit card.

Here we are mostly uncertain because we're not sure what service charges are being levied. We can check our bank account in English as often as we like online. We haven't figured out how to check our credit card but are told it's in Hebrew.

We never took any kind of carry-alls in the car when we went out. Here we never leave without some kind of a *shlep* bag in case we find something we need to buy.

We're not spoiled, but you will find in our refrigerator locally bought French's mustard, Heinz catsup, Hellman's mayonnaise, Sprite and diet and regular Coke and, most recently, Kraft whipped cream cheese.

We never miss Thursday or Friday at the *shuk* (market) to buy flowers and challah. One bakery makes the standard twisted challah and a second version I would swear looks like a Magen David!

We love the change of atmosphere Friday afternoon when the buses stop running and there is an aura of quiet descending before Shabbat. We enjoy the services at the synagogue we joined where members are Israelis and English-speakers and I've been offered aliyot (which I don't accept) as well as ark openings and *g'lila* (wrapping the Torah), both of which I do accept.

### We love the change of atmosphere Friday afternoon when the buses stop running and there is an aura of quiet descending before Shabbat.

It's a little different on Saturday night waiting for an hour after Shabbat for the buses to start running, but we're getting used to going out late and enjoying it.

My Hebrew gets better and life is good. It was indeed the right decision to return (for me, a returning Israeli) at this time. Come and visit us soon. We'd love to show you around.

#### "His" Views By Barry A. Kaplan

It's been a year since I came on aliyah and what a year – the people, the history, the events, the sites, the experience. When I arrived in Jerusalem, I knew I was home. It was very hard to explain to people that I felt it was time for me to go home. Now that I'm here, I know I made the right decision.

I walk to the Kotel (Western Wall), and I know that this is the correct place to be.

You can see how Israel is now really a melting pot of people. You ride the buses (which Sybil and I do all the time), and you can hear Russian, Spanish, French, German, Ethiopian and languages I can't make out; and you see people from everywhere in the world; religious to nonreligious, from smartly dressed to not so well dressed and from fully covered to barely covered.

You see those that fully support Israel and those who continuously fight the government. You see people who try to bully their way though the system and those who work within the system.

And what a system it is. I can only praise the medical programs here that are

offered as one of the top three in the world along with France and Germany. I see here a system that tries to diagnose the problem before jumping to surgery, I find people that are genuinely concerned with your well being.

I go to a synagogue where you find a great many members from English-speaking countries as well as Israelis. We all come together for one thing, and that is to pray.

We have been adopted by several couples at our synagogue, and we have a circle of friends from those we knew from before. They include a past president of the Hebrew University, a member of the Foreign Ministry, a past director of Young Judea year course education, to tour guides, retired librarians, and more rabbis that you can shake a stick at as well as retired people.

As far as the everyday people of Israel go, most of them will help a stranger but are still rude when in line or getting on and off a bus. But you have to love them, surrounded by millions who want to slit their throats, they still go on living each day to its fullest.

So what can I say about being in Israel? I can't picture myself anywhere else. With all our problems here in Israel, we have to remember that the State of Israel is only 61 years old. We are going through growing pains just like America did 200 plus years ago. It survived and so will we.

I hope to be able to welcome all my friends here and encourage them to change the last sentence of the Passover Seder to read, *L'shana hazeh b'yerushalayim* (This year in Jerusalem)!

*Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, book reviewer, food columnist and feature writer who moved from Overland Park, Kan., to Jerusalem. ★*



### HEROES

(continued from page NAT 3)

lives the paper; it is a 24/7/365 life's effort to honor the work of her late father, and to continue the tradition of service to the Jewish community, Indiana and the nation.

For whatever reason, you are invited by the sponsors to vote more than once. It seems that the system of multiple voting is popular. That system has become popular on all the TV reality shows, on American Idol, and in major league baseball. We need to become an army of support for our hero, Jennie Cohen.

Remember, JEWISHCOMMUNITYHEROES.COM, then scroll down to Jennie's picture, vote, and mark your calendar to do it often. It is a way to say thank you to a fine family who has given to us.

*Howard W. Karsh, Special to the Indiana Jewish Post & Opinion/National Jewish Post & Opinion. ★*



## The Roads from Babel

BY SETH BEN-MORDECAI

### Waw or Vav

When a native speaker of Hindi, French, Russian or German speaks English, it is usually with a foreign accent. A Frenchman can pronounce "w," because that sound exists in French, but an Indian, Russian and German will pronounce it as "v" – the closest approximation in their languages. Likewise, Germans and Indians pronounce "h" properly, but to Frenchmen, "h" is a silent letter, and Russians pronounce it as "kh."

By 200 CE, Hebrew had become a foreign language for Jews, who now spoke the languages of the non-Jews among whom they lived – Greek, Latin, Persian, and Aramaic. Later, Arabic, German, Polish, English and other languages were added to the mix. Not surprisingly, the synagogue Hebrew of different Jewish communities reflected the sounds of the local tongues. Because Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic have similar sound structures, the synagogue Hebrew of Mideastern Jews remained close to the ancient pronunciation of Hebrew. Because the sound structures of European languages differ greatly from that of ancient Hebrew, the sound of European Hebrew came to differ greatly from ancient Hebrew.

The most obvious pronunciation difference between European (and American) Hebrew and the ancient language involves the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Ancient Hebrew speakers called that letter "waw" and pronounced it "w." Until recent decades, Jews from the Middle East typically retained the ancient pronunciation because the "w" sound exists in Arabic, the local language. However, European Jews came to pronounce "waw" as "vav." In the 1950s, when nearly a million Jewish refugees from Arab lands arrived in Israel, it was a linguistic toss-up as to whether "waw" or "vav" would prevail in Modern Hebrew. Although "vav" did prevail, reading ancient texts with the ancient pronunciation makes the rhyme and alliteration more apparent.

*An attorney and Semitic linguist with degrees from Brandeis, Stanford and Univ. of Calif., Seth Watkins (pen name, Ben-Mordecai) merges linguistic analysis with legal sleuthing to uncover lost meanings of ancient texts. His Exodus Haggadah uniquely includes the full story of the Exodus in an accessible format. When not lawyering or writing, he tends his 20-year-old ocicat. Email: Seth@VayomerPublishing.com. ★*





## Judaism on Healing

BY RABBI NANCY FLAM

### The Angels Proclaim It, But Can We? "The Whole Earth Is Full of God's Presence"

We enter the season of the *Yamim Noraim* with complex emotions: excitement for the possibilities of a new year ahead; regret over our past failings; some mixture of doubt and hope (if we are honest with ourselves) about our ability to change; joy in celebrating the holidays with family, friends, and community; and fear about what decree lies in wait for us regarding the coming year: Will we rest or will we wander, will we live or will we die? We engage with the words of the *machzor* and strive to relate to the awesome, complex, and inscrutable God it depicts. And at some point in these long days of liturgy and prayer, perhaps often, we wonder how to think best about God.

My own *Yamim Noraim* theology emerged most clearly for me from the dialogues I have had with ill Jews, but perhaps most of all in relation to one woman whom I will call Rebekah.

#### The Search for Meaning

When Rebekah was diagnosed with breast cancer, she felt ambivalent. On the one hand, she had all the "expected" responses: fear, anger, sadness. On the other hand, she began to feel relief, as if an enormous burden was being lifted from her. Having entered "crisis mode," Rebekah was no longer able to "do" her regular life: working as a high-powered psychiatrist, taking charge of household management, her family's financial planning, and so on. All of those concerns receded as she began to manage the one great task before her: how to seek treatment and recover health.

The shock of serious diagnosis propelled Rebekah to examine her life, determine what was of real value, and restructure the way she was spending her time and energy. Without question, she would have preferred to have been spared life-threatening illness and grown to reorder her life in a gentler fashion. Yet, somehow, she was experiencing her illness as a blessing at the same time as she believed it to be a curse.

Rebekah sought a theological framework with which to understand her illness. She refused to believe that God actually sent her this disease with the intent of helping her reorder her life; she didn't believe that God worked that way. Her illness seemed to her a random event in the universe: unearned, without moral cause. And yet, she was able to find some good; in fact, she was creating some good out of the painful circumstances.

#### Meaning Beyond Morality

It was important to Rebekah to resist the urge to attribute divine intent to her illness: either as punishment or as a "blessing in disguise." Such formulations, though emotionally compelling, seemed facile. Searching her deeds, she reckoned that there was nothing she did or failed to do that was commensurate with this affliction. Some part of her wished there were a correlation between "sin" and "punishment," because she might then be able to affect her situation positively through *t'shuva*. But she did not believe that God intervened this way in individual human lives, meting out rewards and punishments.

Likewise, she could not accept her illness as a divinely intended "blessing" sent by God to help her change her ways, what rabbinic theology calls *yisurin shel ahavah* (chastisements of love), afflictions sent by God as prods to do *t'shuva*. Although some good emerged from her suffering, she did not believe that this was the reason for her affliction.

Viktor Frankel asserts that humanity's essential drive is to make meaning. Rebekah struggled to find the meaning of her illness. But her experience suggests to me that disease may be devoid of moral meaning; perhaps disease has nothing to do with merit or demerit and is simply a necessary though sometimes agonizingly painful feature of this physical creation. When Elisha ben Abuya watched the obedient young boy climb the ladder to send the mother bird away before collecting its eggs, falling on the way down to a horrifying and untimely death, Elisha ben Abuya denounced God as the arbiter of justice. There was no justice in the boy's death. The boy had simply slipped from a ladder that did not support him; his death expressed the laws of gravity and physics, not a moral law.

#### Din is the Divine Imposition of Limits

To Elisha ben Abuya's mind, there was no *din* and no *dayan* (judge) in this picture. But I think the element of *din* is here. By this I do not mean "judgment" or "justice" in the way the Rabbis usually mean it, the way we usually think about "judgment" during the *Yamim Noraim*. I mean a morally neutral *din*: *din* as the imposition of limits, the correct determination of things, the *din* Cordovera talks about as inherent in all the things insofar as all things need to remain what they are, to stay within their boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

*Midat hadin* (the divine attribute of *din*), then, carries within it the necessity of limits and finitude. Disease and death are expressions of *midat hadin*. Physical bodies are limited; they are created with a finite capacity for life and health. They are vulnerable to disease, injury, and decay. We are created and, without exception, pass away. This is part of God's holy design. It is with this understanding that I am able to accept the instruction to recite *Tzidkuk HaDin* upon hearing bad news, specifically upon hearing of a death. The core of the prayer blesses God as *Dayan*

*ha-emet* (the judge of truth). On the level of *p'shat*, *Dayan ha-emet* implies moral judgment, of course, where God knows in God's wisdom who should die, when and for what reasons.

But the tradition hints of a morally neutral *din* as well. Consider the new year of *Tu BiSh'vat*, what is sometimes referred to as the *yom din* for trees. Certainly it is not the righteous trees that will bear fruit in the new year, but rather those whose structures are fitting, those that can conduct water efficiently from root to branch. So perhaps *Dayan ha-emet* makes better sense on the level of *d'rash*. Perhaps *Dayan ha-emet* refers to God who sets down the hard and fast laws of physical creation. To say *Dayan ha-emet* would affirm that *din* and God's truth are expressed when there is illness or death: not moral law, but natural law, the God-given truth of limits and finitude. Blessed is *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe, who sets limits and ordains the physical laws of creation. Contemplating such a view of God's *din* on *Yom HaDin* might enrich our sense of connection with the Divine.

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I would go further.  
Acts of *rachamim* may  
not only make the limits  
more bearable, but  
may actually affect the  
limits themselves.

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#### Rachamim is the Expression of Healing

Whereas illness expresses *midat hadin*, healing expresses *midat harachamim* (the divine attribute of mercy). *Rachamim* is classically envisioned as the force that mitigates the severity of the *din*; in cases where *midat hadin* would exact strict punishment, *midat harachamim* comes to commute the sentence, to soften the decree. *Rachamim* makes it possible for us to live within the reality of *din*. Though originally, according to one midrash, God thought to create the world with the attribute of *din* alone, God found that the world would not endure without *rachamim*. The two principles had to work together in the formation and daily re-creation of the world.

To my mind, this is indeed how the world works. Our human acts of mercy, compassion, and empathy make it possible for us to endure, to suffer the sometimes excruciatingly painful limits and losses of creation.

And it seems to me that the Jewish impulse is to add to the principle of *rachamim* so that it might outweigh, indeed ideally, messianically, overcome the power of *din*. It doesn't seem to be our task to add to the power of *din*. Consider the instruction that we should imitate God's ways. God's ways are various, but the examples given in our sources

about "following in God's ways" are all instances of *rachamim*: to clothe the naked, visit the sick, comfort the mourner, bury the dead. We are not told to imitate God in strictness and severity. Perhaps the very nature of *din* as setting the principles of creation precludes human imitation, whereas the nature of *rachamim* invites it. As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in *The Prophets*: "Justice is a standard, mercy an attitude; justice is detachment, mercy attachment; justice is objective, mercy personal."<sup>2</sup>

#### Softening the Edges of Din with Rachamim

When it comes to illness, our acts of *rachamim* can affect our experience of *din*. We may not be able to make disease disappear, but we can profoundly affect how we cope with illness, thereby "softening the decree," if you will. In the Talmud, *N'darim* 39b, we learn that a visitor can take away part of a sick person's pain, can affect the experience of illness. Enough love, Rav Huna asserts, might entirely eradicate the pain, the *tza'ar*, the subjective burden.

I would go further. Acts of *rachamim* may not only make the limits more bearable, but may actually affect the limits themselves. The growing field of mind-body medicine suggests this possibility. For instance, Dr. David Spiegel of Stanford University conducted a classic study where he found that women with metastatic breast cancer who provided emotional support and care for one another lived twice as long as those who did not receive such care. While all the women eventually died of cancer, the realm of *din*, of limits and infinitude, was moved.

Our classic Jewish sources speak of the power of *rachamim* to affect the realm of *din*. Consider Rabbi Akiva's visit to his sick disciple: upon the cleaning of the sick man's room and tidying up, the man revived. A simple act of care and dignity cured the patient of his ills.<sup>3</sup> Or consider the various people Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai would visit: upon honest conversation and a show of care, Yohanan ben Zakkai would reach out his hand and the fellow would be cured, not just comforted. As if our very human love, compassion, and empathy, as well as our research and treatment, could move nature to overcome previously known limits. As if our love, our attention, our presence, our bestowal of dignity could heal both spiritually and physically.

This is the messianic vision toward which we strive: to overcome the limits of *din* with the power of *rachamim*. I do not suggest that *din* ought to be or could be eliminated entirely. The same midrash that says that the world cannot be ruled by pure *din* also states that it would not stand if guided only by *rachamim*. But our desire, our vision, is to move the world toward holding a greater share of *rachamim* than of *din*. Even God is imagined to exclaim in *B'rachot* 7a, "O that I might forever let my mercy prevail over my justice."



## Recognizing Dayan Ha-emet

At moments of blessing, release, relief, healing, beauty, or communion of spirits, it is not hard for us to affirm God's presence. It is decidedly more challenging to affirm God's presence in the midst of loss or limitation. But, as Jews, this is what we are called upon to do. In the Book of Isaiah, God says: "I the Lord do all these things."<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes we recognize God only in what is positive, in blessing, as *Hatov v'HaMetiv*, "the One who is good and who brings goodness." But such a view mistakes a part for the whole and leaves open the possibility of a dualistic theology. If God is the One who inspires us with strength to cope with difficult circumstances such as illness, who or what is responsible for the fact of illness itself, the limitations of creation that bring us so much suffering? This is God too, *Dayan ha-emet*, the Maker of limits and finitude.

At the time of the *Yamim Noraim*, contemplating the reality of God's *din* as well as *rachamim*, we are invited into the possibility of constructing a theology that affirms the truth of our experience as well as the truth that the *Zohar* (*Tikkunei Zohar* 122b) teaches: "There is no place where God is not."

While this theology of *din* and *rachamim* emerged out of my intensive work with the ill, it has deepened and broadened through my work over the past decade, not specifically with those who are ill, but through my experience with a wide variety of Jewish professionals and laypeople seeking spiritual vitality and truth at all points in their lives. Influenced by Chasidism, mindfulness practice, feminism, and my own life as a mother and friend, it is this last line from the *Zohar* that I now see as so central to the theology we might live during these High Holy Days: "There is no place where God is not."

## The Whole Earth is Filled with God's Presence

One of the central refrains of the early Chasidic movement was "*M'lo kol ha-aretz k'vodo*; The whole earth is full of God's Presence." All of creation – human, animal, vegetable, and mineral – is made of divine substance, all of its variety in form by God's donning "the coat of many colors," God's infinitely creative way of refracting the One into the many. A great portion of my own spiritual curriculum has been geared to training my consciousness to see the One behind the many. Only then can I affirm experientially, "There is no place where God is not."

We long to leave nothing out, to find a way to banish none of our life's experience as "other." One of the brilliant teachings of the Baal Shem Tov concerned how to work with "alien thoughts" (*machshavot zarot*) in prayer: intrusive, distracting, compelling thoughts that would captivate one's attention and interrupt one's prayer. Rather than struggling to conquer them, forcefully applying one's will to banish the thought from consciousness, the Baal

Shem Tov taught another way. Since all of creation and all of experience is an expression of the Divine, and nothing at all could possibly exist without the animating divine spark in it, why not investigate the distracting thought to identify its Godly energy? A lusty thought, for instance, must come from the root of *chesed* (love). So instead of wrestling the thought or image to the ground and turning one's back on it, we might turn to face it head-on and "take it to its (divine) root," release its energy into the animating, Godly energy of *chesed*. In this way, the thought and its animating energy is not so much rejected as it is transformed.

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## With mindfulness practice, we draw a larger circle around our experience to include all of it as an expression of God's reality...

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This ability to embrace and skillfully work with all of one's experience is a central goal of mindfulness practice. Originally taught by Southeast Asian Buddhists, mindfulness meditation was brought to America and has been steadily gaining popularity as a secular practice with which to study and work with the mind and body. It teaches the art of being present, of living consciously in the body, mind, and heart in each moment, and not fleeing one's experience. No matter how painful, frightening, or otherwise unpleasant and uncomfortable one's particular experience in any moment, mindfulness practice teaches one how to stay present to what is happening in the body and mind, applying the ultimately comforting strategy of what Pema Chodron calls, "the wisdom of no escape." When we learn how to resist escaping from our experience, from fleeing from what is unpleasant (sometimes excruciatingly so), we are ultimately rewarded by a sense of nonseparation. Constriction of awareness (through any kind of pain, tightening, clutching, etc.) tends to lead to a sense of separation from God. With mindfulness practice, we draw a larger circle around our experience to include all of it as an expression of God's reality: limitation as well as expansion, pain as well as pleasure, *din* as well as *rachamim*. What happens, happens. The most important spiritual task that confronts us at each moment is to be spaciouly present to what is happening in the phenomenal field of our awareness. In so doing, our pleasures become richer and our pain more tolerable.

The key to this ability lies in the cultivation of *daat*, or awareness. Through meditation practice, we learn to develop a witnessing awareness that can (ideally) be present to all experience, of whatever emotional valence. Instead of "becoming"

any particular thought, emotion, or physical sensation, instead of our awareness becoming completely absorbed into its gravitational pull, we rest in a greater awareness of thought, emotion, or sensation itself simply "happening." We do not identify with our experience as who we are. Rather, we rest in a spacious awareness of what presents itself to consciousness, moment after moment. We cultivate a compassionate, witnessing awareness that in Jewish theology we might call "*HaMakom*" (the Place/Space): the expansive, steady place of consciousness itself. Perhaps this interpretation of "*Ha-Makom*" provides another way of understanding the words we say to a mourner upon the death of a loved one: "*HaMakom yinachem etchem...*" May the Place/Space that is greater than your suffering, greater than this moment of excruciating loss, provide you comfort. May you be comforted by spacious awareness.

We strive to become beings who can hold it all, "the full catastrophe," as Jon Kabat-Zinn titled his book on mindfulness practice (quoting Nikos Kazantzakis): experiences of God's *din* – painful moments of constriction and limitation – as well as of *rachamim* – glorious moments of ease and well-being. We long to create a strategy of consciousness and of living, and an accompanying theology, which can help us be present to the entire gamut of our experience, throwing nothing out. Feminist thought has taught us that the body, for instance, is not to be "transcended." Physical experience is not to be "overcome." Such dualistic thinking itself becomes a source of suffering. Physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts are all to be witnessed and held, as a parent strives to embrace and be present to all the experiences, both painful and joyful, of his or her child.

For too many of us, too often, what we experience as painful we judge as "bad." But if we take the analogy of awareness or *daat* to be like a loving parent, and painful moments of consciousness to be like the appearance of the child who has skinned her knee, we understand better that a more skillful application of consciousness would be to learn to sit lovingly with our own painful experiences, rather than to judge them or ourselves as bad. Or when we cannot do that for ourselves (for even with extensive mindfulness training we are, nonetheless, limited and not always able to manifest such awareness), we do that for each other. We help each other resist the temptation to interpret our experience as abandonment by God, or as rejection.

This is not to say that we do not work to change painful circumstances. As I explained earlier, we certainly seek to move the limits of *din* toward the side of *rachamim*. We strive to ameliorate pain, injustice, and all other kinds of suffering through our love, care, therapies, medicine, and just actions, for instance. As Jews, we dedicate ourselves to lessening suffering in all its forms. We apply our best efforts,

all the while aware that we are not in control of outcomes. As we imitate God's *rachamim* and with great dedication try to increase it, we learn how to be with what is in the moment without banishing it as "other," and we learn how to be with whatever does or does not result from our efforts. God – life, reality, creation – will be what it will be. *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*.

The classic, dualist rabbinic theology of God "out there" and we humans "over here," especially prominent as we engage with our liturgy during the High Holy Days, is itself a source of pain for many of us, and can make it challenging to actually experience all of life as taking place within the field of God's loving regard. Without a spiritual practice that teaches us how to inhabit God's spacious *Makom*, moment by moment, we are left vulnerable to feeling alienated from our own pain, discomfort, or suffering; it becomes something *other* than "who we really are," and *other* from God who is classically envisioned as "all good." When God is envisioned as "out there" instead of as "in here" (deep within our capacity for steady, compassionate awareness), most of us moderns lose our capacity to experience the whole of our lives as manifesting an aspect of God's being. For this reason, the Chasidic call that "the whole world is filled with God's Presence," and the *Zohar's* declaration that "there is no place where God is not," become invitations to us for developing awareness. My own experiences suggest to me that one aspect of our current Jewish communal project becomes one less of traditional theology, of thinking thoughts about God, than one of spiritual practice, of manifesting God-awareness in every moment. In a post-modern world where classic Jewish theology has largely broken down, working with the truth of our own experience becomes, as it is to both the religious existentialist and the phenomenologist, the most compelling arena for theological exploration and creativity.

During these High Holy Days, we need to allow the truth of our own experience to inform our theologies so that we might live into them, or, when we must, die into them, with integrity.

### Notes:

1. Pardes Rimonim, ch. 8.
2. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), p. 220.
3. Talmud, B'rachot 39b.
4. Isaiah 45:7.

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## Holocaust Educator

BY MIRIAM ZIMMERMAN

### Go see: *Broken Promise*, *The Wedding Song* and *Menachem & Fred* Don't See: *Inglourious Basterds*

*Inglourious Basterds* is one of the worst examples of Hollywood exploitation of the Holocaust I have encountered. Is the film a cartoon, a fantasy, wishful thinking, or escape into pointless glorification of violence? It is all of these and less.

Quentin Tarantino is true to his *oeuvre* comprised of relentlessly violent films that go nowhere. By beginning with the caption, "Once upon a time...in Nazi-occupied France," he alerts his audience that he has created a fairy tale; thus, the audience should expect little semblance to reality. Tarantino delivers: The characters never develop beyond caricature, and the plot culminates [spoiler alert] in sheer fantasy with the assassination of the four top-ranking Nazis, including Hitler.

The look and feel of the film is similar to Warren Beatty's 1990 excellent rendition of *Dick Tracy*, based on the cartoon of the same name. Like a cartoon strip, *Basterds* unfolds in vignettes, conveniently labeled "Chapter One,...Two," to "Chapter Five." Tarantino uses cartoon elements progressively more throughout the film.



A scene from *Inglourious Basterds*.

The best scene is the opening sequence, which lacks cartoon elements. It is plausible, tense, with a tragic outcome. Characteristics of cartoon such as the use of primary colors and lighting become more pronounced at the end of the film. Scenes are sometimes backlit, revealing features in silhouette, like a comic strip.

The climactic scene of a burning cinema with Nazis clamoring to escape is the most cartoon-like, with jump cuts that capture the essence of action without transitions, as if you were watching the explosion of the movie screen into flames under strobe lights.

A defender of the movie might point out that Tarantino, by employing the most cartoon effects in this scene, is reminding his audience that the death of the four top Nazis locked in an inferno is complete

fantasy. Such effects are appropriate to depict Dick Tracy, but the Holocaust was not a cartoon and should not be treated as such, the comic book *Maus* by Art Spiegelman notwithstanding. Not all cartoons are alike and should be treated according to their merits; I do not object to *Maus*, an allegory for children as well as for adults, that is most appropriately told through the medium of a comic book.

Students will learn considerably more about the Holocaust from the complex and visually detailed *Maus* than from *Inglourious Basterds*. In the latter, I object most to the revenge fantasy of *Basterds* depicted in cartoon terms along with the senseless violence perpetrated by Jews, reducing the victims to the level to which the Nazis sank during the Third Reich.

### At issue: What can we learn from such films and how best to remember the Holocaust.

Brad Pitt as the U.S. officer in charge of the "Basterds" looks his age, with graying sideburns and mustache, eschewing a pretty-boy image. As usual, he plays Brad Pitt, but with a bad Southern accent. When he appears as hunky eye candy in other films, the viewer might not notice that he lacks acting talent. Here, his over-the-top performance is an embarrassment.

Pitt's character recruits Jewish soldiers for revenge against the Nazis. He charges the Jewish "Basterds" to scalp as many Nazis as they can, glorifying the Holocaust as the Wild West. Implicit: The more violent and sadistic the murders, the greater the revenge.

The finest acting belongs to German actor Christoph Waltz who plays SS Colonel Hans Landa. This man deserves an Oscar nomination, if not outright win, portraying a villain you love to hate. He gets the sadism-on-the-edge-of-madness of his SS officer just right.

Tarantino knows his audience. The opening-weekend audience I sat with applauded at the end; some cheered. I believe at this difficult time, U.S. audiences need something about which they can cheer without restraint, as an escape from the bleak economy and the failure of their current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Two wars and billions later, we have nothing to show for such effort but guilt and destruction. *Inglourious Basterds* provides U.S. audiences with a just cause about which they can cheer without guilt.

The movie's ending was reminiscent of the novel *Howard's End* by E.M. Forster, when the bookcase falls onto the hapless Leonard Bast, causing him to have a heart attack and die. It is as if Forster is saying that one should not use education to try to move out of one's social class, contradicting other themes in the novel.

Similarly, three self-proclaimed movie lovers: Hitler, propaganda minister Joseph

Goebbels, and the Wehrmacht soldier-turned-actor, all die in the burning cinema. Perhaps Tarantino is making a point that Nazi film buffs will be destroyed by [future] films, which will expose them for what they are. But not this film.

I am glad I saw the movie so that I can advise my students not to bother. However, given the popularity of the film, which was the top grossing film in the U.S. and Canada (\$37.6 million in ticket sales) in its first weekend of release, students will probably flock to it. Unfortunately, they will not learn anything of value about the Holocaust and instead, will be given a distorted picture of what did happen. Tarantino sacrificed reality for entertainment and for the glorification of violence.

As a Holocaust educator, I know there are many fine films about the Holocaust that students could view instead. At the recently closed San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF) this summer, I saw three outstanding Holocaust-themed movies. I wish these quality films would have the same national and international exposure as *Inglourious Basterds*.

#### The Wedding Song

A lyrical film by Karin Albou, *The Wedding Song* closed the San Francisco venue of the SFJFF. A Bay Area premiere, the 100-minute *Song* portrays the friendship of two teenagers, one Jewish, one Muslim, during the Nazi occupation of Tunisia in 1942. After all the coming-of-age films in the Festival about young boys, it was a pleasure to watch two girls as they negotiate their awakening attraction to boys, their meddling mothers, and the Nazi propaganda that threatens to split their relationship. Between the two girls, there are no secrets.

Groomed since infancy to marry, flashbacks reveal the girls dressed up as brides, singing the haunting melody of the wedding song, which serves as a *leitmotiv* throughout the movie. By the end [spoiler alert], both girls are married, yet remain true to their love for each other despite the efforts of the Nazis and the ominous crash of Allied bombs.



A scene from *The Wedding Song*.

This fine film fills in important information gaps about the Nazi occupation of North Africa during World War II. It is a little-known footnote superseded by the larger theater of war in Europe and deserves more space in the annals of history.

#### Menachem & Fred

A 90-minute documentary, *Menachem*

& *Fred* is about the reunification of the Mayer brothers, whose Holocaust-interrupted lives as family resume after a 60-year separation. The film follows the two brothers as they retrace their journey after a Nazi officer by the name of Emil Hopp deports their family to Gurs, a concentration camp in southwest France.



A scene from *Menachem & Fred*.

After the Holocaust, the brothers live opposite lives. In the United States, Manfred changes his name to Frederick Raymes; "Raymes" is an anagram of "Mayer." Heinz becomes Menachem Mayer when he immigrates to Israel.

Younger brother Menachem is an Israeli science professor; Fred, the elder by three years, becomes an American aerospace engineer. Menachem lives a religiously observant life near his children who reside in a West Bank settlement. Fred marries a Christian woman; their children all marry Christians.

The program notes describe the trajectory of the film: "We travel with them to Germany on an emotional tour of the many homes and refuges they had, including their original family home, a hiding place when they were driven out on Kristallnacht, an orphanage and a camp. Both Menachem and Fred have blocked out parts of their youth so that we, as viewers, have the odd feeling that we are learning about their childhoods at the same time as they are, from old neighbors and from each other."

The brothers collaborate on a book titled, *Are the Trees Blossoming Where You Are?* based on their mother's letters to them after placing them in a French orphanage. As a mom, I am always moved by parents who demonstrate the supreme sacrifice demanding wisdom, courage and trust by giving up their children in the hope that their offspring will survive. The letters stop when their parents are shipped to Auschwitz where they perish.

Ironically, the descendants of the Nazi who evicted the family from their home, Emil Hopp, fund the German translation of this book. One son is Dietmar Hopp, a cofounder of the German software company SAP and one of the wealthiest men in Germany. He and his siblings request that the brothers not include the name of their father in the book as the officer who deports them.

The brothers refuse, saying that just as the victims have names, so should the perpetrators. The Hopps relent, the book is published, and a relationship between the families ensues.

(see Zimmerman, page NAT 15)



## Media Watch

BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

### Defiance

*Defiance*, one of the most important Holocaust films ever made, has just been released on DVD. Based on Nechama Tec's book by the same title about four brothers, Tuvia, Zus, Asael and Aron Bielski, this 2009 motion picture is the drama about Jewish resistance to the Nazis. The acting is excellent all around. The compelling screenplay was written by producer Edward Zwick and Clayton Frohman. Eduardo Serra provided the breathtaking cinematography.



After their parents and neighbors are killed in attacks on Jewish homes in their rural Belorussian village, the brothers begin to strike back at the Nazis. The eldest brother, Tuvia (Daniel Craig), is diplomatic and idealistic. His younger brother, Zus (Liev Schreiber), is militant and bent on killing as many Nazis and Nazi collaborators as possible, no matter what the cost." (Though not relevant to the plot, it would have been nice if the writers had explained the Yiddish name, "Zus" rather than leaving audiences to believe that the character was named after a Greek god.) An important part of the story is much younger brother Asael's quick maturation and development of leadership skills in face of the would-be destroyers of Jews and of the conflict between his older brothers. The youngest brother, Aron, is still a child.

The elder two brothers are certainly of one mind when it comes to avenging the vicious attack on their parents' farm, instigated by a local police captain who was greedy for the bounty of \$500 placed by the Nazis on every Jewish head. Tuvia himself kills the man and his two sons in front of that man's wife, and then the

brothers go after the German soldiers with whom this official sought to curry favor. They gather weapons and take to the woods, where they find other Jews in hiding and where many more Jews start seeking them.

Yet differences between the two eldest brothers are sharp, even violent. Zus wants to eliminate any collaborator or withholder of help, and to refuse entrée to their group of anyone but able-bodied fighters. Even the youngest brother declares at one point, "blood for blood."

Tuvia insists that if the brothers are going to resist the Nazis and gather other Jews to help, they must include everyone and not unnecessarily alienate the local peasants. "We cannot afford to lose friends," he says. "We will not lose anyone. Our revenge is to live. We are not thieves and murderers." Tuvia declares, "This is the one place in all of Belarus where a Jew can be free."

Tuvia consistently adheres to his ideals, though he recognizes that the resisters must be tough to gain the respect and perhaps even the fear of the peasants, if for no other reason than to procure food. Tuvia insists: "We must not become like them." He notes: "We are hunted like animals but we are not animals. Everyday [survival] is like an act of faith. If we should die trying to live then at least we die like human beings."

Most of the film is about Tuvia's struggle to build a community where everyone is involved according to the best of his or her capacity. Among the many hard lessons he must learn is to be ruthless with callous insurgents.

The film reminds us constantly of the sheer miracle of survival of over 1,000 souls who were constantly hunted by Nazis, whose neighbors were more than willing to turn them in for money or even for butter, who faced the dangers of wildlife as well as the ravages of disease, brutal winters, hunger, depression and fear. At one point Tuvia as leader must kill a horse that he cherishes so that the people can have some meat.

For his part, Zus decides that joining the Russian army would be a more effective way of fighting Nazis. Yet he finds himself battling anti-Semitism in the army, and soon realizes that the Russians would have no qualms about killing Jewish resisters perceived as getting in their way. Zus wins the respect of the Russians through his sheer warrior bravado, but in many ways he becomes a necessary liaison between the groups, and events force a reconciliation between him and Tuvia. The only unanswered question left by the film is how Zus managed to break away from the Red Army, whose "deserters" were shot, in order to rejoin Tuvia.

Tuvia achieves his greatest coup when he convinces most of the Jews of a nearby town-turned-ghetto to come to the forest community rather than be sent to Nazi death camps. Some choose to take their chances in the camps. The rabbi in the ghetto declares it best for the people to wait for God. A community leader is concerned



Coinciding with the June 2 debut of *Defiance* on DVD, at the Museum of Tolerance during the first training session in a nationwide campaign to use the Oscar-nominated film as a teaching tool, attendees received a video welcome from the film's director, Edward Zwick, as well as a copy of the DVD and educational materials created by the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation and the film's screenwriter.

that for everyone who escapes, 20 are killed. Later, some of the people want to return to the ghetto with its certain death. In many ways, whether Korach-like rebellion or complaints and crying to "return to Egypt," or the showdown with mortal enemies and the ultimate crossing over, this story parallels the biblical Exodus, and Tuvia does become another Moses, as reluctantly but effectively as the biblical Moses.

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I don't think that Zwick constructed the story to be a latter-day Exodus tale per se. It just happens that the biblical narrative is the story of exodus and redemption par excellence, and that other narratives, not only in the Jewish experience, will reflect it. It rings true that Zus would have said to Tuvia at some point, as he does in this film, "So now you are Moses, ah." The film notes that the irony is not lost on the characters that the last, redemptive encounter with the Nazis must take place on Passover.

The film does a good job of depicting the diversity of the Jewish community in Eastern Europe, from the socialist secularists to the ultra religious. A confused sentry with no aptitude for his job provides comedic effect. There is a nice sampling here of debates between the groups that were typical by the early 20th century not only in communities but in individual families. In the forest community some Jews pray and some play cards, some work (and fight) with their hands and some are intellectuals who learn to work with their hands.

Feminist issues also arise and we know that policies will change as soon as the question is asked: "Why is there a rule against women having guns?"

Tuvia and Zus do have issues with Jews who belonged either to the wealthy class or to the scholarly circle, parties who spurned them in the past. There is a definite suggestion here, as well, that the elder brothers were suited to their calling as rebel leaders because they had always been renegades and even rogues. Even their old Hebrew School teacher, who decried their "wildness" years before, comes to recognize that the unruly are the least likely to abide by bad and dangerous laws and to accept the status quo in a world gone mad.

*Defiance* has its melodramatic aspects, especially a funeral scene in which the teacher (an ordained rabbi?) challenges God: "Choose another people.... Take back the gift of our holiness." For a while the rabbi's rant seems a bit gratuitous, but in a death scene later on it makes sense. Some might find for a moment an unseemly grandiosity in Tuvia's riding atop a white horse, but in an instant we understand that this was Tuvia's necessary moment of transformation as a leader, and in a later instant we learn that, with heavy heart, he sacrifices his empowering trophy so that the community might survive.

The film delves into questions of morality. It takes pains to contrast those who opt for traditional Jewish marriage in the wilderness with those who take a "forest wife." It does not glorify the latter situation, but does indicate at the end that Zus remained married his entire life to the woman he met in the wilderness. There is an implication here that where children were fortunate to flee together with parents, a sense of traditional mores remained strong. The film reminds us, especially when Zus learns of the death of his wife and child, that one cannot but refrain from condemning breaches in time-honored mores, yet the wedding depicted here does show that people, even young people, could have followed those mores had they chosen to do so.

There is a suggestion here that pregnancies just did not occur because Tuvia stipulated that the community could not survive with babies. Yet there is a strong "pro-life" stance here in Tuvia's acceptance of a baby born to a woman who had hidden her pregnancy, the result of rape by a Nazi guard. In moral issues, the film assumes an objective tone, in line with its approach to "forest wives." This is true even in the scene in which a young Nazi soldier is captured and the community would become an avenging mob.

Particularly moving in the film are the scenes in which Gentiles try to do the right thing (well, one Gentile) despite the dangers of Nazi tyranny and his struggle with ingrained anti-Semitism. A peasant who provides weapons to Tuvia and Zus and hides Jews and helps them in other ways initially complains, "You people.

(see Gertel, page NAT 15)



## As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

### Music Composed in Concentration Camps

It is not often that I am not merely impressed but really overwhelmed. I am in the case of the new releases of KZ Musik. There are a set of six CDs under the title of *Encyclopaedia of Music Composed in Concentration Camps 1933-1945*. The number for CD No. 6 is: 231789 and the ISBN No. is: 978-3-86735-473-8.

The scholarship is readily apparent not only in the performances but also in the excellent booklet contained in each CD. Credit here rightfully belongs to Francesco Lotorno, who serves as pianist, organist and conductor and who was the moving force behind this project.

There have been other CDs that deal with this subject (i.e., Music from Terezin), but this is the first comprehensive survey of music of works written in each of the death camps. The booklet gives a brief biographical sketch of each of the composers (in English, Italian, French, German and Hebrew) as well as the texts used in the vocal selections and the location of the sacred texts within the service. (Thank you, Grazia Tiritiello.)

There are photographs of the various camps as well as details of when the camps were open and liberated. With the exception of Viktor Ullmann, none of the other composers are well known, and this CD goes a long way to underline the fact that these creative souls may have been murdered but that they live on through their music.

The composers whose music is represented on this disc include: Josef Pinkhof, Boaz Bischofswerder, David Frunfeld, Zikmund Schul, Viktor Ullmann, Vilem Zrzavy, William Hilsley, Hermann Gurtler, Josef Kropinski, Ludmila Peskarova, Jadwiga Leszczynska and Camilla Mohaupt.

The performers include: the Choir of the University of Foggia (Nicola Marasco conductor); male voice (cantor) Paola Candido; baritone Angelo De Leonardis. Strings include: Laura Aprile and Alina Scoticaio on violin, Luigi Gagliano on viola and Cuciniello on Cello. In the duo selection, the oboist is Domenico Sarcina, violist is Luigi Gagliano; the female voice is Cantor Rosa Sorice; and the pianist is Francesco Lotoro.

The total playing time is 68 minutes and one second. I listened to this CD with awe. I sat mute and immobile listening to the richness and variety of the selections from a heartfelt El Mole to dance pieces to choral selections. In a column written



many years ago, I recall observing that the Nazis murdered more than our People. They came close to annihilating a language (Yiddish) as well as the culture of European Jewry.

On the evidence of this CD alone (out of the six), the musical genius of an entire generation of creative musicians was wiped out as well. While there is no one around whom we might possibly forgive, surely we must never forget what they tried and nearly succeeded in doing. We should keep this in mind while listening as well as rejoicing in what these martyrs accomplished in the most awful of circumstances.

It would be more than presumptuous of me to comment on any aspect of these selections. They are a "brand plucked from the fire." To quote from the jacket: "All the musical work originated by imprisoned composers and musicians in Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buchenwald, Theresienstadt and other concentration camps. One of the most important preserved mankind heritages of the unique history of the tragedy of Deportations and the human catastrophe of Shoah. The remembrance as a DNA of the history."

I hope to review the other CDs that I have and perhaps make some pertinent observations. With regard to this particular CD, I conclude with the last words of the Kaddish, *V'nomar, omeyn*. It would not be inappropriate for me to encourage the purchase of these CDs if only to memorialize the lives and music of these composers. In this way, the more we know of them and their music, the greater the certainty that they will not be forgotten.

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### On this date in Jewish history

On September 9, 1867

The first synagogue built in modern times in Basle, Switzerland was dedicated.

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



## Book Review

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

### Israeli Arabs

*Aravim Tovim (Good Arabs, The Israeli Security Services and the Israeli Arabs)* by Hillel Cohen. Jerusalem: Hebrew Publishing House. 2006. Pp.307. In Hebrew.

The author of this dramatic eye-opener, Dr. Hillel Cohen, is a researcher at the Hebrew University's Truman Institute as well as the Jerusalem Institute for Israel's Study. We also owe much to the recent release, which he expertly utilized, of most secret archival material of Israel's security agencies concerning Israeli Arabs during the imposed military rule of curtailed civil rights from 1948 to 1966.

The pre-1967 War period was characterized by a serious security alert questioning the true loyalty of Israel's Arabs. Given Israel's vulnerability from without and the de facto state of war that existed with its Arab neighbors, along with a significant Arab minority, there was understandable though perhaps exaggerated fear and suspicion.

Thus the military rule (Mimshal Tzevaie) was established to control the Arab population in sensitive areas, with a system of rewards for cooperation with the authorities as well as punishments for subversive activity. Substantial benefits in employment, movement and gun licensure were granted or withdrawn. Informers were recruited to keep tabs on Arab violators. Even students, teachers and principals gathered condemning information on each other with instances of teachers fired for negative rhetoric. The driving goal was to prevent the formation of independent Arab institutions opposing the official Israeli line and interest.

The Israeli policy was to downplay the Palestinian national narrative regarding Israel's 1948 victory as a tragedy (Nekba) that hopefully would be reversed. The Arab states, committed to Israel's destruction, looked at Israel's Arabs as traitors given that some of them served Israel's interests even across the border and did not rise up as an organized group against the Jewish state. The Israeli Communist Party spearheaded the rejectionist Israeli Arab effort. There were, however, those who sought cooperation with Israel as means to advance Arab rights and not only for personal gain. They voted for the powerful ruling Labor Party (MaPai) and its Arab affiliates. They were among the "Good Arabs" (the book's title) that Israel tried hard to cultivate while generally looking down upon Arabs. The Israeli Arabs also paid a heavy price in land confiscation for national Israeli purpose.

Surprisingly, some in the fiercely loyal Druze sect were initially violently opposed to IDF service, albeit in a distinct unit. Also from 1948 to 1953, over 20,000 Arab infiltrators (Mistanenim) into Israel were actually returned refugees who hid in the Arab population, eventually becoming Israeli citizens. The author claims that overall the Israeli Arabs, contrary to public perception, did not compliantly submit to the authorities with the fateful 1948 transition.

Dr. Cohen's conclusion merits careful consideration by an Israel saddled with an inherently problematic relationship with its further radicalized Arab minority in recent years. Issues such as financial and land allocations, employment and education as well as cultural and national identification with the Jewish state have not disappeared, though the first Muslim Arab was appointed minister in Olmert's cabinet.

"Even a more extreme attempt to uproot Arab nationalism from the Israeli Arabs' hearts would not have succeeded, given nationalism's powerful pull in the new era. This is a central reason that Israel's Arabs have not undergone the full process of "Israelization." To this we have to add the basic fact that the Zionist movement – and the Jewish state emerging from it – never offered Israel's Arab citizens a way of influence and involvement in the state – precisely because they were Arabs" (Pp.267,268. Zoberman's translation).

Israel's first president, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, to whom I am proudly related, reflected that Israel would be judged on how it treats its Arab citizens. After all, Jews as a minority were mistreated throughout the long dispersion. But the Israeli and Middle Eastern context offers a complex and agonizing reality that ought not obfuscate the need nonetheless, on moral and practical grounds, to try harder to fulfill neglected areas.

Rabbi Israel Zoberman, spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach, Va., is the son of Polish Holocaust survivors. He grew up in Haifa, Israel. ☆

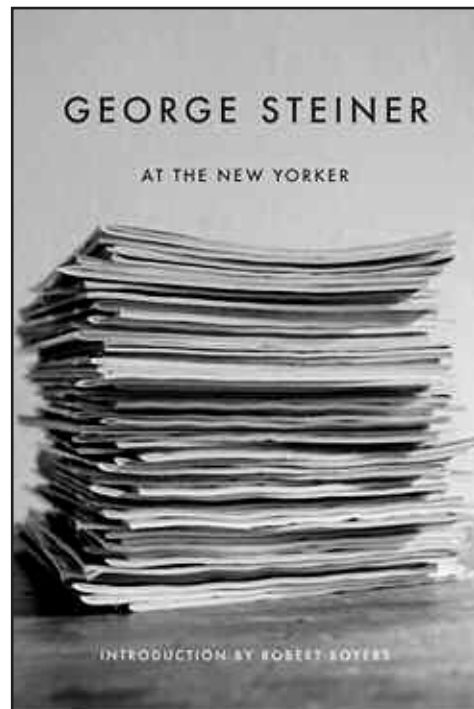


# Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

## 53 superb essays

*George Steiner at the New Yorker.* Edited by Robert Boyers. New York: New Directions, 2009. 304 Pages. \$17.95.



If your favorite delicacy were served to you three times a day, you'd have some idea of the rich fare that is offered in this superb collection of essays. George Steiner is a public intellectual who has served for many years as cultural critic for the *New Yorker*. Out of more than 150 articles by Steiner published in the *New Yorker* between 1967 and 1997, editor Robert Boyers, professor of English at Skidmore College, has selected 53 for inclusion in this book.

Steiner's brilliance and breadth of knowledge are fully displayed in these essays. His vocabulary and his writing skill make them a treat to read. After a helpful introduction, Boyers presents the essays in four categories: history and politics; writers and writing; thinkers; life studies. They range far beyond Steiner's expertise in comparative literature although he fully demonstrates his mastery of that field. He also shows that he is at home with classicists, philosophers, psychologists, and linguists. In the best sense of the term, he is truly a learned Renaissance man.

For Jews, Steiner's thinking poses a number of problems. He wrestled mightily with his Judaism, and Judaism lost the match. His parents moved twice because they feared the threat of Nazism. First, they went from Vienna to Paris where Steiner was born in 1929. Then, they settled in the United States in 1940 and, in 1944, Steiner became an American citizen. He was educated at the University of Chicago, Harvard and Oxford. A year after he earned his doctorate at Oxford in

1955, he went back to the United States where for two years, he was a scholar at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He then taught at Princeton, Innsbruck in Austria, Cambridge, Geneva, Oxford, and Harvard. Currently, he lives in Cambridge, England where he is associated with the University of Cambridge.

Perhaps this cosmopolitan background has given rise to Steiner's dubious attitude toward Jewishness. He rejects Zionism in favor of a universal human consciousness. As restless refugees, Steiner claims that the Jews are a cultural vanguard, promoting morality among all nations. When they are "isolated" in the State of Israel, he says that Jews surrender their mission to break down the barriers that separate people from each other. He argues somewhat dubiously that the very rejection of Jews that contributed to the development of Zionism also led to the genius of Marx, Freud, and Einstein whose inability to establish roots gave rise to the nurturing of their talents. Somewhat immodestly, he asserted that his own wanderings helped to foster his creative ability.

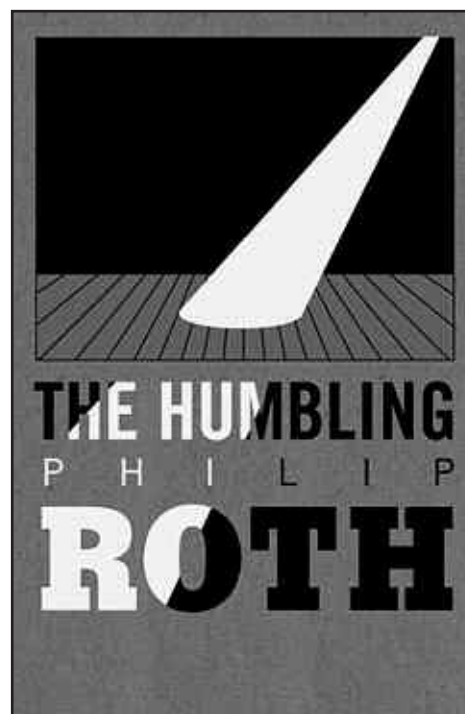
Few of these ideas appear in the essays selected for inclusion in this book. The *New Yorker* would, in all likelihood, have been an inhospitable venue for them. Instead, there is a positive discussion of Gershom Scholem, the great Jewish scholar and Zionist. Also, one essay deals with Simone Weil, a French Jewish philosopher who rejected her Jewish background and who is called by Steiner a "transcendent *schlemiel*." In still another essay, Steiner writes affirmatively about Claude Levi-Strauss, an important French Jewish anthropologist. The book concludes with a partially autobiographical account of Steiner's years at the University of Chicago where Robert Hutchins was president and finally, with a list of all the essays that Steiner wrote for the *New Yorker*.

Regardless of whether or not one agrees with Steiner's views, especially his attitudes toward Zionism, his impressive contributions to contemporary scholarship cannot be denied. Moreover, the wide-ranging nature of his learning and his superlative writing ability make this collection an important asset.

## Fifty years later, 30th book by Roth

*The Humbling.* By Philip Roth. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 160 Pages. \$22.

Fifty years have passed since Philip Roth published his first book, *Goodbye Columbus*, which consisted of a novella and five short stories. *The Humbling*, scheduled for release in November, 2009, is his 30th book. These publications have won many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for his 1997 novel, *American Pastoral*. Despite this prodigious output, Roth has limited himself to a few themes: sex, Jews, sex, politics, sex, Philip Roth,



sex, identity, sex, and patriotism. Some of his more recent work, including *The Humbling*, deals with illness and death, reflecting the fact that Roth is now 76 years old. Even though this is a new emphasis, Roth, as always, provides explicit details about his favorite theme of sex. He is an erotic writer who occasionally converts pornography to literary art.

The protagonist of *The Humbling* is Simon Axler, a 65-year-old actor, who "lost his magic." Unable to act any more, he becomes despondent and his wife leaves him. Afraid he will kill himself, Axler arranges for his admission to a psychiatric hospital. What happens next probably draws on Roth's own experience of a nervous breakdown in the late 1980s, which he described in his 1993 novel, *Operation Shylock*. This is in keeping with Roth's penchant for using autobiographical elements in his novels.

In the hospital, Axler befriends another patient who tried to commit suicide after catching her second husband molesting her eight-year-old daughter. The patient offers to pay Axler if he would kill her husband. He urges her to regain her mental equilibrium so that she can go home and reclaim her two children. This episode ends inconclusively but is devastatingly completed later in the story.

Although Axler remains somewhat shaky and is still persuaded that he can no longer act, he recovers sufficiently so that he is able to return home from the hospital. His agent visits him and vainly tries to convince him to return to the stage. These events lead to the second part of the novella in which Axler has an affair with Pegeen, 40 years younger than he and the daughter of Axler's friends. Indeed, Axler first saw Pegeen when she was an infant. In this section of the story, Roth expresses his unbridled determination to write unreservedly about sex, providing unnecessarily specific details.

The final section of the book provides further information about the turmoil and intricacy of the relationship between Pegeen

and Axler, complicated by the involvement of her parents and of another woman with whom Pegeen is involved. An almost inevitable and partly foreseeable ending concludes the work.

*The Humbling* will find favor with Roth's many fans, some of whom have organized the Philip Roth Society in order to promote interest in his work. Books and articles have been written, analyzing and commenting on the creativity and technical mastery demonstrated in Roth's extensive and well-received output. For a time, Roth, Saul Bellow, and Bernard Malamud were considered to be America's leading Jewish writers. Roth clearly remains in this category but must be ranked beyond it as one of America's leading novelists. This new book embellishes his reputation.

## Novel grips attention of reader

*Almost Home.* By Pam Jenoff. New York: Atria Books, 2009. 376 Pages. \$25.

Pam Jenoff has written two well-received novels about World War II and its aftermath, *The Kommandant's Girl* and *The Diplomat's Wife*. Both featured Jewish characters. Her new novel, *Almost Home*, has a Jewish protagonist but takes place long after World War II, although the fall-out from that time figures as part of the plot.

The heroine of the story is Jordan Weiss, a State Department intelligence officer. She "was raised with the typical upbringing of an East Coast reformed Jew; enough Hebrew school to get through a bat mitzvah, then services twice a year on the High Holidays." When she was stationed in Warsaw, she attended synagogue to combat her loneliness and to demonstrate that the Nazis had failed to wipe out the Jews. Since that time, she "reverted to her secular ways" and stopped going to synagogue although "the lessons of the Holocaust were deeply embedded" in her consciousness. Her parents were active in both the civil rights movement and the battle to free Soviet Jewry. They taught her why Jews see social justice as so crucial.

Having worked in several dangerous parts of the world, Jordan is in Washington when she hears from Sarah, a close friend from ten years ago when they both studied in Cambridge. Sarah has the fatal ailment, ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. Jordan is granted her request for a transfer to London where she is met by an experienced State Department official, Maureen Martindale, who is deputy chief of the American embassy. She and Jordan know each other from previous assignments. She assigns Jordan to a team that is investigating an Albanian mob that is illegally related to subsidiaries of American corporations.

While working on this assignment, Jordan simultaneously pursues a different inquiry that is set in motion when she

(see Teicher, page NAT 15)



## Kosher Kuisine

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

### Apple desserts for Rosh Hashanah

Dipping the apple in honey on Rosh Hashanah is said to symbolize the desire for a sweet new year. Why an apple? In *Bereishit*, the first chapter of the book of Genesis, Isaac compares the fragrance of his son, Jacob, to *sadeh shel tappuchim*, a field of apple trees.

Scholars tell us that mystical powers were ascribed to the apple and people believed it provided good health and personal well-being. Some attribute the using of an apple to the translation of the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit that caused the expulsion from paradise.

Some maintain in the phrase "go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet," sweet refers to apples and honey. Here are some apple desserts that don't use honey, for the New Year.

#### Poached Apple Sauce (2 cups)

- 1 1/2 pounds apples
- 4 cups water
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 vanilla beans
- 1/3 cup lemon juice
- 3 Tbsp. confectioners' sugar (optional)
- 2 Tbsp. flavored brandy or
- 2 Tbsp. liqueur

Halve apples and remove cores. In a saucepan, place water, sugar and vanilla beans. Stir until sugar dissolves. Add lemon juice and apples. Cook until apples are tender. Add confectioners' sugar, cool and chill. Puree fruit in processor or blender with some of poaching syrup. Add brandy or liqueur.

#### Applesauce Cake

- 1/2 cup butter or margarine
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 2 1/4 cups flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. allspice
- 1 1/4 cups unsweetened applesauce
- 1 cup raisins
- 1/3 cup rum

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a Bundt or tube pan. In a food processor or mixer, blend margarine, sugars, eggs and vanilla. Add flour, baking soda, cinnamon, allspice and applesauce. Blend. Add raisins and rum. Spoon batter into pan. Bake in preheated 350°F oven 50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.



## Funsmith

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

### Kosher food fun

Dear Funsmith,

*A lot of my family's experience of what you call "kosher fun" is, rightly, I feel, centered on meal time. We are very careful to make sure that we keep all the laws of kashrut. And we say all the brachot. But, frankly, I don't think we're really having all that much fun together.*

Signed, S. Gezunterhait

Dear Hungry-for-Fun, I just happen to know a few very fun-focused, food-centered games. Give them a try and call me after Havdalah.

#### Finger Food Roulette

1. Select a variety of finger foods: celery sticks, carrot sticks, pistachios, peanuts, etc. Place each in a separate serving dish. In each dish, place enough of the selected finger food to feed one-third to one-half of the extended family.

1.1 If there are more people than finger foods (as is often the case), prepare two or perhaps even three dishes from each.

1.2 Thus making certain that each finger food is equally represented, and each participant equally finger fed.

1.2.1 For example, were there only three snacks and some 12 people, there would be 4 portions of each finger food.

2. At the appropriate time, distribute the finger food platters randomly, placing one in front of each food fingerer (sic).

2.1 Instruct all participants to take a handful of the snack in front of them, and then to...

2.2 Pass their platter to the clockwisely (also sic) adjacent person.



#### Sugar-Free Applesauce Cupcakes

This recipe is fun to use for fancy cupcake pans or mini pans.

- 1 1/4 cups vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- 1 3/4 cups sugar substitute
- 2 cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 cups cooked unsweetened applesauce
- 2 tsp. vanilla

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease muffin tins. In a mixer or food processor, combine oil, eggs and sugar substitute. Add flour, baking soda, cinnamon, applesauce and vanilla and blend. Spoon into greased muffin tins. Bake in preheated 350°F oven 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into a couple of muffins comes out clean.

Sybil Kaplan lives in Jerusalem. ✨

- 2.3 Continue in like manner: finger-feeding, passing, finger-feeding, passing.
- 3. The last finger-food left loses.

#### Guess my Chew

This game is one of the silliest in my collection. Hence, I strongly advise you not to take it seriously.

1. Prepare at least five or so finger foods, each with a different crunch. For example: cranberry sauce, cashews, ginger snaps, cheese nips, and garbanzo beans.

1.a. Place each in a small saucer or cuplet, with enough complete sets for every other chewer-to-be.

1.b. Declare these people the Chewers, and adjacent participants Partners.

1.b.a. For greater complexity, try bilateral adjacency.

1.b.b. Otherwise, suggest that the Partner is the person to the right of the Chewer.

2. The Partner places an ear to the Chewer's cheek.

2.a. The Chewer takes a small piece of one of the foods, and chews as necessary.

2.b. The goal, if one is needed, would be to identify what is being chewed, and perhaps how much of it, along with some estimate of swallow duration.

2.c. Or perhaps both Partner and Chewer both chew and listen at the same time whilst simultaneously attempting to identify what the other is eating. To make this activity almost involuntarily amusing, see 1.b.a.

3. Estimated duration: 3-8 minutes. Activity is often left incomplete due to hilarious incapitance.

### I just happen to know a few very fun-focused, food-centered games.

#### Politessen

I made this one up after reading a story about the difference between heaven and hell.

A. Announce the following rules summarily:

- 1. Participants must serve each other.
  - 2. No participant can serve himself (and/or herself).
  - 3. Or ask to be fed.
- B. Play for 3-20 minutes.

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

## Bit of Wit

On Rosh Hashanah, there is a ceremony called *Tashlich*. Jews traditionally go to the ocean, a stream, or a river to pray and throw bread crumbs into the water. Symbolically, the fish devour their sins. Occasionally, people ask what kind of bread crumbs should be thrown. Here are suggestions for breads which may be most appropriate for your specific sins and "misbehaviors":

- For ordinary sins – **White Bread**
- For erotic sins – **French Bread**
- For particularly dark sins – **Pumpernickel**
- For complex sins – **Multi-Grain**
- For twisted sins – **Pretzels**
- For tasteless sins – **Rice Cakes**
- For sins of indecision – **Waffles**
- For sins committed in haste – **Matzoh**
- For sins of chutzpah – **Fresh Bread**
- For substance abuse – **Stoned Wheat**
- For use of heavy drugs – **Poppy Seed**
- For petty larceny – **Stollen**
- For committing auto theft – **Caraway**
- For timidity/cowardice – **Milk Toast**
- For ill-temperedness – **Sourdough**
- For silliness, eccentricity – **Nut Bread**
- For not giving full value – **Shortbread**
- For jingoism, chauvinism – **Yankee Doodles**
- For excessive irony – **Rye Bread**
- For unnecessary chances – **Hero Bread**
- For telling bad jokes/puns – **Corn Bread**
- For war-mongering – **Kaiser Rolls**
- For dressing immodestly – **Tarts**
- For causing injury to others – **Tortes**
- For lechery and promiscuity – **Hot Buns**
- For promiscuity with gentiles – **Hot Cross Buns**
- For racist attitudes – **Crackers**
- For sophisticated racism – **Ritz Crackers**
- For being holier than thou – **Bagels**
- For abrasiveness – **Grits**
- For dropping in without notice – **Popovers**
- For over-eating – **Stuffing**
- For impetuosity – **Quick Bread**
- For indecent photography – **Cheesecake**
- For raising your voice too often – **Challah**
- For pride and egotism – **Puff Pastry**
- For sycophancy, ass-kissing – **Brownies**
- For being overly smothering – **Angel Food Cake**
- For laziness – **Any long loaf**
- For trashing the environment – **Dumplings**
- For those who require a wide selection of crumbs, we suggest a Tashlich Mix available in three grades (Tashlich Lite, Medium, and Industrial Strength) at your favorite Jewish bookstore. ✨

## Bit of Wit

#### Adam & Eve

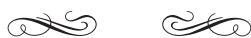
Adam and Eve had an ideal marriage. He didn't have to hear about all the men Eve could have married, and she didn't have to hear about how well Adam's mother cooked. ✨

**KARSH***(continued from page NAT 6)*

the earth looking for meaning in their lives. I believe that every family needs an "operative" reality, and that it needs to be expressed, husband to wife, parents to children, friend to friend. Without such a reality, we are doomed to a life of fear, fearful of relationships, fearful of commitment, fearful of emotional loneliness, with no place of safety to turn to.

It is sad to say of any man's life, his accomplishments though many, were built on the destruction of people he loved and people he served. There was a path of destruction in Senator Edward Kennedy's life, his marriage, the lives of his wife, his children, his family, the accidental death of Mary Jo Kopecky; the private settlement with her family that muted the circumstances of her death relieved him of facing public scrutiny. Privilege, money and power led Edward Kennedy to characterize his brother, Bobby, at his untimely death, as a decent man, decent in a "Kennedy sense of decency," but not in a society based on ethics and morality.

Howard W. Karsh lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisc. His e-mail is [howkar@wi.rr.com](mailto:howkar@wi.rr.com). ✨

**GERTEL***(continued from page NAT 11)*

Why is it so...[expletive] hard being friends with a Jew?" Tuvia advises him, "Try being one." This man, who admired the brothers' father, proves to be quite noble and is later hanged by the Nazis in his own barn and covered with a sign, "Jew Lover." One of the most moving scenes in the film is the one in which the brothers bury him and craft a makeshift cross for him.

I hope that this review gives you, the readers, a sense of the importance of this film. In a uniquely powerful and even stunning way, *Defiance* recalls and pays tribute to Holocaust resistance with integrity and thoughtfulness, pull and inspiration. The DVD belongs in the collection of any individual or school or organization that values the full story of Jewish (and Russian) responses to Nazi atrocities.

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

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**ZIMMERMAN***(continued from page NAT 10)*

The climactic sequence of the documentary occurs in their hometown of Hoffenheim, Germany, where the two brothers and their families reunite. After 60 years, they poignantly discover that they are family. The reunion includes the Hopp family as well. The event becomes a civic affair, the whole town participating with music, a memorial service to the victims, and food.

**Broken Promise**

*Broken Promise* is an antidote to the recent Hollywood smash hit *Defiance*, which is about Jewish partisans sabotaging the Nazis. Although I do not have the same negativity toward *Defiance* as I do to *Inglourious Basterds*, if my students have a choice, I would rather they see *Broken Promise* and not *Defiance*, both about Jewish partisans.



A scene from *Broken Promise*.

The personable Martin Friedman escapes from deportation and ultimately joins a social-nationalistic partisan resistance group, headed by an anti-Semite. By this time, Martin has identity papers as Martin Petrsek and has learned to disguise his Jewishness.

SFJFF program notes capture the essence of the film: "A rare and superb entry from Slovakia into the genre of Holocaust drama, *Broken Promise* is based on the true story of teenager Martin Friedman's unlikely escapes from deportation during the war. From work camp to Catholic infirmary to an underground stint with the Partisans, Martin manages to win deliverance through both chance and the aid of sympathizers. The film explores collective and individual anti-Semitism among invaders and liberators alike."

*Promise* screened on the last evening of the Palo Alto venue of the Festival. In attendance were the director, Jiri Chlumsky, Martin Friedman himself who has used Petrsek since the end of the war, his wife Anna Trojack and Samuel Spisak, the talented young actor who plays Petrsek. This film was Spisak's first feature-length movie; he had been a stage actor. The audience eagerly questioned all of them.

Finally, festival director Peter Stein had to call a close. He herded the entourage to the lobby to clear the stage for the final film in Palo Alto. I strategically stood up just as Petrsek approached my aisle seat, so I was able to chat with him all the way to the lobby.

No, the partisan leader did not know that Petrsek was Jewish when he refused to allow him to be bullied into dropping his pants, per the demand of a suspicious partisan who wanted verification that the boy was not a Jew. At that point in the movie, the leader seemed almost protective of Petrsek. Apparently, it was more about not allowing such an insult to take place.

In the lobby, I had my own semi-private Q&A with the former partisan. "How accurate was the film compared to your book?" "The movie captured 80 to 85% of the reality." My husband's question that he had not been able to ask previously: "How was it to kill Germans?" Petrsek shook his head and looked at me intently. "It was not so easy, even to kill Germans." A charming and gentle man, I decided that the casting had been perfect.

This film beautifully captures lived experience of the Holocaust. What a contrast to *Inglourious Basterds*. After writing about *Broken Promise* and other worthy Holocaust-themed movies in the SFJFF, I have calmed down somewhat. This article is the second I have written about this year's SFJFF, a dedication to Holocaust films. But because of the Tarantino film, this column usurped my almost completed article about the Festival, about which you will read in the next edition of the *P&O*.

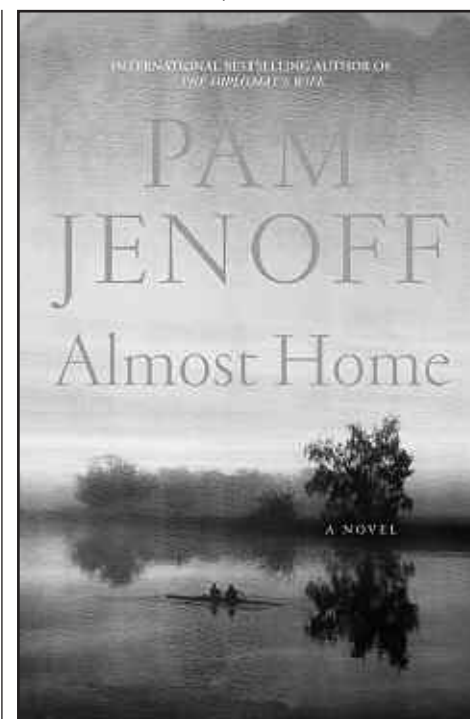
**The dilemma**

Ultimately, for me, twin issues emerge: What can we learn from such films and how best to remember the Holocaust. Holocaust survivor and activist Elie Wiesel cautions if not opposes using art forms to depict the Holocaust. Art, by definition, transforms its subjects and in the process, beautifies and makes sense out of them. The stark narrative of the Holocaust is enough; anything else is a distortion. Art is not needed.

The question becomes, is the Holocaust a sacred cow about which we must tiptoe and treat with reverential awe bordering on idol worship? Of course not. No less of a Holocaust scholar and researcher than Michael Berenbaum is putting together a book on Holocaust humor. I will await judgment on that one, but am predisposed toward wanting to like it, having family stories of the Holocaust that cross the line from irony into humor.

Those of us with a personal connection to the Holocaust understandably have a more visceral response to the various ways in which the Holocaust is remembered. In the future, when our collective memory has fuzzed over the details, it troubles me that the audience of *Basterds* might fail to realize that such revenge never occurred. Tarantino, through his art and artifice, created a testimony to himself and his prowess as a filmmaker. *Inglourious Basterds* is an entertaining evening of episodic violence that does nothing to preserve Holocaust memory.

Dr. Miriam L. Zimmerman is professor emerita at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, Calif. She can be reached at [mzimmerman@ndnu.edu](mailto:mzimmerman@ndnu.edu). ✨

**TEICHER***(continued from page NAT 13)*

meets Chris Bannister, a journalist who is another friend from their Cambridge days. He also knew Jared Short, a fellow student and Jordan's sweetheart who had drowned. Chris advises Jordan that he now believes Jared's death was neither an accident nor a suicide and he asks her to accompany him to Cambridge in order to see if they can learn what actually happened to Jared.

Flashback scenes recount the days at Cambridge when Jared and Chris were part of a racing boat crew on which Jordan served as the coxswain. These recollections combine with the contemporary efforts to locate Jared's killer and to stop the Albanian mob. The work entails increasing peril as Jordan gets closer to the truth in both her quests. Interspersed with these tense endeavors is Jordan's attempt to comfort her friend Sarah, which was her original motivation for coming to London.

Author Jenoff does well as she juggles these plot lines, weaving them together in intricate patterns that gradually begin to merge and emerge. Despite the rapid pace and the movements back and forth through time, she successfully retains the reader's interest, overcoming some confusion as a few of her characters turn out to be other than as originally presented. Her knowledge about Cambridge is based on the fact that she did graduate work there and she also makes use of her experience as a State Department officer. An alumna of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Jenoff is a practicing attorney in Philadelphia. She has effectively blended her own experiences with her writing skills to produce a novel that grips the attention of her readers.

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



# Musings

BY BATYA MEDAD

## The fragrance of the Shechina

Friday, August 21, 2009

This morning, the first day of the Jewish Month of Elul, I joined other women for a calm and leisurely Prayer and Psalm session at Tel Shiloh.



We all felt the *Shechina*, G-d's presence, as we prayed to G-d, possibly, in the very same area the Biblical Chana did thousands of years ago.

What a contrast to the stressful, crowd-filled Kever Rachel, Rachel's Tomb, which is strangled by concrete and bars.



That's one of the reasons I began inviting women to come to Shiloh on Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of each Jewish month.

Tel Shiloh is open for visitors everyday but Shabbat and Jewish Holidays. Tours may be arranged. For more information, email [telshilo@gmail.com](mailto:telshilo@gmail.com) or call 02-994-4019. If you'd like to join my Women's Rosh Chodesh Prayer Group, please email me, [shilohmuse@gmail.com](mailto:shilohmuse@gmail.com)

**Very busy at Kever Rachel**  
August 22, 2009

I ended up at Rachel's Tomb during the ceremony when the Sefer Torah, written for Gilad Shalit's safe return, G-d willing, was brought there.

Yes, that's me being interviewed on TV. I'm the one who said that Israel must be strong. The Arab prisoners we're holding shouldn't get anything Shalit doesn't get, and that includes letting the Red Cross visit them.

The Red Cross is anti-Israel. That's why they opposed our Jewish Star as an officially recognized symbol. That's why



they haven't campaigned for Gilad Shalit. If it doesn't bother them that he has been without their official care, then Israel doesn't owe them any respect.

### Peacefully summer

I can't believe that summer is ending. It's dark when I wake up in the morning. Just a couple of months ago, I didn't have to turn on the kitchen light to make my morning coffee. We have a very short pool season, just three months.



Yes, that means that it will be closing soon, emptying out and I won't be able to have a convenient "swim" four mornings a week.

### Custom-fitted affordable earplugs

I just noticed that this is the 3,800th post on this blog. It boggles the mind, or should I say "boggle"?

"Regular" readers may remember my rant about that DJ noise we suffered when we were trying to celebrate. A friend came to the rescue with his "Custom-Fitted Affordable Earplugs."



I was extra-lucky, since they even matched my outfit. The earplugs were easy to make. He took some soft bread, rolled it around in his fingers, until they felt like clay. I put them in my ears, and they dulled the sound a bit, enough so I could stay in the room.

### Living in Shiloh is a treat

Last night we were, thank G-d – may there be many more happy couples – at

yet another wedding. (Illustrative picture is from a different one – busy season!)

A few minutes before the ceremony started, when the sun was still brightening the lawn where the bride was receiving her guests and near where the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) was set up, a neighbor came up to me:

"I was looking at who's here and trying to figure out who must have a *Sefer T'hillim*, Book of Psalms. You have. Don't you?"

"Here, take it."

"And while I'm at it, may I also borrow your reading glasses?"

Yes, we're full-service helpers here in Shiloh. This is a neighbor who helps others so much more than I ever have, so I was so happy to do something for her. There's so much going on that people are hardly aware of, so many more serious issues than lending reading glasses and a *T'hillim*. I find living in Shiloh such a great privilege and treat. Thank G-d for my neighbors.

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

### LEDERMAN

(continued from page NAT 4)

"A community is too heavy for any one person to carry alone."

Over 2,000 years ago, our sages understood only too well the burden of taking care of those in need. They were faced with as many, if not more, social, economic and communal problems as we are today and they knew how impossible it was to care for everyone unless it was a collective response. It was because of this wisdom that Jewish communities the world over, no matter how poor or isolated, have always established organizations to provide food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, and help for the sick and needy.

The oldest lesson in Jewish history is what keeps us safe, as Jews and as human beings. And while it is up to each one of us to decide what our commitment to our community will be, one thing is certain: We have to work together – for each other and with each other – to make this world a better, safer place for all.

*Amy Hirshberg Lederman is an award-winning, nationally syndicated columnist, author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney. Her new book One God, Many Paths: Finding Meaning and Inspiration in Jewish Teachings is available at [www.OneGod-manyPaths.com](http://www.OneGod-manyPaths.com) or on her web site at [www.amyhirshberglederman.com](http://www.amyhirshberglederman.com).* ✨

### POLLACK

(continued from page NAT 3)

Rabbi Moshe's lesson is a great one, but it is also a lesson that is hard to hear. It is much easier for us to pay attention to the mundane details of life than to really search our hearts, to find our faults, and perhaps most difficult of all, to have the courage to ask forgiveness from those whom we have wronged. The High Holy Days are a gift from God – the opportunity to make a fresh start.

It is difficult to begin to search within, and even more difficult to admit to what we might find there. Yet, that is the purpose of *teshuvah*, of repentance and forgiveness. *Teshuvah* literally means to return, to return to the state of wholeness and completeness that we cannot possibly be in, unless we right the brokenness that we have caused and the brokenness that is within us.

Fulfilling all our responsibilities to our families, our workplaces, and communities may seem to be so demanding that we find it hard to fulfill this additional responsibility of *teshuvah* at this time of year. But it is in precisely these relationships that we have the opportunity to "return." Think about how you treat others that you work with, those whom you run into on the street, and how you respond to those whom you love. Making small changes in the way we relate to one another, being more honest, more loving, more patient, and more forgiving will open doors to greater change and bring us closer to each other and to God. Each small step on the path of *teshuvah* leads to greater transformation and opens new pathways into what we will become.

My husband, Phil, and our children, Seth, Gil, and Rachel join me in wishing you and your loved ones a *Shanah Tovah U'Metukah*, a year filled with joy and the sweetness of life.

May the New Year 5770 bring you fulfillment and most of all, a sense of *Shalom*, of wholeness, and peace. *L'shalom!*

*Rabbi Audrey S. Pollack serves at Temple Israel in West Lafayette, Ind.* ✨

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