Chag Shavuot Sameach

The Hebrew text in this art is part of the Shavuot Kiddush blessing:

“In love have You given us, O Lord our God, appointed times for gladness, festivals and season for joy, this Festival of Shavuot, the festival of Your giving us the Torah.”

Cover Art by Orit Gutmacher Levy
(see About the Cover on p. 3)
Interview of Ballerina
Sierra Levin of the
Indianapolis Ballet

BY DANCER SIERRA KRICHIVER

Editor’s note: This interview was done March 29, 2020. It had been scheduled in early February, before COVID-19. It could not be done in person as planned, but was done by Facetime on Facebook. Thank you to Tami Miller Krichiver for recording it. J.C.

Sierra Krichiver: How long have you been dancing?
Sierra Levin: Since I was three, and professionally for the past five years.

Krichiver: How did you end up choosing ballet over other styles?
Levin: My sister started dancing before me and she was at a competition studio so I joined and did a whole competition until I was twelve. Then I decided I wanted to do something with my dance career. I thought ballet was a good choice for me because of the way I am built and I was pretty good at it.

Jennie Cohen: Did any of your teachers encourage you to go into ballet?
Levin: I did a YAGP (Youth America Grande Prix) world ballet competition and I got a lot of encouragement from the people who were coaching me. They said I was on the right track so my mother put me into Princeton Ballet School which is in New Jersey. I really liked it and then I wanted to take it a step further. A school 45 minutes away from me, Metropolitan Ballet Academy in Jenkintown, Pa., had a good success rate in training dancers to make it professionally. I went there about 6 or 7 years. As soon as I graduated from that studio I got my first job at Carolina Ballet. I started out doing competition dance. Ballet was the one that stuck with me and that I enjoyed the most so I stayed with it.

Krichiver: What is it like being a professional dancer? How would you describe it?
Levin: It’s wonderful! I get to wake up every day and do what I love, and I get paid to do it!

Cohen: Are there any drawbacks?
Levin: Financially, in the Arts it can be challenging. I knew going into this profession that it was going to be a struggle, but I made it work and it’s worth it.

Krichiver: What tips can you give to young dancers who might want to become professionals?
Levin: Getting to where I am now was really difficult. When you pick a professional track, you have to be so dedicated. I didn’t have a normal high school experience because I had to miss a lot of school functions. I sacrificed a lot because I was too busy going to rehearsals and performances. I tried to do my Junior year at home because I had been asked by the Boston Ballet to train at their school. To do that I would have had to be homeschooled so we tried it out. I struggled a lot during that year. It was difficult to learn online so I went back to public school for Senior year. After I graduated the auditioning cycle is really challenging especially mentally because you see others who are so good. You have to just focus on yourself.

Krichiver: Who do you look up to in the most professionally and in general?
Levin: The professional ballerina I look up to is Marianela Nunez from The Royal Ballet. You can see her YouTube videos. She can do anything! Personal mentors were my first YAGP coach Natalya Zeiger who was a dancer with The Bolshoi Ballet in Russia, and Lisa Collins Vidnovic and Denise D’Angelo who both danced with Pennsylvania Ballet. Israeli actress Gal Gadot who starred in the movie Wonder Woman is someone I admire outside of dance.

Krichiver: Did you ever have Jewish related activities, such as summer camp that conflicted with your dance schedule?
Levin: When I was younger I used to go to Hebrew School on Sundays but unfortunately we have dance rehearsals on Sundays. I had to pick one or the other because I would miss too many rehearsals if I went to Sunday School. I chose dance. I knew this was what I was supposed to be doing and I couldn’t do both.

Cohen: If you had a performance scheduled for Yom Kippur, what would you do?
Levin: I’ve been fortunate to have off for certain Jewish holidays in recent years. I was able to spend Passover and Chanukah with my family. We are usually on lay-off during those times. Normally, if it was a Jewish holiday we could ask to have off if we were scheduled for a rehearsal. Shows would be different, but then I would try and find a way to celebrate sometime that day.

Krichiver: That’s good. How many hours a week do you dance?
Levin: I dance from 9:30 a.m., to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday about 40 hours. Sometimes we have shows on Saturdays and Sundays but if we have a busy weekend, we get Mondays off or start a little later at 11 a.m., instead of 9:30.

Krichiver: What are some fun or funny memories you have?
Levin: I fall a lot on stage. At the time it’s more embarrassing than funny, but after I watch it on video it seems funny.

Krichiver: What do you do when you fall? Do you just get back up and keep going?
Levin: Yes. There are times when it happens so fast.

Krichiver: When I go to different competitions every stage is different and some of the floors can be slick.
Levin: Also different types of shoes can help or hinder.

Krichiver: How do you keep from having sore toes when you dance on pointe [dancers moving gracefully on the tips of their toes]?
Levin: I tape my toes and use second skin. It’s a jelly square that you put on the tops of your toes and you wrap tape around them so you don’t get blisters. I get bruised toenails sometimes.

Cohen: Would you ever have to miss a rehearsal if your toenails were bruised?
Levin: I wouldn’t necessarily have to miss but I could ask to put my ballet flat (see Krichiver, page 4)
Editorial

We have a column by Elliott Familant on page 13 filled with practices one can adopt into one’s daily life to help one cope with the current pandemic. In the last part on “Feeling Gratitude in Dark Times” he mentions the morning ritual that some Jewish practice upon awakening, Nisim B’chol Yom (Prayer for Daily Miracles).

This reminded me of my editorial published exactly 17 years ago. For those who are not able to see or rise or get dressed, and feel uncomfortable reciting a bracha levatala, a blessing in vain whose purpose cannot be fulfilled, see the list below. Some of them may be inspiring to those with no religious beliefs.

Recently I heard some spiritual leaders comment that before our current health crisis we were so busy we did not set aside quiet time in order to examine our values. This is an important concept in Judaism. It is one of the goals of our holidays, especially our Sabbath observance. One of the benefits of sheltering-at-home, they teach, is we now have plenty of time to contemplate and determine what changes we need to make. That concept is reflected in the last blessing below, written 28 years ago.

From May 14, 2003 editorial (abbreviated):

When I lived in San Francisco, I was involved with inaugurating a Jewish Healing Center in 1992. The rabbi who oversaw this huge undertaking was Nancy Flam. One of her responsibilities was leading a spiritual support group for AIDS patients. One Jewish teaching she shared with them was the morning blessings.

For example, “Blessed are You, our God who firms man’s footsteps.” A man from the group was not content saying the blessing about walking when in fact he could not get out of bed. Rabbi Flam understood but did not have an answer for him.

At a women’s conference a few weeks later, she led a workshop on Jewish texts of healing. She explained her dilemma and then asked each woman to write a blessing that one could say if one was too sick to recite the traditional morning blessings.

The following is a partial list of those. Besides being good for those coping with illness, these can be a source of strength for someone grieving a loss or facing other challenges.

Rewritten from, When the Body Hurts the Soul Still Longs to Sing

- I gratefully acknowledge today with its infinite possibilities and opportunities.
- Blessed is our Eternal God, Creator of the Universe, who has allowed me to experience both great pleasure and the chance to learn of life, for the hope offered by this new day.
- Praised are You, God who has made me as You wanted me, so that I may open my heart to love myself as I am. Thank you for opening my heart.
- Blessed are You, Source of Life and Love. Thank You for creating a world with the possibility of healing. May it be Your will that I should be healed in body and soul.
- Spirit of the Universe, thank You for allowing me to experience the sacredness of life on this earth. With You I greet this new day in praise for the wondrousness of all life.
- Thank You, God for the light that is breaking through the sky, the sun that shines upon my face, my mind that is still alert and functioning despite my limitations. Through the day You will join me on this journey, so that I will never be alone or frightened, for I know You will be there. I can thank you for what I am capable of enjoying this day.
- Blessed are You Divine Creator, for giving me another day, another hour, another moment of life. I hope to find Your comfort, love, grace and courage as I walk through this day.
- Blessed are You, Source of Life, who has given me consciousness once again. With each day of life, may I continue the task of repairing the world and take wonder and joy in the miracle of life.

(see Editorial, page 4)
KRICHER\[continued from page 2\]

shoes on. If it gets infected you can’t dance en pointe at all and you have to let it heal without anything touching it. If that happens I would dance in socks or ballet flat shoes.

Krichiver: What is something that most people don’t know about being a professional dancer?

Levin: Obviously people know how hard it is but I don’t think people realize how much fun it can be. Other than dancing, we get to attend functions as representatives of the ballet. We go to galas and symphony performances as ambassadors for the company. The mayor gave us his suite at an Indiana Pacers [NBA] game so we had excellent seats.

Krichiver: If you hadn’t decided to become a professional dancer what do you think you would have become instead?

Levin: I have always wanted to be a physical therapist. I’m in school for that part time now. I do my classes online. When I stop dancing that is what I want to be. Every company has their own physical therapist. I would like to help dancers in a different company.

Krichiver: That would be good since you have the experience of being a dancer. Do you have a favorite dance step?

Levin: I love pirouettes [a complete turn in place on one leg], especially en pointe.

Krichiver: How many can you do?

Levin: Consistently three, and on occasion five or six.

Krichiver: I have heard that they are super hard to do. What do you enjoy doing when you are not dancing?

Levin: I like to do outdoorsy activities. I love horseback riding. That was another activity I had to sacrifice.

Cohen: Do you have a favorite Jewish holiday and have you ever been to Israel?

Levin: Chanukah is my favorite because I like lighting the menorah and getting gifts for eight nights in a row. My older sister and I want to take the Birthright trip to Israel together but so far we haven’t found a time when we are both free to go at the same time.

Cohen: Did you have a bat mitzvah?

Levin: My parents wanted me to. I went to a Jewish kindergarten, first grade and Hebrew school at synagogue, Ohev Shalom in Bucks County, Pa., but I didn’t have time to prepare for a bat mitzvah.

Krichiver: I’m sure deciding not to have one was a difficult decision to make, but you could still have one as an adult.

Cohen: How long have you been living in Indianapolis?

Levin: More than two years. Dr. John Abrams [sponsor] has helped me get to know the Jewish community here.

Sierra Krichiver is a 13-year-old who has been dancing for 7 years. She first started at Performer’s Edge in Carmel, Ind., and now dances on the competition team at A-List Dance Center in Carmel, Ind. She enjoys all styles of dance including tap, jazz, ballet, and contemporary, but tap is her favorite.

Sierra is also very involved in the Jewish Community. She became Bat Mitzvah at the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation last June, and she attends Goldman Union Camp Institute in the summer, which is her “home away from home.” It was such an amazing experience for her to meet Sierra Levin, another Jewish dancer in Indiana with the same name as herself! Sierra Krichiver hopes to continue both her dance and Jewish paths in the future.

For more information about the Indianapolis Ballet go to: indyballet.org or Indianapolis Ballet, 502 N. Capitol Ave., Suite B,

EDITORIAL

(continued from page 3)
to recognize and count your blessings.
• Blessed are You, Source of creation, wisdom and sanity, whose ways I can never fully understand, who is taking me down a path I do not understand, for reasons I do not understand, and who will give me the blessings You want for me. I turn my will over to You. • Thank You God, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, who has created me for this opportunity for humility, for the experience of the care of my loved ones, and for the will to learn courage and hope – ingredients that are and have been so vital to life. • A silent walk in fresh air (woods, ocean, park) to renew the beauty of breadth of the universe: a lift from the personal which is momentary. • Blessed is the Eternal One who gives me the ability to remember those blessings which are still mine to affirm, and the strength to arise anew this day. • Praised are You, God, Ruler of the Universe, who has created us with the ability to experience the warmth of the sun and the touch of our fellow humans even when we are not feeling well. • Blessed are You, source of all creation, who sustains me this day. • Thank You God for giving me all the special, precious things in my life. Please grant me my health and my strength so I can continue to praise You and walk in Your footsteps. • Blessed are You, eternal God, who has awakened my soul to a new day, allowing me to love and be loved by others. • The weaker my body becomes, the stronger the fire of my soul burns. Thank You for freeing me from the distractions which prevented me from self-examination and spiritual growth.

Wishing all a Shavuot Sameach!

Jennie Cohen, May 20, 2020 ☼

A Prayer for Healing in the Era of Covid-19

By Rabbi Leah Doberne-Schor

Dear God,

We ask that You be there for us, as you were for our ancestors, a pillar in our midst. Help us to turn to You, O God, for guidance during these troubled times. Give us strength for the weeks ahead. Help us to reach out in love and compassion to one another, to support those who are ill, unable to leave their homes, or who are struggling financially.

Be with our doctors and caregivers, our nurses and scientists, as they are working to develop a cure and care for those who are ill.

Be with all who are ill and their families, offering them Your compassion.

And, we pray, Your healing.

Be with our leaders. Guide them to wise decisions in these troubled days.

Be with us O God. Help us to find the inner strength to be patient when our nerves are tested.

Be our Still Waters when we are surrounded by fear and anxiety. Be our Rock, to Whom we can turn and give our worry and fears.

Be our Shelter. Guide our steps and keep us safe.

Help us to feel Your presence in these times of change.

Rabbi Leah Doberne-Schor serves Beth Israel Congregation (bethisraelflorence.org) in Florence, S.C. From: reformjudaism.org/blog/2020/03/26/shabbat-prayer-healing-era-coronavirus ☼

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Based on CDC projections, local government officials, and prevailing public sentiment about the COVID-19 status in the U.S., Indianapolis Ballet has made the decision to open their 2020–21 Season with The Sleeping Beauty in September. Indianapolis Ballet Camps have been rescheduled for July 20–24, 2020.

Ticket sales cover a critical part of their annual operations costs and, even during these challenging times, those costs continue. By donating your tickets, purchasing or renewing a season subscription, or making a contribution to IB Emergency Relief Fund at (indyballet.org/relief), you’re ensuring the continuity of their operations. ☼
Difficult and Amazing Times

Here in Israel the Ministry of Health recommends that I stay home all day, especially since I am 70 years old. That is not easy. My daily exercise routine was to ride my bicycle to shul for morning prayers. But because of the virus, the shul has been closed for the past month. Now I have to do most of my praying and also my exercising at home.

What is amazing about these times? Many incredible things are happening in the world. A few months ago battles were being fought in the Ukraine, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Many people were killed. Now, thank G-d, almost no fighting is taking place. The UN is trying to completely stop all fighting everywhere!

Here in Israel the security situation has improved. The number of terrorist attacks has gone down dramatically. The terrorist organizations in Lebanon and Iran are now working very hard to help the sick and prevent the virus from spreading.

The weapons factories are making respirators! The soldiers are delivering food packages to the sick and elderly who have to stay home. The military intelligence is busy locating and bringing urgent medical supplies to Israel.

Here we are seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that a time will come when there will be no war, and swords and all armaments will be transformed into plowshares and other useful appliances.

This period of time is called the Days of the Moshiach (Messiah). This will be a wonderful era! No more evil, no more sickness or death. We will live forever! G-d will be revealed to everyone, everywhere! Right now G-d is still hidden from many of us. Of course many of us believe in Him and realize that He is our life and existence and see how He runs the world. But, since He is still somewhat hidden, there are those who do not yet believe. And those of us who do believe still need to work hard to strengthen our belief.

This is also changing. Chabad and many other organizations work to help people believe in G-d and live lives of Torah. We work hard to bring ourselves closer to G-d, and bring everyone closer to G-d. Today, as a result of the virus, we are working overtime. Every spare minute I spend on the phone, talking to people that for many years were not interested to hear my messages.

What is happening? Many people have been busy all of their lives working jobs in their professions. This kept them busy and provided them a certain satisfaction, so they were not interested to hear any new ideas. However, now their businesses or laboratories are closed, and they have to stay home. No bars, discos or other outside distractions! G-d is having mercy on us. He is giving us plenty of spare time to look for Him, and He is opening our hearts to find Him. Soon, very soon, Moshiach will speed up this process, and G-d will be revealed to all of us!

How can each of us speed up this process? Our leader, the Lubavitcher Rebbe told us to increase our learning of Torah and fulfilling of mitzvahs, especially to learn what the Torah teaches us about the days of Moshiach. Every good deed that we do is added on to all of the good deeds of our ancestors and makes our world a better place. Let all of us do everything we can to bring Moshiach Now!

We wish everyone a good holiday of Shavuos, and hope that Moshiach will come today, so that we can celebrate this holiday together in Jerusalem.

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Coping with Covid Requires Navigating Uncertainty

I’m no stranger to the fear and angst that living with chronic uncertainty can generate. For the almost four years that my husband, Ray, lived with cancer, we spent many of our days tiptoeing through a landmine of medical complexities, holding our collective breath in fear of the next exigency. After his passing almost five years ago, I never imagined there would come a time when those same feelings would resurface. But I was wrong.

Unlike a personal medical crisis however, Covid-19 is a crisis of global proportions from which no one is exempt.

We are all equal in the eyes of Covid. Each of us is now living in an altered universe where many of the assumptions and expectations upon which our daily lives have been based no longer apply or exist. We have no map, no compass by which to navigate except, perhaps, a sense of communal responsibility and an abiding belief that “this too shall pass.”

I listen to others and hear my own truths reflected in their words. We have trouble focusing; we sleep too much, eat too much, drink too much – as we try to fill the hours and days of sheltering in place. We obsessively watch news as we look for more closets to clean and photos to scrapbook.

We ask ourselves questions for which there are no certain answers: Will our families remain safe and healthy? How long will this last and what will it do to our minds, bodies and bank accounts? What will life look like once the pandemic has subsided? How will our world change?

Like many of us who have dealt with personal trauma, illness or loss, time has enabled me to look back and reflect on what I learned from living through an extended period of “not knowing” or being able to predict the outcome. This is what I learned.

I discovered from making my bed each morning that the simplest of actions can create a sense of order as we face a new day.

I recognized that it was much easier to maintain a positive, hopeful attitude when I did some form of exercise or act of self-care every day.

I realized that avoiding the elephant in the room was not as helpful as “riding” it. Facing up to my fears and concerns was initially very difficult but in the end, it enabled me to make concrete decisions that served my family better than if I had ignored the realities.

I set a day each week, (for me it was Friday, the Jewish Sabbath), and told myself that all I needed to do was to make it through until the following Friday. Focusing on getting through week by week, rather than day by day or even hour by hour, gave me strength and determination because at the end of the week, I wanted to say: “We made it.”

And perhaps, most significantly, I never lost sight of all of the many beautiful things in my life and marriage – even in the face of losing them. Cultivating gratitude is a game changer when running a marathon of uncertainty.

I have no crystal ball or means by which to know more than anyone else about what will happen during and after this unprecedented time in history. But if we all do the best we can do, individually and communally, I believe we will emerge stronger and more aware of how much we treasure the families and communities that we have built.

Amy Hirshberg Lederman is an author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney who lives in Tucson. Her columns in the AJP have won awards from the American Jewish Press Association, the Arizona Newspapers Association and the Arizona Press Club for excellence in commentary. Visit her website at amyhirshberglederman.com.
Iyar – A Month of Healing

We welcomed the month of Iyar on the eve of April 24th, the time of the new moon. May this be a month of healing and blessing for me, for you, all of Israel, and the entire world! This month hosts the holiday of Lag B’omer beginning on sunset May 11th. The holiday of the month epitomizes the spiritual energy of the month. Lag B’omer commemorates the end of the plague that killed 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva, a great Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud. May we see a meaningful diminishment of our modern day plague by then.

Lag B’omer is also the yahrzeit celebration of Rabbi Shimeon Bar Yochai. Because of his spiritual radiance, having realized the soul’s unification with the limitless light of God, this rabbi was called the Holy Candle. This awesome holiday inspires each of us to experience our own soul’s highest connection to the Divine as well.

The Hebrew letters for the name of the month Iyar spell out the initials of the verse, Ani Yud Yud Rofecha (I am God your healer.) What a powerful mantra to meditate upon. Try it. Take a moment, even right now. Be with your breath as you take a few slow and deep breaths. Repeat this mantra to yourself with each breath. Know this as the truth. God is your healer. God is healing you right now! All healing comes from the experience of our connection to God, the Creator of all life, the Source of all blessing and love.

In order to heal, to become more whole, we must go beyond our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and living. We must change our thinking and create new and wonderful habits for ourselves. How can we expect to facilitate healing and growth in our lives if we keep doing the same things we always do over and over? Being sheltered in place has given us opportunities to nurture ourselves in new ways.

Healing begins with a careful discernment between ego states masquerading as the self and the soul, our true essence and identity. To the extent we are identified with the ego, we will lack objectivity and not see the spiritual opportunity present in the life challenge. Know that if and when you are in a blaming mode or victim mode, you are not in touch with the truth of who you are.

Healing requires a deep listening to oneself in the most honoring respectful way. Ask yourself, “Can I be open and listen to the deep knowing inside myself that is coming from inner stillness, the voice of the soul? Or do I listen to the chatter and hysteria of the ego mind, which is loud and clamoring for my attention?” Be with your feelings without blaming anyone. The common tendency to judge and be overly critical of oneself or others weakens self-esteem and limits the flow of healing energy. Blaming keeps you stuck as a victim. Let go of blame, breathe it out with the breath and take responsibility for your own healing. Be compassionate with yourself. Cultivate and heighten your appreciation and gratitude for all that you do have right now.

Iyar is the connection between the previous month of Nissan, which hosts Passover and the following month of Sivan, which hosts the holiday of Shavuos. Healing, purification and refinement of our character traits is now needed to internalize the spiritual gifts we have been given as well as to be open to future blessings at the time of Shavuos. Many Jews participate in a spiritual practice of Counting the Omer that encompasses the entire month of Iyar as recorded in the Bible. “You shall count seven perfect Sabbaths from the day following the Passover holiday when you brought the Omer as a wave offering until the day after the seventh Sabbath, when there will be fifty days.” (Lev. 23:15–16)

The Counting of the Omer is a spiritual meditative practice that helps people become more aware of the preciousness of each day as well as to help refine our character traits. Each week of the Counting of the Omer is devoted to reflection and meditation on a particular sefirot (divine attribute) in relation to the other nine sefirot. The sefirot are explained in depth in my book New Age Judaism. The sefirot constitute what is called the Tree of Life. When the Bible says that the human being was made in the image and likeness of God, these words are actually referring to the sefirot. When the sefirot were first created, they appeared in the form of a man. The sefirot are not separate from the Creator, but they are not the same either.

The sefirot are the ways we experience and know God. The sefirot are considered vessels and lights – vessels because at the same time they delineate and limit Ein Sof (literally”without end”– the hidden, infinite aspect of God), and lights because they reveal Ein Sof in ways that can be received directly. Meditating and experiencing the sefirot in our own bodies is a very powerful, holy, and profound spiritual experience (see New Age Judaism for guided meditation on the sefirot in the body).

Each day when Jews count the Omer during the month of Iyar, they meditate on the qualities of the sefirot in relation to the other sefirot so as to expand their capacity to experience and embody the divine attributes within themselves.

Meditating of the sefirot gives us an opportunity to call forth various emotional energies for different situations. For example, at times we have to be strong and set definitive boundaries; at other times we have to love unconditionally and have no boundaries. Not having the capacity to express what is appropriate in any given situation is limiting and detrimental to oneself and to others. Though we have a propensity in one direction, for example, some of us are more kind than strong. We need to cultivate the whole spectrum of emotional capacities as presented in the Tree of Life.

For example, Abraham, known to embody the quality of hesed (loving kindness) was constantly challenged to demonstrate gevura (strength). It was neither his nature, nor his desire to send his son Ishmael away and yet he did. He had to rise above his nature. In this way, he gained the capacity to choose what was needed and appropriate for a situation, rather than limited by the feeling of “this is the way I am”. Let’s be mindful of when we limit ourselves in this way this month. How can we move out of our comfort zone and show up in our life in new and more loving ways?

Purification is a major theme reflected in the Torah portions for this month of Iyar. These portions instruct us that it is in the sanctification of the basic physical things of life that we experience holiness and become holy people. It is not enough to simply meditate to be holy. Through the mundane world and its myriad of physical activities like food, sex, love, money, and business, we have an opportunity to experience God. In this way we purify ourselves and the world. The connections (mitzvot) we make through the spiritual and physical aspects of our life, allow us to bring Godliness more into our very being. So may this month be one of healing, a month of becoming more whole, more open, vital and alive, no matter what is taking place around us.

Melinda Ribner, L.C.S.W. is also the author of Everyday Kabbalah, Kabbalah Month by Month and New Age Judaism, and The Secret Legacy of Biblical Women: Revealing the Divine Feminine. Internationally known for her pioneering work in kabbalistic meditation and healing, she is also a spiritual psychotherapist and for more than 30 years has used kabbalistic wisdom as part of treatment. She offers a free newsletter on meditation, healing, kabbalistic energies of the months, holidays, and more. www.kabalahoftheheart.com. Email: Beitmiriam@msn.com.
The Journey of Amos Goodheart

If faith is the sap of the Jewish tree of life, then good deeds are its fruit. Those who believe that good deeds are the fruit of the Tree of Life like to tell the riddle of Amos Goodheart.

It all began late one night as Amos, a wealthy merchant, read his <i>Chumash</i>. A heavenly messenger came through his roof and ceiling as easily as a sunbeam penetrates the stained glass window of your synagogue. Amos put down his bible and stared in wonder at the angel. “Tomorrow,” said the messenger, “you must appear before the throne.”

Next morning, dressed in his finest clothing, Amos the Good stood in the throne room of his ruler. Solemnly, the King told him that he must prepare for a journey to another Kingdom far over the cloud-crowned mountains that surrounded his homeland.

“Tomorrow,” said his ruler, he must leave. “Be at the throne room at dawn and I will show you the way. And be prepared for your journey over the mountaintops,” he cautioned. A thousand questions, like the lights that flashed in the huge chandelier over the throne, danced in Amos’s mind. How could a man prepare for a trip to an unknown land?

But before he could turn doubts into questions the King spoke. “Amos, you may only carry that which cannot be carried.” The voyager was left with his unanswered questions. But one did not question the King.

Not much time, thought Amos the traveler. By dawn tomorrow he must be ready for a long trip to a foreign country.

Due to the generosity of the King he owned many possessions. But what to carry in the light of the riddle? What did it mean? The king loved riddles. But how could he carry what cannot be carried?

His advisors thought about the puzzle with faces distorted by wrinkled foreheads and narrowed eyes. Carried, but not carried? “I have it,” said his advisor. “It is simple. A cart. We will load up a cart. You will ‘carry’ nothing. But a donkey shall pull a wagon full of legal papers, money, food, and clothing. Maybe even a second one containing a few of your more interesting friends and musicians to entertain you on this long, hard journey.

Amos frowned. No, he didn’t think a “cart” fell within the king’s meaning. Finally, after further talk Amos figured out that his Ruler intended him to carry whatever bundles did not require the labor of his hands and arms. Aha, he would fill his pockets. But due to his good fortune what huge pockets they must be.

First, gold. He must bring his gold coins. A new business in a new land would require much money as well as credit. Gold had value everywhere. And there was his lock-box full of contracts, documents of legal ownership, and titles. He must bring his titles. But wait – what about food for the trip?

A journey without a map? The path might lead through desert, wilderness, perhaps oceans. He would need food: many wheat cakes flavored with sesame oil and honey – his favorites. Why be bored with tasteless cakes on such a long journey? But he recalled the king’s riddle. He could “only carry that which could not be carried”.

And pockets were only pockets; there were hard choices to make.

He summoned his tailor. “Make me a suit of clothing, immediately!” he commanded, “with many pockets. Huge pockets. Deep and wide. For tomorrow our ruler is sending me on a lengthy journey to a faraway Kingdom.”

Late that night the puzzled tailor returned with his creation. The merchant smiled. It was made exactly as he desired. A row of pockets lined the front and back of the pants. And the coat – by use of the lining – was one gigantic pocket. Tomorrow, thought the merchant, he would load up and appear before his Master.

And so he did. In the gray dawn the silly figure of Amos Goodheart stood before the palace of his king. His pockets, stuffed with gold coins, oily wheat cakes, and bunches of legal paper, pulled him down like an invisible hand. His pants, had he not grabbed them with both hands, would have fallen below his knees. Even worse than his sagging pants, his coat stuffed with soggy wheat cakes, slumped his back and shoulders. And splotted with rotten sesame oil, it was beginning to smell like the fishmonger’s week-old cod at the bazaar. His dignity had fled. This was no figure of Amos Goodheart.

He looked up to direct his prayers to the figures, half-human, half-smoke. A pale woman said, “When I was sick you brought me in bread with broth. Hunger and loneliness you banished from my life.”

“You helped me one cold winter night, pull my mule from the ditch,” said a neighbor. “And inspired me to do the same for others.”

And I’m the beggar boy. Every Sunday on your way to <i>shul</i>, a coin you put in my cup. I grew up without bitterness because of you.

Blessings from a life of good deeds anointed the head of Amos Goodheart. He stood tall. His clown clothes dissolves at his feet. And he smelled like honey clover in the meadow.

“Here, here is the way,” they said. And they all set off together on the longest journey a man can make. Amos Goodheart carried nothing except his good deeds.

My Father, by Russ Roberts

Theodore (Ted) Alan Roberts, 89, passed away on March 2, 2020 in Huntsville, Ala., where he had lived for the last 42 years. He was born in Memphis, Tenn. He served in the Air Force and he graduated from Memphis State University (now the U of Memphis) and earned a masters in psychology from Iowa State University.

Years ago, my dad told me the phrase he wanted on his tombstone: “His heart was full of stories” He got that one right. He wrote hundreds of stories on Jewish themes, sports, daily life, his children and his grandchildren. They appeared in publications all over the world: <i>The New York Times</i>, <i>The Wall Street Journal</i>, <i>Reader’s Digest</i>, <i>The Forward</i>, <i>Hadassah</i>.

He also wrote poems and song lyrics. He wrote and narrated dozens of stories for the radio as part of WLRH’s Sundial Writers Corner. He wrote a children’s book (see Roberts, page 8)
**Wiener’s Wisdom**

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

### Don’t Lose Sight of Other Sacrifices

The days are filled with news of the pandemic. The nights are filled with repetition about the pandemic. That is how it should be.

However we need to understand that the world continues to turn. While we are seriously concerned about where to go or when it will end, it is also necessary for us to continue, as best we can, the daily pursuits of our lives.

This in no way lessens the severity of what we are experiencing. What we should understand as the world turns, we too should turn with it for example:

Last month, we should have commemorated the end of one of the worst nightmares of our history as a nation – the end of the Vietnam War. Forty-five years ago, the debacle initiated by our leaders ended in defeat – a humiliating defeat – the worst in our nation’s history.

How many have visited or seen pictures of the Vietnam Memorial? The starkness of it should be a reminder that, in addition to sacrificing 58,220 of our finest, there was a darkness that enveloped us and created an atmosphere of mistrust that exists to this day.

These men and women, we need to remember, will never have families of their own, no children to shower with affection, no stories of growing old, no tomorrows, only yesterdays. The survivors and their families are left with the horrors of emptiness that will never be filled.

Each veteran returned to a country that showed contempt for their service and the sacrifices associated with that service. There were no parades, no outpouring of love and affection for those who survived this nightmare.

A movie, The Last Full Measure, depicts the agony of loss and the frustration of reckless involvement. Limbs were lost, lives shattered, remains are still missing to this very day.

For what? For whom? These questions and more linger and will never be forgotten by time. Over, and over, I watched the pain of the afflicted. In their faces, I saw the blank stare of men and women who were searching for the key to survival, to find truth in their efforts. Yes, they gave “the last full measure” in attempting to fulfill the obligations they swore to uphold.

None of us will truly understand the torment, the agony, the despair felt as their comrades fell at their feet. None of us will truly understand the fear of not knowing whether there would be a tomorrow or wholeness.

The blood that was spilled, that now nourishes the earth where they fell, should be a reminder of our shame. Perhaps only eyes washed by tears can really see clearly the futility of that senseless war. Perhaps the tragedies we encounter are less significant than what happens within us.

To me, the greatest sin of this debacle was the attempt to justify the sacrifice. The film I alluded to symbolizes true patriotism, true heroism. Names such as Airman First Class William Pitsenbarger illustrate what is right with our country.

Names on the Vietnam Memorial, such as Major Alan Pasco, a childhood friend of mine, are a testament to the bravery and dedication of so many because of love of country, love of humanity, love of life.

These two represent all that is good in us, the sacrifices we are willing to make to protect who we are, and yet to be.

These two also represent the men and women who serve our country daily through their untiring service. Perhaps the (see Wiener, page 9)

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**Robert Wiener’s Wisdom**

### Don’t Lose Sight of Other Sacrifices (continued from page 7)

called Oodles of Noodles. One of his granddaughters illustrated it. But there was one thing he loved more than words. Family.

On a Saturday night in 1947 in Memphis, Tenn., at a dance at Beth El Emeth Synagogue, a 17 year old named Ted Roberts asked a 15 year old named Shirley Goldberger for a dance. Four years later they were married, a dance that lasted 69 sweet years.

At a party, someone once asked him: How did someone like you ever get a saint like Shirley to agree to marry you? Without smiling, he dead-panned: I have a lot of money.

That certainly wasn’t true in 1951. Eventually, my dad had what he thought of as enough money. He used to tell me that his measure of success was supporting his family and staying out of jail.

He and my mom created the incredible home that nurtured all of us and in turn, our children, too. He was an incredible father and grandfather, an unending source of amusement and story-telling inspiration. He was an incredible teacher as generations of bar and bat mitzvah students at Etz Chayim Synagogue in Huntsville, Ala., can attest.

To say he was unconventional doesn’t begin to cover it. He rode a bike into his 80s and never wore a helmet. He liked the feeling of the wind in his hair, even when it was the attempt to justify the sacrifice. The film I alluded to symbolizes true patriotism, true heroism. Names such as Airman First Class William Pitsenbarger illustrate what is right with our country.

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**Editor’s Note:** The National Jewish Post & Opinion was honored to have published the humor of Ted Roberts, z”l, The Scribbler on the Roof, since 2009. We thank him for sharing his musings and insights with us – we’re the better for it. He made us laugh; he made us think. He will be greatly missed by us and our readers. His work appeared in newspapers around the US, on National Public Radio, and numerous web sites. As of this publishing, his Web site: www.wonderwordworks.com was still active. His collected works The Scribbler On The Roof is still available for purchase on Amazon.com or lulu.com. Our condolences to his family.
Inspirational Companions

I have recently been introduced to two books by Alden Solovy: *This Joyous Soul: A New Voice for Ancient Yarlings*, 2019, and *This Grateful Heart: Psalms and Prayers for a New Day*, 2017, both by Reform Judaism Publishing, CCAR Press.

First, *This Joyous Soul: Solovy*, a liturgist, has created a book of prayers which follows the Reform siddur (prayerbook), *Mishkan T’filah*, organized around the weekday morning service, beginning with morning blessings, ending with the *Kaddish* to Closing Meditations. These prayers are meant to augment the congregant’s experience, to serve as doorways, as the author states, to one’s own Jewish spirituality.

His prayers are written in a contemporary language, accessible and easy to understand. Solovy says they are “poetry, meditation, interpretations, challenges, reframes and flights of fancy.” He hopes these prayers will also serve as a starting place for a personal prayer practice.

It is difficult to choose just one of his 130 plus prayers to highlight. I had recently come upon this quote in USA Today, that the average adult laughs only 15 times per day. Count one of mine due to Solovy’s question in “Sacred Silly”: “Wouldn’t it be fun, just one time, / To secretly slip a goofy prayer/Inside the siddur, /Say, in the middle of the Amidah/...Let’s get a few for God. / Let’s laugh out loud in praise...” This idea surprised me and I did laugh out loud.

Some of my favorites reside in his Morning Psalms. Dance Hallelujah: “A step, a bend, a twirl, a leap,/A breath of light,/A stream of color,/Spinning toward radiance and splendor.../God of Miriam,/...Teach me to dance my Hallelujah...” Joyous for sure! In Solovy’s Concluding Prayers section, his “Whispered Prayer,” especially captures the hope that your prayers carry holiness and power. And that “Your whispered prayer/Is the song of the ages./Your secret hope//Is the light of tomorrow./Your quiet yearning//Is the voice of eternity. ...” He connects you to the magic of the universe. May you find your favorites.

Further, in *This Grateful Heart*, Solovy explains in his introduction, how once he fell in love with a prayer. And he has continued this affair with prayers for 50 years. You, the reader, are the lucky beneficiary of this love affair. His goal is to enrich your life with prayer, to feed your soul with the love of prayer. With this book, he wants to let prayers flow into the routine of your life, into the flow of your time and seasons. He progresses from prayers for days, from waking to sleeping, to holy and special, to turning points, to end of days and grief, to memorial prayers.

We pray for all kinds of reasons, Solovy explains. He presents the gamut. Here are a few excerpts from his prayers: “Forgiveness Inside”: “God of redemption, // With Your loving and guiding hand // Seeking forgiveness is easy // Accepting forgiveness is a struggle... God of mercy, help me to leave my judgments behind, // To hear your voice, // To accept your guidance, // And to see the miracles in each day.”

“For Summer”: “Bless this summer with energy and vitality / So that all Your creatures / Enter the coming seasons In the fullness / Of Your bounty / Make me like the summer / Dawn, vibrant, awake, vital and ready.”

For Martin Luther King Day, “Let Truth”: “Awake you who sit idle and hapless against the tide of dishonesty and deceit. / Have you forgotten My promises? / Have you forsaken our covenant, our pact to care for Creation?” He admonishes you not to turn away from truth, hopes and ideals, especially cogen today.

In his “Veterans Day Prayer” he asks God to bless veterans “With a deep and abiding understanding / Of our profound gratitude.”

Solovy knows that expressing gratitude contributes to the happiness of your life. You are united with your grateful and joyous heart in reading both these collections of prayers. And if praying sustains you, if your heart’s desire is to become that “prayer with wings gliding on the currents of your faith,” then Solovy’s *This Joyous Soul* and *This Grateful Heart* will be your inspirational companions.


She has conducted creative writing/healing workshops for the homeless in recovery, for the HIV/AIDS affected/infected population, for Pink Ribbon Connection and for “Honoring the Sacred Feminine” conferences, celebrating women’s wisdom and spirituality.

Bonnie grew up in Indianapolis where she continues to live and work as a poet for Arts for Learning, as a copy editor for the Indianapolis Business Journal and as an Ai Chi (aquatic flowing energy) instructor at the JCC. Email: bmaurer@ibj.com.

**Alden Solovy** spreads joy and excitement for prayer. An American-Israeli liturgist, poet, author and educator, his writing was transformed by multiple tragedies, marked in 2009 by the sudden death of his wife from catastrophic brain injury. The Liturgist-in-Residence for the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, his teaching spans from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem to synagogues throughout North America, as well as Leo Baeck College in London and Limmud Conferences in the U.S., Canada and the UK.

He is the author of four books, the two reviewed here from CCAR Press, Jewish Prayers of Hope and Healing, 2013, and Haggadah Companion: Meditations and Readings, 2014. His fifth solo volume is slated for release in March 2021, also from CCAR Press. Alden’s work is anthologized in 14 volumes from Jewish, Christian and Catholic publishers. Alden also writes for Ritualwell, RavBlog and The Times of Israel. He’s a three-time winner of the Peter Lisagor Award for Exemplary Journalism. Find his latest work at: ToBendLight.com. In 2012, Alden made aliyah to Jerusalem. He can be reached at asolovy54@gmail.com.
Holocaust Educator

BY DR. MIRIAM L. ZIMMERMAN

A Souvenir from Auschwitz

Munich sandwiched our ten-day visit to Poland for the 75th anniversary commemorations of the liberation of Auschwitz. For a week, we visited our younger daughter Leah, her husband Ian, and two granddaughters, Ziva, 6, and Maya, 3. On Jan. 26, 2020, we caught up with the family at the Munich airport, joining them on the last leg of their flight to Kraków, the Nazi Deadly Lab Experiment Survivors group at the Munich airport, joining them for the last leg of their flight to Kraków, that had originated in Chicago.

Food, shelter, oxygen, clothing – a death camp like Auschwitz II–Birkenau (henceforth, “Birkenau”) strips its victims from everything a body requires to stay alive. Birkenau substituted starvation rations for food, unheated stables for shelter, ill-fitting uniforms that failed to protect from winter’s cold instead of seasonal clothing, and gas chambers in lieu of air to breathe. Prisoners had five minutes of bathroom time for the elimination of body wastes in open-air latrines, little more than sewers with wooden planks over them. Toilet paper? Any survivor of Auschwitz would laugh if you asked. Conditions varied somewhat in different parts of the camp, but rats and lice were so prevalent from the unsanitary conditions, that “epidemics of contagious diseases erupted frequently” (auschwitz.org/en/history/life-in-the-camp).

Conditions were so bad that SS physician Dr. Heinz Thilo called Auschwitz, “Anus mundi,” the “Anus of the world.” Please note that Auschwitz I was a concentration camp; Birkenau, a death camp.

On Jan. 27, 2020, the 75th anniversary of its liberation, the parking lot at Auschwitz I filled with buses, disgorging people from all over the world. Our two buses of the CANDLES tour (see prior column, “Anticipating Auschwitz,” April 1, 2020 or at this link: jewishpostopinion.com/?p=3764), arrived early so that we could go through security before lines formed to enter the camp for the ceremonies.

Beth Nairn, volunteer tour coordinator extraordinaire, thoughtfully arranged for boxed lunches to be distributed on the buses. We ate lunch comfortably while we waited for security to open.

Prior to the tour, participants filled out forms denoting any special dietary requirements, from kosher to vegan to food allergies. All our meals adhered to a variety of nutritional needs and preferences of the 65 of us on the CANDLES tour, many of whom were Holocaust educators, like myself.

In contrast, Nazi physicians devised food rations to ensure that inmates would starve to death within three months. Daily rations varied from 1,500 to 1,700 calories, significantly less than the 2,500 recommended for men and 2,000 for women. Thus, there was a constant need for inmates to secure additional food, either by “organizing” or by means of a better job. To “organize,” “organisieren,” in camp lingo, meant “stealing,” but without negative connotations. To “organize” in Auschwitz was a survival strategy. Such was the morality in the “Anus mundi.”

While walking from the parking lot to the ladies’ room at Auschwitz I, I heard languages from all over the world. Hitler would be appalled to see all races and colors of people mingling, touching, talking together. The joke on our buses was to remember to take two “potty Zlotys” for restroom use. A Zloty is worth about 25 cents. It cost nothing to enter the camp, but about 50 cents to use the bathroom. Richard and I stood in line to pay the attendant four Zlotys. We each received one token.

The line then diverged, women to the left while the men exited right. Crowded, both genders had to wait in another line for their respective cubicles. Despite the hordes of people, we enjoyed the luxury of private cubicles in a clean, heated indoor facility. Seventy-five years earlier, lines going to the left or to the right meant the difference between life and death. Throughout my three days in Auschwitz, I could not stop making comparisons between then and now.

My press credentials, obtained through the recommendation of my publisher, Jennie Cohen of the J&P&O, enabled me to sit with journalists from all over the world. Jennie also helped my husband acquire photographer credentials. We did not know that securing press passes would enable each of us to have a significantly better view of the ceremonies.

Dignitaries placed lighted candles at the Birkenau Memorial Monument after the main ceremony.

Those without press credentials had to watch the ceremonies from outdoor jumbo trons in Birkenau. No headsets; no simultaneous translation. The photographers, in their own area, had an excellent view of the survivors and dignitaries, laying wreaths or candles at the Birkenau Monument. They, too, remained outside for the duration, with their own jumbotron.

The ceremony itself lasted about three hours. Five survivors told their stories. In my opinion, too many politicians spoke (see prior column, “The Politics of Remembrance,” April 1, 2020 or at this link: jewishpostopinion.com/?p=3831). An exception was the keynote address by Ronald Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and Chairman of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation (ABMF).

It was as if Mr. Lauder spoke to me directly. He touched on why I continue to teach a course on this history and the implications for today. He invoked the future, noting the current rise in anti-Semitism, which, when combined with world indifference, has deadly effect. His keynote, in English, is currently available on YouTube, (youtube.com/watch?v=c-Ap6FP9m4s). But the ceremony rightfully belonged to the survivors. For their stories, browse to the ABMF website, (preserveauschwitz.org).

It was dark by the time we boarded the bus for the 45-minute drive to the Holiday...
The picture below shows the vent to the gas chamber in Crematorium IV. The guide detailed life in Auschwitz, the daily torments and terror. My head swam as we entered and exited block after block in Auschwitz I, with showcases of victims’ shoes, suitcases, hair, shaving brushes, spectacles, prostheses, or tallit sim (Jewish prayer shawls) of the victims.

Our guide paused in front of Block 10 to give us a crash course in medical experiments at Auschwitz. As someone who has made Nazi medicine an important part of her Holocaust course, I wanted to interrupt and point out that she was omitting too much; specifically, the ethical abuses of Nazi doctors relevant today.

"They’re going to die anyway," a ration-alization used by German physicians as they mutilated, sterilized, drugged, starved, infected with germs, or otherwise painfully maimed their subjects. Anesthetics were never used; death was almost always the result. Autopsies were performed to see the results of their “treatments.”

Doctors ignored the Hippocratic mandate to “do no harm.” Medical ethicists today agree that most of their research is useless. The Nazi doctors employed shoddy methodologies and did not properly record results. The “research” designed to prove the supremacy of the Aryan race was completely spurious. I wisely did not interrupt the guide, who actually did a commendable job summarizing what occurred in Block 10.

Auschwitz I contained 28 residential barracks, one kitchen, and one crematorium, which could burn 340 corpses in 24 hours. In contrast, Birkenau, designed solely for extermination, contained five crematoria. During the Hungarian Jewish genocide in 1944, those furnaces consumed about 4,500 corpses in 24 hours. The Nazis per-1944, those furnaces consumed about 4,500 corpses in 24 hours. The Nazis per-

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Birkenau is huge; we walked through the entire camp. Delineating the vastness of the camp and the scope of the murders deserves a separate column.

I would like to conclude with why this day was both one of the best and worst in my life. Exhausted and chilled despite layers of clothing beginning with long thermal underwear, I realized I was running a fever. But I toughed it out, inspired by those who survived much colder Auschwitz winters, with far less clothing. The day culminated in a candle lighting ceremony at the Birkenau Monument. In advance, Richard and I were asked to lead the Kaddish prayer.

Beth distributed transliterated copies of the Kaddish and votives to all assembled. I read a short, previously prepared intro to the Kaddish and explained the Jewish ritual of Yahrzeit. It was the 30th Yahrzeit of my father, Werner Loewenstein, of blessed memory, who fled Nazi Germany in 1937. This prayer is for you, Dad. As Richard and I chanted the Kaddish, I felt Dad’s presence with me in this horrible place, dissipating my discomfort, and making that moment one of the most powerful of my life.

But I was ill for the rest of my journey in Poland. The next day in Kazimierz, the Jewish Quarter of Kraków, remains a blur. I remember walking by the alley used in the movie Schindler’s List (pictured right) depicting the liquidation of the Kraków Ghetto.

After the tour, Richard and I remained in the Jewish Quarter for a 4:15 p.m. Shabbat service while the rest of the group bussed to Schindler’s factory. Although I felt alone standing for Kaddish behind the mechitzah (divider between men and women’s sections in an orthodox shul), it felt right to be there. Later that night at the hotel, we said goodbyes to our new friends in the CANDLES group, since we had an early flight to Warsaw the next day.

Somehow, I was able to make it through three days of Warsaw sightseeing without collapsing. By the time we returned to Munich, I was unable to stop coughing. I asked Leah to make an appointment for me to see a doctor, since I was now coughing from my lungs. I did not want to infect my grandchildren with what I suspected was pneumonia.

Seeing a German doctor in Munich is the subject for yet another column. Although the doctor pronounced my lungs clear, she gave me a prescription for antibiotics and a recommendation for an over-the-counter drug “to open my lungs.” Those medications, along with an inhaler, helped considerably, but I still could not shake my cough. I remained in the bedroom for most of our second week in Munich; no hugs for the grandkids when we said our goodbyes.

On Feb. 10, windstorms all over Europe delayed our nonstop Lufthansa flight to San Francisco (SFO) for ten hours. We had to make an unscheduled stop in Newark to pick up a new flight crew and to go through customs, since customs at SFO would be closed at our new 4 a.m. arrival time. No sleep that night. Once home, I collapsed.

For the next week, I could barely drag myself out of bed for meals. Richard acquired similar symptoms, mirroring mine from one week earlier. He felt equally debilitated and also developed a cough he could not shake. I could not imagine why each of us came down with such a bad flu, since we are zealots about flu shots.

Flu vaccines taken last fall should have lessened the severity of our illness, if it were, indeed, the ordinary flu. Covid–19 had not yet entered our consciousness. Richard was able to see his doctor’s nurse practitioner who prescribed antibiotics and ordered a chest x-ray, which turned out to be negative. He did not have pneumonia.

Our Northern California county was one of the first in the nation to mandate “social distancing” on Mar. 17, two days before Governor Gavin Newsome ordered the entire State to “shelter in place,” which order has now been extended through May. I was still not feeling 100%, and welcomed a respite from daily activities. Both of us stayed home for another week, still not up to par.

I began to see so many parallels between Auschwitz and the pandemic. The Covid–19 pandemic has overburdened the healthcare system, collapsed the global economy, created massive unemployment, and turned lives upside down. There was no toilet paper in Auschwitz, and there is no toilet paper in Costco. Crime and air pollution have gone down, while stress levels and death rates have increased. Relationships are disrupted, sometimes for the better, as families are forced to spend more time together.

As the pandemic spread, Ronald Lauder’s speech on Jan. 27 has proven remarkably prescient. Again, the antisemitism he described increased exponentially. Will the world remain indifferent as it did in Europe during the Holocaust?

Virulent antisemitic memes, circulating online, echo Nazi propaganda. Recently, I encountered, “Jews are the true virus,” echoing Hitler’s claim that Jews were infecting the Aryan race. President Trump, by repeatedly blaming the pandemic on a “foreign virus,” gave his followers permission to blame the Jews, always the foreigner, for Covid–19.

It also reminded me that Jews were blamed for the Black Death during the Middle Ages, because they survived in greater numbers than their Christian neighbors. Jewish law requires a prayer to insulate them from that plague. Signs everywhere now remind us to wash our hands; YouTube videos instruct how to wash our hands correctly.

Currently, the debate is about restarting the economy. Republican Texas Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, who is of the opinion that old people, i.e. those most at risk, should volunteer to die to save the economy” (Vanity Fair online). After all, they are going to die anyway. The question now debated in the media, “What is an acceptable death rate in exchange for restarting the economy?” sends chills down my spine.

As more has become known about the virus, I began to wonder if I contracted the disease that first day in Auschwitz, rubbing shoulders with people from all over the world. Since antibody testing is not yet readily available, despite our president’s proclamations to the contrary, I cannot prove it either way. No doubt I (see Zimmerman, page 13)
Developing a Practice in Times of Pandemic

BY ELLIOTT FAMILANT

The pandemic is overwhelming and disorienting. There are certain things you can do — wash your hands, follow guidelines for social distancing, cough into the crook of your elbow. Still, the enormity of the problem and the dramatic changes it has wrought in our lives has left many of us feeling out of control.

To cope with the crisis, some binge-watch Netflix or eat pints of ice cream. Others check their phone’s news feed 17 times a day or buy toilet paper. Instead of reacting in potentially unhealthy ways, there is something else you can do. Develop a practice.

You might think of a practice as doing something over and over again to learn a skill, like practicing a piece of music or practicing your ABC’s. What is important to realize is that the act of repetition, especially if done daily, is itself beneficial.

Traditional Jewish religious observance is a clear example of a practice. The well-known aspects of this life — defined times to say various prayers, proscriptive of thrice daily communal prayer, various dietary restrictions, and the wearing of specific types of clothing — are aspects of a tradition-rich in practice. These practices provide a structure, a grounding that is particularly beneficial in chaotic times, like our current circumstances.

Yet, you do not have to adopt an orthodox Jewish lifestyle in order to reap these benefits. Some daily practice is better than none. The exact nature of this practice does not matter much. It could be something you are doing now such as washing the dishes or walking the dog. Or it could be something from the spiritual or mindfulness traditions like prayer or meditation. There are many ways to develop a practice. The key is to do it in a way that a practice can develop within you.

How to Start

First, perform the practice daily, preferably at approximately the same time each day. You will know that a practice is established within you, when, if you miss a day, you feel out-of-sorts.

Second, perform the practice mindfully, with intention. While performing the practice, you are in the moment. Your mind is not wandering. You are not thinking about the next thing you need to do, or the argument you had with your friend, or what you are going to eat for lunch. You are attending to the task at hand. Of course, easier said than done. But there are a couple of techniques that help.

Slow down. Whatever you are doing as part of your practice, breathing, walking, praying, writing, washing the dishes; do it at a pace that is significantly slower than normal. Slowing the pace focuses your attention and makes the act more deliberate. Then, pay attention to the small, often overlooked details of what you are doing.

If you are lighting a candle, observe the sound of the match as it is struck and the way the light glints off your finger nails. If you take a daily walk, observe the sequence by which your foot comes in contact with the pavement, the swing of your arms, how you position your head. By observing, in such minute detail, you concentrate your mind and stay in the moment. If you want to consider a distinctly Jewish practice, below are three possibilities.

Hitbodedut — Talking to God

Traditional Jewish prayer is stylized and ritualized and is in someone else’s words. But, what if praying to God was more like you were talking to a close personal friend or the best therapist in the world. What would that be like? This intimate conversational way of relating to God is common among Evangelicals and I think helps account for their strong devotional commitment.

This form of prayer is also found in Judaism. It is called Hitbodedut and it was popularized by the Hasidic Rebbe Nachman of Breslov more than 200 years ago. The goals of this technique are to establish a close and personal relationship with God with the ultimate goal of achieving a state of transcendence. The technique is simple.

In its most common form, practitioners just pour out their thoughts and feelings to God in their own language. There is no ritual to perform, no special language or prayer to learn. It is just a straight unvarnished expression of what is on your mind. It need not have cosmic significance, the profane is considered as legitimate as the profound. Even an inability to think of something to say is considered legitimate content for Hitbodedut.

Hitbodedut is done silently, usually alone in a secluded place. A frequent recommendation is to perform it out in nature. A key aspect to this prayer is its duration. Multiple sources recommend an hour every day. This agrees with general recommendations related to meditation which suggests a practice between 30 minutes to an hour each day. But this is after you have meditated for a while. At the start, try 10 minutes a day. If your concept of God is that of one who can actually hear prayers, then you may find this practice to be compelling.

A Candle Meditation

Typically, meditation involves one or more objects of focus. It might be something internal like your concept of God or love, or some aspect of your physiology like your breath or heartbeat. Alternatively, it can be something external, like a natural vista or an image or icon. This particular meditation uses a lighted candle. We are all aware of the frequent presence of lit candles during various Jewish ceremonies. They are lit at the beginning and end of Shabbat. They are lit during Hanukkah and prior to major Jewish holidays. They are lit by families to mark the yahrzeit of a loved one. They also have a mystical significance.

They are thought of as a reminder of God’s presence and are considered representative of the human soul. The following meditation makes these kinds of mystical connections.

Darken the room and light the two candles. Allow your gaze to rest on the candles in front of you and breathe deeply using counts to four to regulate your breathing. Breathe in for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four, and rest for a count of four. As you breathe in this controlled manner, try to be aware of the colors in the flame, the white, the yellow, and the red. Then let your gaze fall on the blackness surrounding the flame.

As you meditate, you may see a sky-blue field around the darkness. The blackness may extend for a certain distance around the candle but around this will be an experience of pure sky-blue. The Zohar says that the blue that one sees around the flame represents the Divine Presence, Shekinah in Hebrew. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, z”l, suggested that the blue represents the spiritual essence of the light radiating from the candle. Rabbi Kaplan also suggested that it is possible to see visions in this blue field. Let me suggest one to you now based on a meditation created by Rabbi Marcia Prager.

*Visualize Abraham and Sarah standing before you. They can be seen as two radiant candles (see Familant, page 14) thereby subsequently passed whatever I had to Richard. If so, we had a milder form of the virus and, I am delighted to report, we both fully recovered. Covid-19 might have been my souvenier from Auschwitz.

Dr. Miriam Zimmerman is professor emerita at Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU) in Belmont, Calif., where she continues to teach the Holocaust course. She can be reached at mzimmerman@ndnu.edu. You can read Dr. Zimmerman’s coverage of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1995 at this link: jewishpostopinion.com/?p=3699.
Making Everyday Count

How can you make each day of your life matter?

The period of the Counting of the Omer, from Pesach to Shavu’ot, from the festival of freedom to the holiday of covenant, is a unique time in Jewish life. During this extended period – seven full weeks – we take a few moments daily to acknowledge the natural gifts we have been given by God. And we specifically and literally count the days of this procedure, from the 2nd night of Passover to the beginning of Shavu’ot, “First day, second day,” and so on, all the way until “Today [May 28, 2020] marks the 49th day in the Counting of the Omer, seven full weeks.”

This seemingly arcane ritual is a great and surprising gift. For the Counting of the Omer is actually a remarkable opportunity for each of us to recapture a spiritual center in our own lives.

While originally a purely agricultural offering of a “measured quantity of grain” (omer) on a daily basis, the process of making a small, very specific gift to God through prayer has within it a very important potential for cultivating awareness. As the text in Proverbs has it, “teach us to count our days so that we might make each day count.” Every day has the potential for beauty, accomplishment, love, holiness. Yet how often do we end a day without experiencing any of these in a meaningful way?

An accumulation of days like these leads us inexorably away from meaning and goodness. As Macbeth says, “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time. And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.” That sort of nihilism is the result of failing to see what is possible every day on this earth that God has made. When all that we count in our lives is our money – diminished or augmented – we miss the very point of being alive.

The Counting of the Omer, this very different kind of counting, comes to teach us a profound lesson; each day is filled with holy possibility. It is that we count, too, and every day counts. Each day is an opportunity for goodness, beauty, and meaning. Every day can reflect the Divine gifts we (see Cohon, page 15)
Creative Kosher Recipes


Many people have probably never heard of Miriam Pascal. I am one of them. She describes herself as a 20-something Jewish gal from New York, a self-taught cook. She founded OvertimeCook.com, a popular kosher recipe blog and has written two cookbooks before this – Something Sweet and Real Life Kosher Cooking.

Her new cookbook has some very good points – an introductory remark for each recipe; ingredients in the left column and numbered directions on the right; and a full-page, color photograph for each recipe including photographs of four dishes before each of the 10 chapters.

In her introduction, she recalls the memories of various recipes and says her goal is to make the recipes in this cookbook “approachable” and doable.” Her book’s subtitle is “Approachable Recipes for Memorable Dishes.” She wants to help her readers “create delicious food and special moments.”

A total of 200 photographs and 139 recipes plus 22 sauce and dressing recipes which can be used with other recipes are included. Of the 139 basic recipes, 46 are listed in the Pesach guide at the end.

Chapters and number of recipes are: Breakfasts and Breads (9), Appetizers and Snacks (16), Salads and Spreads (13), Soups and Stews (10), Meat and Poultry (27), Dairy and Meatless (13), Vegetables and Sides (16), Desserts and Drinks (15), Baked Goods and Pastries (12) and Sauces and Staples (8).

Among these are Puff Pastry Breakfast Pizza, Crispy Onion Strings, Meaty Root Vegetable Soup, Caramelized Onion and Cheese Manicotti, Two-Ingredient Chocolate Mousse and No-Bake S’mores Cheesecake. Sound yummy?

A new bride, especially, or any kosher cook will enjoy reading this cookbook and finding creative recipes for trying. I found a few I am going to try! Below are three from the book.

Sweet Potato Wedges with Avocado Drizzle (above)
(Pareve – Yield 6 servings)

“I always love a good sweet-and-savory recipe combo, and these sweet potatoes combined with the tangy avocado dip are no exception. As a bonus, the beautiful contrasting colors make it an eye-catching dish!”

3 sweet potatoes
3 Tbsp. oil
1 tsp. kosher salt
1/4 tsp. black pepper

Avocado Drizzle:
1 avocado
1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. garlic powder
2 tsp. lemon juice

Preheat oven to 425°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper; set aside. Peel sweet potatoes and cut into wedges. Place into a large bowl; add oil, salt, and pepper. Toss to coat. Place wedges in a single layer on prepared baking sheet. Bake for about 50 minutes, until the outsides are starting to brown. Meanwhile, prepare the avocado drizzle: Place peeled and pitted avocado into a bowl; mash until smooth. Add remaining ingredients; stir to combine. Remove roasted sweet potato from oven; allow to cool slightly. Just before serving, drizzle avocado mixture over wedges just before serving.

Roasted Vegetable Soup
(Pareve – Yield 6–8 servings)

“What started out as a fridge full of produce that had to be used up has morphed into one of my all-time favorite soups. Roasting the vegetables brings out their flavors, resulting in a healthy soup that’s packed with flavor and so filling! Feel free to customize your soup based on whichever veggies you happen to have on hand.”

2 large zucchini, diced
3 medium yellow squash, diced
2 red bell peppers, diced
2 onions, diced
1 lbs frozen cauliflower florets, defrosted
1/4 cup oil
1 Tbsp. kosher salt
1/2 tsp. black pepper
Soup:
4 cups vegetable broth
about 6 cups water
2 bay leaves

Prepare the roasted vegetables: Preheat oven to 400°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Place vegetables, oil, salt, and pepper into a bowl. Toss to combine. Divide between prepared baking sheets. Roast for 50-60 minutes, until vegetables are starting to brown. Prepare the soup: Place roasted vegetables, along with any juices, into a large soup pot. Add soup ingredients; bring to a boil. Simmer for about 1 hour. Discard bay leaves. Using an immersion blender, blend soup well, for about 3 minutes, until fully smooth. Adjust

(Suck Kaplan/recipes, page 16)
Shavuot Customs
Bind Family and Community

BY JULIETTE NEHRING

Time and its passing carry deep meaning in Jewish life. Daily activities, the passing of the week, a new month, the cycle of the seasons, events over a lifetime – all these can be marked with blessings and reflection. Counting the omer on the way to Shavuot, like other counting traditions, intentionally builds our anticipation of the culminating holiday. Although the focus of this holiday, also called Pentecost, has changed over the centuries, it remains one of the most important times of reflection in the Jewish year.

The word “Shavuot” means weeks referring to the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. It is sometimes referred to as Pentecost, because there is a period of 50 days between Passover and Shavuot. Its English name comes from the Greek term for the holiday, pentekoste hemera, or “fiftieth day” (from pentekonta or “fifty”).

Another name for Shavuot is Yom Habikkurim, or “The Day of the First Fruits.” The holiday was originally a wheat harvest festival celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. Israelites brought offerings of the first fruits of their fields to the Temple in Jerusalem. Harvest offerings were also brought to the Temple for Passover and for Sukkot, the other two of the three harvest festivals, sometimes called shalosh regalim, or three pilgrimage festivals.

Yet another name for Shavuot is Zeman Matan Torahenu, or “The Season of the Giving of Our Torah.” This name comes from the tradition that the giving of the Torah to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and especially the Ten Commandments, coincided with Shavuot. The focus of Shavuot in modern times has shifted to the giving of the Torah. The rabbis emphasized this connection after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

Many Shavuot customs have developed since its earliest celebrations. One legend says that the Israelites overslept on the morning on which they were to receive the Torah. From this came the tradition of staying up all night to study in the synagogue, insuring that one will not oversleep on Shavuot morning. This observance is called Tikkun Leil Shavuot, or “Restoration of Shavuot Eve.”

In services on Shavuot, the congregation stands during the reading of the Ten Commandments. The Biblical Book of Ruth is another special reading for Shavuot. The Book of Ruth is set in Biblical times during the wheat harvest; the period we now celebrate as Shavuot. Her story of choosing the Torah and the Jewish people as her own is seen as being congruent to the Jewish people’s acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

But as much as Shavuot is primarily a community holiday, other customs help bring the festival of Shavuot into your home and family. Confirmation of teenagers who have continued their studies after their bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies often is celebrated on Shavuot morning. Homes and synagogues are decorated with flowers and greenery, because when the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai to receive the Law, they found the area to be very fertile, with lush greenery and flowers.

Of course, you and your family might most enjoy the foods custom of Shavuot, which suggests the eating of dairy and sweet products in reflection of the Biblical verse: “And He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Juliette Nehring is a teacher, performer, writer, and collaborator at Ms. Juliette Music (nsjuliettemusic.com). She’s a music specialist at Congregation Beth Shalom (Indy) and Congregation Beth-El Zedeck and was the WFYI in Indianapolis On-Air Talent Sunday evening host from 2003–2014.

Editor’s Note:
With great sadness, our condolences go out to Sybil on the recent passing of her husband, Barry, z”l. (See his obituary on page 17.)
Modern Family (& The Middle) and Judy

ABC’s Modern Family (2009–2020) just completed its run. Whether or not one agrees that the program enhanced American family life with its tone, its characterizations and its scenarios, there is no question that it was a milestone in popular culture and in the family sitcom genre.

While the series did not have recurring lead Jewish characters, it occasionally indulged in Jewish humor and in references to Jews and Judaism.

The show did offer a milestone of sorts in its depiction of Jewish concepts. In the first episode of the 2015–2016 season, writer Abraham Higginbotham had Phil Dunphy (Ty Burrell) sport an Oy Vey tee shirt, and remark: “They loved it at the deli. They were kvelling.” He then praises his daughter’s ex-boyfriend, whom he’d love to bring back into the family: “You’ve done a real mitzvah, buddy.” Here was a rare and interesting use of the term, mitzvah (as “good deed” rather than its literal and theological meaning of “commandment”) in a TV series.

The two series finale episodes, written by the entire staff, had one reference each to Jews and Judaism. The series finale, “Modern Family” (2-24-16) written by Roy Goldstein is several inches shorter and a whole year younger than me,” Brick complains, “and he’s a man now?”

That’s just what they do in Josh’s culture,” Dad (Neil Richard Flynn) reassures. “We’re Protestants. We just try to obey the commandments and keep our heads down.”

But Dad’s statement is truer of Jewish than of Protestant theology, for the “manhood” attained by a bar mitzvah is precisely the age of responsibility for observing the mitzvot or commandments. Bar mitzvah is religious maturity and an affirmation of the human obligation to perform acts of holiness that are prescribed by God. A traditional Protestant would maintain that human beings can never come of age to do God’s will because people are flawed by original sin and need to be “saved” no matter what commandments they do or don’t do.

Dad continues facetiously: “Technically speaking, you’re a man when you turn 18, and sometimes not even that.” Yet Brick

The Jewish references on Modern Family were not particularly insightful or even thoughtful. But a companion ABC series that shared the evening with Modern Family for several years, The Middle (2009–2018) did deal with a bar mitzvah ceremony in a memorable way. The series was a gentle look at family life in Middle America Wisconsin. In an episode ("The Man Hunt," 2-24-16) written by Roy Brown, the youngest son, Brick (Atticus Shaffer) attends a bar mitzvah ceremony and reports: “Jewish people know how to party. Josh got to read from this giant scroll, and the font was insane. I want all my books in scroll from now on.”

Apparently, Brick is jealous of his Jewish friend, not unlike Kevin (Fred Savage) in the classic bar mitzvah episode of The Wonder Years (which I reviewed here and in my book, Over The Top Judaism). “Josh Goldstein is several inches shorter and a whole year younger than me,” Brick complains, “and he’s a man now?”

Remembering Sybil Kaplan’s husband

Barry A. Kaplan, 81, husband of Sybil Kaplan, who was also her photographer, passed away April 23, 2020. She had known him for 68 years. Even though this was a second marriage for both, it was long – a few weeks shy of 29 years.

She wrote, “We cannot sit shiva normally because of the Coronavirus, so my synagogue friends are coming to an empty lot across the street from where we live and are holding services out of doors with masks and proper distancing.”

“Barry and I originally met at a party when we were 13 years old. Years later after he had gotten a divorce and I was starting one, we bumped into each other. Rather, he came over a hill as I was pulling out of a drive and almost hit my car.

“That was the beginning of a renewed relationship as he supported me through my divorce and my move back to the community where we had grown up.

“We established a lovely life – he in various kinds of sales, I in writing and teaching and we were very active in our synagogue. He was stepdad to my two daughters, Elissa and Shara and I was stepmom to his three grown children – Marc, Craig and Julie. We enjoyed talking to his grandparents, Ben and Jordan and hearing about my Wilder and Miller.

“We made several trips to Israel as I climbed up the Hadassah ladder from chapter president to region president to National board member. One day we decided we really wanted to come and live in Israel. That was 11 years ago. We carved out a nice life with my old friends, our new friends, our synagogue and his photographing for my journalism.”

Sybil’s daughter Elissa who works for Microsoft in Dublin this year, happened to be in Israel seeing her clients. Below is part of the eulogy she gave at the funeral.

“Barry had a good heart, and it was filled with love for my mom. If she wasn’t at 100% then neither was he. If she was sad, then he wanted her to feel better. Since Shara and I were my mom’s life, therefore we became his as well. And if I wasn’t calling enough, he’d make sure to remind me to do so, indirectly or directly, not so much for him, but because he knew it would make my mom happy.

“While I know he loved the life that he and my mom built together here, I also know, if he hadn’t wanted to come, he would have done so for my mom who always wanted to come back.”

Our condolences to Sybil and their family.
Life and Time

Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his wonderful book, “The Sabbath”, explains: “Judaism is a religion of time, aiming at the sanctification of time… it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.”

Chag HaPesach (the holiday of Passover) concluded on [April 16, 2020]. However, from the second night of Passover until the eve of Shavuoth (May 28th), we count time, each and every day. Thus counting is Sfirat HaOmer (counting of the Omer – sheaf of grain) known as Sfirah (the counting). The Torah tells us: “Sheva Shabbatot Temimot Tshiyuena Od mimacharam Hashabbat Hashevii’t chamishim yom.” (From the morrow of the Sabbath you shall count seven complete weeks until the completion marking Shavuoth.)

This biblical commandment is related to the Omer offering which was brought to the Temple on the second night of Passover, and also offered on Shavuoth. In our own time, the counting of these days has taken on a multifaceted meaning that includes the mourning of the death of Rabbi Akiva’s students during the weeks between Passover and Shavuoth.

An amusing story illustrates a modern meaning of counting. A young attorney was on his way to court when he suddenly found himself at the Gates of Heaven. A group of angels escorted him inside. He protested this interference in his life and insisted that his untimely death was a mistake. He cried out, “I am too young, I’m only 30!” An angel agreed to inquire about such an early death. Returning a short while later, the angel said, “It’s no mistake, sir. Based upon the number of hours you have billed your clients, you are at least 110.”

Sfirah links the two major festivals of Passover and Shavuoth, beginning on the second night of Passover, and also offered on Shavuoth. In our own time, the counting of these days has taken on a multifaceted meaning that includes the mourning of the death of Rabbi Akiva’s students during the weeks between Passover and Shavuoth.

The poignancy of the usage of time is illustrated in the following story. The Chinese ambassador was visiting New York City and was being shown around by then Mayor Edward Koch. Mayor Koch was showing off the vast network of the New York subway system. He said to the ambassador, “If we take the E train and switch at the next station we can save ten minutes, and if we switch again a few stations later, we can save another ten minutes. The ambassador contemplated the mayor’s advice and he asked, “Mr. Mayor, what are we going to do with this extra 20 minutes we have saved?”

Sfirah arrives each year to remind us of the precious use of time. As we recite each day of Sfirah: Tisporu yamim – count your days. Or as the psalmist reminds us, “Teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Rabbi Herbert Horowitz wrote a regular column for JP&O from 2015–17. This one is from May 20, 2016. He served Shore Parkway Jewish Center in Brooklyn.
Seventy-one years after Israel fought for its independence, **Magen David Adom is helping the country battle a different enemy.**

The coronavirus pandemic is indeed a war. Even if Israel can keep mortality rates for those infected to 1 percent, it will still mean the death of more than 30,000 people — more than all of Israel’s wars combined.

Magen David Adom has been on the front lines against the coronavirus, but the fight has taken an extraordinary toll on MDA’s resources. We need your support to keep saving lives. Observe Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel’s independence day, by keeping the people of Israel strong.

**Give today to our Coronavirus Emergency Campaign at afmda.org/corona-campaign**

*American Friends of Magen David Adom*

*Saving lives. It's in our blood.*

afmda.org/corona-campaign
A Shavuot Thought

Ten Commandments of Human Relations

1. Speak to people. There is nothing so cheerful as a word of greeting.
2. Smile at people. It takes 72 muscles to frown and only 14 to smile.
3. Call people by name. The sweetest music to anyone’s ear is the sound of his/her own name.
4. Be friendly and helpful. If you want friends, you have to be one.
5. Be cordial. Speak and act as if everything you do is a joy to you.
6. Be genuinely interested in people. You can like almost everyone if you try.
7. Be generous with praise and cautious with criticism.
8. Be considerate of the feelings of others. There are usually three sides to a controversy: Yours, the other person’s and the right side.
9. Be eager to lend a helping hand. Often it is appreciated more than you know. What counts most in life is what we do for others.
10. Add to this a good sense of humor, a huge dose of patience and a dash of humility. This combination will open doors and the rewards will be enormous.

Editor’s Note: About ten years ago this “Ten Commandments of Human Relations” was clipped from a bulletin titled, Central Conference of American Rabbis. It lists Kenneth J. Weiss as the editor. In it he says it has appeared in temple bulletins over the years and its author is unknown. I went online to see if I could find an author for it. When I typed those five words in Google search many results appeared. It was posted on sites about Judaism and other religions. Besides those, it was posted on sites for business, education, recovery, scouting, quality speech, social media, healthcare, humor, military and government. Of the dozen or so I looked at the oldest I could find was from 1993. Most listed the author as anonymous but a couple of those sites listed the author as Southern Baptist Minister Robert G. Lee (1886–1978).

Papercuts for Shavuot

By Sybil Kaplan

Papercuts are patterns cut out of paper where the sheet of paper is folded with half a design drawn on one side. The folded sheet is then fastened to a wooden board and the design is cut out with a sharp knife. When the paper is unfolded, a symmetrical design is revealed.

Papercuts appeared as early as the 4th century C.E. in China. They appeared in Western Asia by the 8th or 9th century; in Europe in the 13th century; and in Turkey, Switzerland and Germany in the 16th century. Papercuts have been a common Jewish folk art since the Middle Ages and, by the 17th century, they were popular for Shavuot.

Shevuoslekh & Royselekh

Shevuoslekh (meaning, “Little Shavuots”), used to decorate windows on Shavuot, were rectangular. Royselekh (the word for rose or flower), which were circular, were also used. Papercuts were attached onto the glass panes of the windows of Jewish homes. They were made of white paper, seldom colored and frequently displayed the phrase, Chag ha-Shavuot ha-zeh (this holiday of Shavuot).

According to an article in the Canadian Jewish News by Sara Horowitz (May 23, 2017), “for Ashkenazi Jews, there was a particular link between papercutting and Shavuot, which stems from an old practice of decorating homes and synagogues with flowers, branches, boughs and trees. In shtetl culture, cut flowers were a luxury – pricey and perishable…paper, especially used paper was always around and available for artistic repurposing.

“Some sources cite the objection of 18th century scholar Vilna Gaon to the Shavuot greening as another reason for the development of a Shavuot papercutting tradition. Because church décor involved cut flowers, and pagan practices involved trees, the Vilna Gaon viewed such customs as inherently non-Jewish.”

Shavuot papercut by unknown artist.

An acquaintance of mine from many years ago, Yehudit Shadur (1928–2011), and her husband, Joseph, wrote a history of the last three centuries of Jewish paper-cutting called Traditional Jewish Papercuts: An Inner World of Art and Symbol. This book won a 1994 National Book Council award. She was considered the one who pioneered the contemporary revival of the Jewish papercutting tradition. Her method was to cut a folded piece of paper to produce a symmetrical design once the sheet of paper was opened.

She would draw the design on a plain sheet of paper. Then she would transfer the design onto one-half of a folded sheet of paper. Then she would cut the design with a small, sharp knife. Her works are represented in major museum collections. She also had museum exhibits in Israel, England and the United States.