

*The National Jewish*  
**Post & Opinion**

Volume 77, Number 7 • April 6, 2011 • 2 Nissan 5771 Three Dollars  
[www.jewishpostopinion.com](http://www.jewishpostopinion.com)

*Happy Passover*



Cover art  
by Bruce David.  
(see p. NAT 2 and 14).



# Editorial

Last night April 2, I watched Butler University win the semifinal basketball game against Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), which is located in Richmond, Va. The game was played in Houston and was part of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's Championship tournament.

Everyone in Indianapolis is excited, not just because Butler is located here, but also because it is a very small school relative to most and has a much smaller budget for athletics. Last year at this juncture, Butler was facing Duke who reportedly had a \$15 million athletic budget compared to Butler's \$1.5 million budget. On Monday night April 4, we are hoping for one more win against the University of Connecticut.

Whether or not to mention events like this has always been a dilemma for me. We will be sending the pages of this issue to the printer on Monday before the final game starts. By the time the newspaper comes out on Wed., April 6, the winner of that game and everything related to it will be old news.

Each morning before I read my *Indianapolis Star*, I have already seen the news online and frequently it is more current than what is in the newspaper. This has been the downfall of printed newspapers.

This brings me to the sad news that the April 6 issue will be the last printed issue of this newspaper. In some ways this is an unhappy time but in others it could prove to be positive. For example, when I receive a column by one of the writers the day after the pages are sent to the printer, it would normally be two to four weeks before it appears in the next issue. For writers like Howard W. Karsh from Milwaukee who writes about current events, that amount of time frequently makes his column old news. If I was able to put his column on our website within a day or two of when I receive it, it would still be quite current.

Whether not we are able to continue with our website depends on one or more of these two things. One is if I am able to find someone who will volunteer his or her time and expertise to upload articles and help manage the Website, and two if I am able to find someone who will donate current software that makes it very easy to upload new columns.

Regardless of what the future holds, I feel very blessed that you, dear readers, have let me share with you and be a part of your lives for these past several years. When I first took over managing the newspaper, especially when I began writing eight years ago, my goal was to use the written word to demonstrate that life can be wonderful and amazing.

I found that whenever I read other newspapers, I usually came away at least saddened, if not crying, unless it was the page with comics. I feel I was successful

# About the Cover

The "Storytelling" Seder Plate, featured on the cover, is just one of Bruce David's many multi-dimensional, interactive Jewish art designs (www.davidart.com).



Bruce David

This Passover composition is designed to assist in the mitzvah of retelling the Passover story. It engages viewers in many of the major events from the Passover story, as well as their symbolic significance, as they relate to the items found on the seder plate (see article on page NAT 14).

Bruce David is an award-winning and world renowned artist, creating biblical storytelling art that combines multi-dimensional symbolism and vivid colors, encouraging diverse audiences to interactively discover the hidden within art and life. His primary forms of art (see Cover, page NAT 3)



in my endeavor to leave this newspaper's readers with an optimistic hopeful attitude.

Technology has changed rapidly and in order to stay on top of it, I have learned a great deal about computers and software. I have had the pleasure of meeting or at least corresponding with or talking to the most interesting people many of whom I would not have met otherwise. If there were columns you enjoyed or disagreed with or even mistakes in the newspaper, you readers alerted me to make a correction in the next issue.

Eighty years ago, my father, Gabriel Cohen (1908–2007), started a newspaper in Louisville called the *Spokesman*. He was 22 and had recently graduated from the University of North Carolina. In March 1933, a small four-page monthly newspaper, the *Jewish Post*, was founded in Indianapolis by two young brothers, Leonard and Arvin Rothschild. They charged 50 cents per yearly subscription.

In 1934 the *Jewish Post* became a weekly, and my father bought it. He hoped the two local newspapers could become the nucleus of a national independent Jewish newspaper. He began publishing a series of regional or state editions that in 1945 became the *National Jewish Post*. In 1957 Rabbi Stephen B. Wise bequeathed to my father his magazine *Opinion*, a journal of Jewish life and letters. My father then changed the name of this newspaper to the *National Jewish Post & Opinion*.

From 1946 to 1973 while raising eight children, my mother, Helen Cohen (1916–1999), wrote a weekly column titled "Woman's Viewpoint."

During this time span of 80 years, a lot of very significant Jewish history has transpired and was recorded on these pages. I am proud to have continued this legacy as long as I have, and been a small part of this newspaper's history.

Jennie Cohen, April 6, 2011. ★

# Shabbat Shalom

By Rabbi Jon Adland

April 1, 2011, Shabbat Hachodesh (Leviticus 12:1–3:59) 26 Adar II 5771

I've struggled for many weeks trying to figure out how to write about this without being too political. Next week I will be traveling to DC to attend the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) Annual Conference. I sit on the local Planned Parenthood board as well as on the Clergy Advisory Board to PPFA along with 19 other clergy including 3 other rabbis. I am proud to be a part of this organization as it has been there for women when other organizations and state agencies can't or won't.

I am angry with the conservative right and the religious right who attack Planned Parenthood for abortion services when this part of the organization is only a small part of its operation. Abortion is a very personal, emotional, complicated decision, but it is a decision that some women make. At the same time most of Planned Parenthood's work is spent in educating women about family planning, serving women's health needs, and educating our youth with medically accurate information so that informed and healthy choices can be made.

I try to stay out of these conversations on Shabbat Shalom and instead help focus people on celebrating Shabbat, participating in *Tikkun Olam*, understanding who we are in this big world, and making one's spiritual life a bit stronger. But I've lost it here in Indiana as it becomes one of the most regressive, anti-women, anti-choice, and anti-Planned Parenthood states in the country. The legislature is proud to make women jump through hoops to get services or an abortion. This legislature is obligating doctors to provide unscientific information to women who may be facing an abortion

and making them wait longer than is truly reasonable. I testified before the Indiana Senate committee proposing this harsh legislation on the question of when human life begins according to Judaism, but the Republican Senators wouldn't even look me in the eye. They didn't care what I had to say.

This week's Torah portion *Tazria* is one of the most complicated portions in the Torah and one of two that most rabbis would rather just skip. The other one comes next week – *Metzora*. We are truly lucky in the years they are a double portion, where there is just one tough week of Torah rather than two. The two chapters are listed above so you can read them, but chapter 12 deals with impurity which happens to a woman after giving birth because of the blood involved. Chapter 13 deals with a variety of skin affections that are just gross to read. The key though is that we do read these complicated chapters and try to make sense of the words left to us. We see the women in chapter 12 as real, but struggle to make sense of the rules of impurity. The Indiana legislature, instead of struggling with women's issues just wants to sweep them under the rug and pretend that they don't exist. If we make abortion difficult, girls won't have sex and get pregnant. If we don't teach them about sex, then it won't happen.

Let's struggle with the issues, educate our children, help them make healthy choices so that they won't need to face these life wrenching decisions. Let's teach our children how to bring wanted and loved children into this world. Let's not close our eyes, but open them wide to the real world and real choices. It is what we do with the Torah and the tough passages. We can't cut these chapters or the chapters on curses or the death of Korah or anyone else. We read, ponder, discuss, teach and maybe resolve the problem for now.

Thursday I will lobby in the morning (see Adland, page NAT 3)

The National Jewish

# Post & Opinion

www.jewishpostopinion.com

**Editorial and sales offices located at**  
**1111 East 54th St., Suite 119, Indianapolis, IN 46220**  
**office: (317) 972-7800 • fax: (317) 972-7807**  
**jewishpostopinion@gmail.com**  
**Address correspondence to:**  
**1111 East 54th St., Suite 119, Indianapolis, IN 46220**

**The Jewish Post & Opinion**  
Published monthly by  
**The Spokesman Co., Inc.**  
(USPS 275-580) (ISSN 0888-0379)  
Periodicals postage paid at  
**Indianapolis, IN**

**Publishers**  
Gabriel Cohen, z"l  
Jennie Cohen

**Advertising Director**  
Barbara LeMaster

**Accounting**  
Vivian Chan

**Advertising Sales**  
Mary Herring

**Graphic Design**  
Charlie Bunes  
Crystal Kurz

**Editors**  
Jennie Cohen  
Grechen Throop

**Subscriptions \$36.00 per year, back issues \$2.25, single copies \$2.00.**

All advertisements designed and prepared by The Jewish Post & Opinion are the sole property of the newspaper and may not be reproduced without the consent of the publisher. Copyright © 2005 Spokesman Co. Inc. All rights reserved.

# Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

On Wed., March 30, my wife and I flew to New York. We are on the way to a wedding in Vancouver. My wife's sister lives there, and her daughter is getting married.

To visit New York is always a very special occasion for Lubavitchers. World Lubavitch Headquarters is located at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. It was here that I had my first audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 41 years ago. I was 19 years old at the time. Nine months earlier I had dropped out of Hebrew University to learn in the Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Kfar Chabad. I quickly fell in love with the yeshiva. I greatly enjoyed learning Torah, especially Chassidic teachings and Talmud. To enjoy learning? This in itself was a very special and happy feeling. Until then I had learned for 14 years, but not because I enjoyed it, but because I had to. When I was in school, I would usually only learn the bare minimum necessary to pass the tests.

Praying also became a beautiful experience. Until I went off to college my parents had taken me to shul every *Shabbos* morning, but I did very little actual praying. I was leading a secular life, which left little room for any spirituality. Now I was in yeshiva, and my life was more spiritual. We learned Torah for ten hours every day, and prayed three times a day. Even the material aspects of life, like eating and sleeping, also took on spirituality. We didn't eat just for the pleasure of eating, but in order to have strength to learn Torah and do *mitzvahs*. Each prayer gave us another opportunity to come closer and communicate with *Hashem*, our Father. To come closer to *Hashem* is a wonderful feeling.

Another beautiful part of life in Lubavitch is the *mitzvah* to love your neighbor. The secular world had taught me to "Look out for number one (myself)" and to heck with everyone else. This philosophy is not very conducive to developing deep and lasting friendships. In Kfar Chabad they taught me that real happiness doesn't come from money or material possessions. Real happiness

## ADLAND

(continued from page NAT 2)

and then join my fellow clergy for meetings. Friday there is an interfaith breakfast that will welcome people of all faiths from Catholics for Choice to many other denominations. It is time to fight back and help women reclaim their power in the face of difficult odds. I will do everything I can to help.

I apologize if my emotions and passions came through today, but I am truly scared for the women of this country as politicians and religious leaders try to assert themselves into their personal lives. I will do what I can to stop this move.

When you light your Shabbat candles this week, light one for the prophetic voices we can bring to the issues of today. Light the other to remind us that every person has the right and power to think for themselves.

*Rabbi Adland has been leading Reform congregations for more than 25 years in Lexington, Ky., and Indianapolis, Ind. He can be reached at j.adland@gmail.com. Mishnah Avot 2:19: Rabbi Elazar used to say: "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it."* ★



comes from love, both to family members and neighbors and from helping others and doing good deeds. In yeshiva, for the first time in my life, I experienced true friendship. We were all friends.

Time flew. *Rosh Hashanah* was approaching. Chabad organized a charter round-trip flight from England to New York for those who wanted to spend the high holidays with the Rebbe, and I signed up. After *Yom Kippur* I flew to Indianapolis to spend a week with my family. I was in for a hard time. In Kfar Chabad and in the Lubavitcher neighborhood in Brooklyn, all of the men and boys over the age of 13 wear dark suits and black hats. In Indianapolis 40 years ago, I think that I was the only one dressed like that in the whole city.

In the yeshiva everyone was learning Torah and doing *mitzvahs*. This created an atmosphere of holiness. I was swimming with the current. Now I was alone. The secular current of Indianapolis was pulling me in the opposite direction. I tried to swim against this current, but soon this tired me out. Every day my enthusiasm became weaker and weaker. It took a great effort just to put on tefillin and pray three times a day. On Shabbos I started to say the morning prayers only one hour before sunset. I was sinking back into the secular world.

The next day I was scheduled to fly back to New York. I said to my father "Maybe I'll stay in Indianapolis for another week." He answered that I should go back to New York, to the Rebbe. "You have a charter flight, and (see Benzion, page NAT 19)

# Obituary

## ZOA mourns Elizabeth Taylor, 79

The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) mourns the passing of legendary American actress and ardent Zionist, Elizabeth Taylor, who died on March 23, 2011. Ms. Taylor, who enjoyed a long and hugely successful career in Hollywood, was converted to Judaism in 1959 by the Rabbi Max Nussbaum, who served as National President of the ZOA from 1964 to 1966.



Among Elizabeth Taylor's outstanding work on behalf of Israel and Jewish causes was her participating in raising \$840,000 for Israel in a 1967 London gala and purchasing personally \$100,000 in Israel Bonds in 1959. The same year, she cancelled a visit to Moscow after the Soviet Union lashed out at Israel after the June 1967 Six Day War. In 1975, she was one of 60 prominent women to sign a statement to then-U.N.

Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, condemning the U.N. General Assembly's infamous Zionism-is-Racism resolution. Taylor offered herself as a hostage when 104 hostages aboard an Air France airbus were hijacked by PLO terrorists and held at Uganda's Entebbe Airport, from which they rescued in a spectacular Israeli commando mission on July 4, 1976, America's 200th birthday. Taylor frequently visited Israel and met with its leadership, including Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1983. In 1987, she signed a petition seeking the release from Soviet incarceration of leading refusenik, Ida Nudel.

Elizabeth Taylor's pro-Israel activism led to the banning of her films in several Arab countries. After purchasing \$100,000 in Israel Bonds in 1959, the United Arab Republic (now Egypt) banned all her movies. Gen. Essam Elmasri, head of the Cairo regional bureau of the Israel Boycott Office, said that Miss Taylor would not be allowed to come to Egypt because she has adopted the Jewish faith and "supports Israeli causes." Her movie, *Cleopatra*, was not permitted to be filmed in Egypt, but in 1964, Egypt dropped her from its black-list when it decided that *Cleopatra*, which mentions Egypt 122 times, would provide good publicity for Egypt.

Taylor was a member of Temple Israel, Hollywood. Other members included Al Jolson, Sammy Davis, Jr., Eddie Fisher, Eddie Cantor, George Jessel and Leonard Nimoy, among numerous other Hollywood celebrities. ★



## COVER

(continued from page NAT 2)

(original, hand-pulled serigraphs and limited-edition lithographs) are spread around the world, while his commissioned pieces (stained glass windows, glass mosaics, and such) may be found in schools, organizations, religious congregations, individuals' homes, and other venues in communities across the country.

David, who views the art as a gift, feels that the best way to use this gift is to share the beautiful, important, and modernly relevant aspects of Judaism and life through his art. While he is glad that his work has found financial value for its artistic merit, he personally views it very strongly as a contemporary educational tool, designed to promote universal understanding and mindful awareness.

While Bruce David is still working on commissions and new art designs, his recent efforts have been dedicated to realizing the intended educational nature of his designs. As of June 2010, Light of the Nations ([www.LOTNexperience.org](http://www.LOTNexperience.org)) – a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization – was formed and is currently working to provide communities around the country with contemporary educational programming, through art, music, and uniquely crafted interactive experiences, allowing participants to experience Judaism through the senses. The programs are designed to share the spirit, beauty, and importance of Judaism and its universally-oriented ideology, within an experiential manner, allowing participants to understand the modern relevance and application of Judaism's universal values.

After a year of intensive organizational start-up and program-development, Light of the Nations (LOTN) has just finished a successful series of pilot programs in the Bloomington, Ind. community, demonstrating the entertainment and educational value of their programs, which will be launching in Jewish camps this summer, and communities across the country in Fall 2011. Programs like their Art-Edutainment Concerts and Outdoor ReConnection Experiences were displayed for the community, receiving much positive feedback.

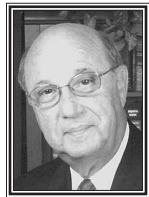
During a pilot program in the Wednesday religious school, students, normally tired after a long day of secular schooling, were given a second-wind, as they engaged with each other in the proactive learning process of LOTN's Build-A-Blessing Workshops and Art-Education "Interactives." When a father came to pick up his daughter a few minutes early, instead of seeing his normally quiet and reserved daughter ready to leave, he found her singing, dancing, and laughing uncontrollably, as she excitedly told him about the LOTN program. Afterwards, he told LOTN that "if you guys are going to make Judaism fun again, maybe I'll come back." We hope he brings company. ★

## Rosenberg Holocaust Haggadah is now online:

[www.holocausthaggadah.com](http://www.holocausthaggadah.com)

This site is paid by Rabbi Dr. Bernhard and Charlene Rosenberg in memory of Jacob and Rachel Rosenberg, the rabbi's parents, survivors of the Holocaust. Rabbi Rosenberg is Spiritual Leader of Congregation Beth-El in Edison, N.J.





## Wiener's Wisdom

By Rabbi Irwin Wiener, D.D.

### Can we ever see God?

The great sage Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "God is in search of man, as man is in search of God." We all desire to know God, to feel God's presence in our lives and, of course, to seek the help of God in times of trouble. Yes, it is true that God searches for us as strongly and as curiously as we search for God.

To understand this better we need to recount the episode in Exodus, 33:18 as Moses asks to see God's glory. In reality, Moses wants to see God because even he found it difficult to understand a concept or a perception of something that can't be imagined. "You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see My face and live." Picture yourself having a conversation with a spirit that is alive and yet not formed. Most would say that you were mad or worse, perhaps, even delusional.

Then the climax of the encounter, "I shall shield you with My hand until I have passed. Then I shall remove My hand and you will see My back, but My face may not be seen." God is invisible to the naked eye and here we learn about God in human terms about God's hand, God's face, God's back. It is impossible to think or describe things other than how we were created as human beings. We touch, we feel, we smell, we hear and we see. These things we can understand, but to realize that there is a spirit that moves about the universe with none of these characteristics just does not seem possible.

Moses too has his doubts. It started with a bush that burned and was not consumed and continued through the ordeal of plagues and torments described but impossible to imagine. It was followed by a tumultuous voyage that witnessed miracle after miracle culminating in a spiritual connection that made Israel distinct in every way.

It is this distinction that makes Passover so significant. People fight for independence and freedom every day in all corners of the globe and yet, Israel's fight was explicit in that it contained an element of intimacy with God. We constantly struggle to maintain that connection. Our ancestors found it difficult coming from a culture that saw many gods and now re-taught about one God. They could not understand the difference between invisible and visible. The Golden Calf represented the visibility of God and that gave them comfort.

We all need to feel the nearness of God. It is hard to imagine, and we are no different than those who left Egypt in



## Jewish Educator

By Amy Hirshberg Lederman

### What drives the Jews? – Your answers!

Several months ago I asked a question in one of my columns and invited your input. Answers came from all over the country and were as diverse as Jews are themselves. The question, originally posed to me by my 23-year-old daughter was this: What drives the Jews?

In keeping with the Jewish tradition of "two Jews, three opinions," many of you had multiple responses, and often your answers refined the question or posed new ones. To all of you who took the time to share your thoughts with me, thank you!

The consensus was that this question is not an easy one to answer because

search of this nearness. We have our Golden Calves, whether it is wealth or beauty. However, we neglect to remember that we can find God's nearness with everyday living or recovery from illness or the birth of a child or a marriage. Each day is an experiment that brings completion and fulfillment if we will it because we remember to love and allow ourselves to be loved. Most of all we need to show gratitude by sharing with others.

However, to me, the most important aspect of Passover is that our very existence is a compliment to God for the imprint on our lives as attested to by our ancestors. And our very existence will remain a testament to our ability to persevere and prosper so that future generations will hear the same story and marvel as we do to the timeless message of emancipation.

Generation after generation retells the story because it fulfills the wishes and desires of all humankind. And as Moses exhorts Pharaoh to "let the people go" in their desire to worship God in peace and security, we are reminded that this is a clarion call for all people to be able to feel secure.

Yes, we searched for God, we still search for God. God searched for us and still searches for us, and this episode in history affirms that the search is not complete and may never be. Just as we search for the heaven before the Passover begins, and as we search for the Afikomen during the Passover Seder, we need to continue to probe because Passover is the continuing search to see God.

Rabbi Irwin Wiener is spiritual leader of the Sun Lakes Jewish Congregation near Phoenix, Ariz. He welcomes comments at [ravyitz@cox.net](mailto:ravyitz@cox.net). ★

each one of us views Judaism from both personal and historical perspectives, which differ based on the period of time we grew up in, our family traditions, social, economic and cultural realities and our genetic makeup. Yet of the themes that emerged, one was certain: that there is a feeling deep inside, a spark that dwells within the Jew regardless of denomination, social background and education, that drives him or her to *identify* as Jewish.

Some may call this the *pintele Yid* (Yiddish for Jewish spark), others may think of it as the *Yiddish Neshamah* (Jewish soul) while still others jokingly refer to it as being a Member of the Tribe. (M.O.T.) It seems however, that there is a unique, somewhat ineffable feeling of "being Jewish" that drives many of us to think, act, and respond as Jews today.

Many readers identified the Torah, Jewish learning and the quest for knowledge as what binds Jews together in their struggle to survive. Jewish education consists of more than training the mind; it also requires training the heart. One reader eloquently wrote: "We are driven as a people by the knowledge that there is a power – for good, for right, for beauty, that is beyond our comprehension – that we strive to imitate and achieve. We are driven by this power, which is not random, and is intelligent beyond our grasp...the Torah is the earthly representation of this power we know as God."

Other insights about what drives the Jews included: a sense of community and feeling responsible for one another, the idea that the promotion of human freedom and dignity is essential to living a Jewish life, and that we are committed to the Jewish future because "we don't want to be just the grandchildren of great men and women, we want to be the grandparents of an even greater generation!" Interestingly, each one of these ideas is articulated in traditional Judaism as *Kol Israel arevim ze Lazeh*, *B'tzelem Elohim* and *L'dor v'dor*, respectively.

Perhaps one of the more controversial responses suggested that there is something "in our genes" that drives us – to leave a bad situation for a better one, to push ourselves to excel and succeed, to respond to the world's problems with compassion and a sense of justice. While the genetic answer might be more applicable to the question of "Why have Jews achieved scientific, financial, artistic and cultural success to a greater extent than statistics would indicate," it opens the door to other arguments that are potentially dangerous to Jewish survival.

Judaism is and has always been a religion and a way of life but not a race. Contemporary scientific research on Jewish DNA concludes that while some genes may be more prevalent among modern Jews, Jews do not constitute a single group distinct from all others. Rather, modern Jews exhibit a diversity of genetic profiles, some reflective of

## Rock 'n Rambam

Original creator and member of legendary rock band, KISS, returns to his roots at Rambam

Gene Simmons, founding member of the hard rock band, KISS, arrived Tues., March 29 to return to his roots at the Rambam Health Care Campus, Haifa, Israel.

Sixty one years ago, in 1949, Simmons, named Chaim Witz, was born at the Haifa hospital to a couple from Tirat HaCarmel, Florence Klein, a Hungarian Holocaust survivor, and Peri Witz. When Chaim was eight, he immigrated with his mother to the USA, and there became Gene Simmons. In the 1970's he created the band KISS, and served primarily as the group's bass player. During his career, Simmons added the titles "singer," "songwriter," "musical producer," "entrepreneur" and "actor" to his resume.

Simmons is the long-time partner of the well-known actress Shannon Tweed, with whom he has two children. He is currently in Israel to film an episode of his reality series *Gene Simmons Family Jewels*.

During his visit to Rambam, Simmons toured the hospital in which he was born, accompanied by his entourage. The tour, led by Prof. Rafi Beyar, Chief Executive Officer and Director General of the hospital, began opposite the new emergency room, Israel's first emergency medical facility fortified against conventional and chemical warfare, where the singer was briefed on events of the Second Lebanon War. The singer asked to visit the site of his birth, and recalled that at the age of three, he returned to Rambam after contracting polio. His only memory of his hospitalization is looking out at the sea and the ancient sea wall. He was visibly excited to take in the very same view, while standing in the building in which he was born.

Before parting from Rambam, Simmons gladly fulfilled the request of two young female soldiers serving at the hospital, who wished to be photographed with him. He also had his picture taken with a group of American Jewish students who are studying in the medical faculty on the Rambam campus, and signed their shirts, records and even a guitar. (See photo on NAT 20.) ★

their Semitic/Mediterranean ancestry, and others suggesting an origin found in European and Central Asian groups.

The answer to what drives the Jews is a question that can and should be discussed for years to come. For only in looking back at our past and examining our present can we hope to find inspiration, guidance and direction as to how we want to live as Jews in the future. And, at a minimum, it gives us pause to think about how remarkable we are as a people and feel grateful for  
(see Lederman, page NAT 6)



## Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

### Muddled Middle East future

MARCH 22, 2011 – It appears today that the winds of the Middle East are blowing over Israel. We read that there are Palestinian demonstrations of size and note being held in the West Bank and Gaza, which are calling for an end to the divisions of the Abbas government and Hamas. Can it happen? If it happens, what can it mean for the chances of a peaceful solution to the turmoil in the State of Israel.

First, the fact that it is happening is remarkable. Second, they are on a world screen along with Libyans waving banners for “One United Libya,” and military defections and refusal of the army to kill civilian protesters in Yemen. The military did not come to the defense of President Mubarak in Egypt, and his government fell. What are we to make of the demonstrations in the Gaza and the West Bank? Arab arguments, as we have opined often, are usually shaped about “honor.” They begin with issues, and there are many, but when they end up in “honor,” the rules become muddled. There are Arab honor conflicts in the Middle East that are centuries old and as raw, now, as they were when they began. The normal rule of power is to preserve itself at any cost.

All we can do, along with the government and people of Israel is to wait and see, but, in the interim, we can begin to discuss what could, might and should happen in the case that it works. If it does not work, everything will not be the same. Once anger is publicly displayed, you can’t return to the time when it wasn’t, and all the issues will be on the table.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and his predecessors have long maintained that they could not move forward without responsible partners at the table. What if they come to the table? And if they come, what will they find on the Israeli side of the table. For as long as any of us can remember, no majority consensus existed on exactly what we could, might or should do if a responsible party appeared. The nation is badly divided on many of the issues. They are often stuck in old rhetoric and old politics, and there seems to be an absence of good will, the kind that might make a unified front possible. The world is not prepared to see a united Palestinian will sitting across from a divided Israeli government.

Israelis would be tested about long-held angers. Within this fractious parliamentary government are years of deep-seated ire, which can break out in an ugly and uncivil manner. For some

## Jews’ News

### Haddasah dedicates \$7 million Katherine Merage Pavilion

*Dedication is first for new Sarah Wetsman Davidson Hospital Tower, to open in 2012*

NEW YORK – Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, and the Hadassah Medical Organization, recently dedicated an inner pavilion that will be part of the Sarah Wetsman Davidson Hospital Tower in Jerusalem. Since 2005, both Katherine Merage and the Andre and Katherine Merage Foundation made several gifts totaling \$7 million to Hadassah to fund the 14-story Katherine Merage Pavilion, which will house four signature healing gardens as well as in-patient facilities.

The dedication began a year of pre-events that will peak with the official dedication of the Sarah Wetsman Davidson Tower in October 2012, as part of Hadassah’s Centennial Convention, which will be held in Jerusalem, and in the presence of thousands of Hadassah members from the United States and around the world.

Since 2005, when the fundraising campaign to fund construction of the 14-story, \$363 million tower on Hadassah Medical Center’s Ein Kerem campus began, through February 2011, Hadassah had raised more than \$228 million toward the tower, in addition to separate funding from the Israeli government. It is Hadassah’s biggest building project in the past 50 years and one of the largest infrastructure projects currently underway in Israel.

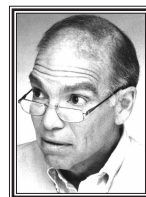
For more information, visit [www.hadassah.org](http://www.hadassah.org). For more information on the 2011 Tower Campaign, e-mail [towercampaign@hadassah.org](mailto:towercampaign@hadassah.org) or call 1-800-988-0685. ★

observers of the Israel scene, the disunity among the Palestinians actually served as a defense against getting serious about the future. As long as they fought, we didn’t have to worry about a united front.

And even those who looked forward to this time, even those who hoped that the nationalistic and democratic sentiments that appeared on the flags and slogans would extend here, even they are surprised. There are so many Israelis that are so tired of strife and so desperate for peace.

The issues, should they get to them, are not easy. The right of the State to survive could ironically be among the easiest concessions, but what about everything else?

Who could have imagined, even as late as yesterday, that something of this (see Karsh, page NAT 19)



## Shipley Speaks

BY JIM SHIPLEY

### An opportunity not to be missed

We have heard for years about the “Arab Street.” This means, I suppose, the masses of Arab citizens going about their daily lives, hearing about the world, about good guys and bad guys through their various government controlled press outlets. For the most part this “Street” is governed by authoritarian regimes bent upon keeping themselves in power.

It has been to their advantage to keep the “Street” calm and happy by telling them that their daily lives could be better if it were not for the amazing power of Israel and the United States. The mosques, well rewarded by said regimes preach this to the masses every Friday. They manage to find portions of the Koran that justify this line of thought. Well, you, I guess, could find parallels in Torah or the Christian Bible. I guess. But it has been 500 years or so since Christian doctrine has made scapegoats of Jews.

The minions of radical Islam personified in Al Qaeda and its off-shoots preach hatred of Jews and America. Yet, while they kill thousands of Muslims every year, they do not take their hatred out on Jews or others except for the troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Then suddenly, this year, something really weird happened. An obscure fruit peddler in Tunisia was insulted once too many times by a female police officer and was so depressed, incensed or whatever that he set himself on fire. Suddenly the “Street” was aroused by the corruption and totalitarianism existing under their noses that they had been told to overlook for so many years.

And so it has come to pass that a new revolution is sweeping the Arab world. Outside of Libya, which is a special case, revolution has swept Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain with hardly a shot being fired. Yes, in each case, the army has had to come down on the side of the people to keep the bloodshed at a minimum – again, Libya is an exception, and to some extent are Bahrain and Yemen.

So far as some of the other repressive and backward regimes in the region are concerned, time will tell. But things like this are like gas under pressure. Sooner or later, the lid will blow off. And as it does, an incredible opportunity will emerge for the people of this region. The “Street” if you will.

Ben Gurion spoke of it, as did Begin. The opportunity that the tiny state of Israel offers its neighbors as they come

out of this trance in which they have existed since the 13th century.

And here is little Israel with no oil, no other natural resources except one – brains. Brains and technology and medical miracles and a real desire to find friends amongst its neighbors. Sounds like a no brainer, does it not? A young, well-educated population has risen up and said “Enough!” They want freedom of expression, fiscal opportunity, a free market system, all the rest.

But somehow in your heart of hearts, you just know it is not going to happen. Israel offered this in Gaza. They left a thriving, export-driven greenhouse business to the residents of Gaza. An opportunity in business. What did they do? Even with the promise of financing from of all people, a Jewish businessman, they turned their back on it. Instead they smashed the greenhouses, stole anything stealable and ruined this one viable economic opportunity.

Business in the West Bank is flourishing. Check points have been dismantled, the economy is advancing well ahead of Israel’s. It should be a shining example to the Hamas thugs who hurl missiles at children and deprive the people of Gaza of any opportunity to better themselves. But no. They continue in a self-destructive frenzy.

They want “peace” – a malleable expression. If peace means that the Jews should all be killed, forget about it. As good as things are in the West Bank, one or more killers managed to enter a Jewish home and slaughter a Jewish family, including three children.

Of such things, peace and prosperity are not born. And yet, there are publications in this country and of course, overseas, who blame the Jews for Arabs killing babies. It is surprising that they do not blame us for the suffering in Japan.

Egypt is less than a month out of its orgy of peaceful revolution. And already Muslims are killing Christians. Tunisia is at a standstill. Libya is descending into tribal warfare, the Saudis are helping their fellow monarchists in Bahrain. A great opportunity is being squandered. And not for the first time.

Israel can show the way. Israel can become the lynch pin of a successful re-awakening in Arab nations as they shake off the torpor of ten centuries. But once again, as the slaying of children shows, as the “honor killings” and the ingrained prejudices go on, this opportunity also may be lost.

At some point you would think that rational thought would prevail. But as you see the clerics continue to spew hatred, Christians being killed in Egypt, and babies slaughtered in Israel, it looks like it is not going to happen this time after all.

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



# Rice on Passover; it's a Sephardic thing! Or is it?

BY RABBI DR. EYTAN M. COWEN

It's 1968. Passover is around the corner, and the new chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, notices signs posted outside grocery food stores; in large print "Rice Is Prohibited on Passover" and in small print are written the words, "except for those of Sephardic descent."

It is clear from the Talmud that rice is permissible for consumption on *Pesach*. The Gemara in Masechet Pesachim (120b) relates that Rava, one of the Amora'im, would eat *aroza* (rice) at the seder as one of the foods eaten to commemorate the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple on Pesach night. Furthermore, the Gemara addresses the question of whether one may fulfill the *mitzvah* of *matzah* by eating bread made from rice. The Gemara rules that one does not fulfill the *mitzvah* with this kind of *matzah*, because rice is not included among the five principal grains. Clearly, the Gemara accepted the premise that rice does not constitute *chametz*, and it disqualified rice for *matzah* only because the *matzah* must be made from one of the five grains. Fundamentally, then, there is no question that rice is permissible on Pesach and is not considered *chametz*.

Thus, Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575) in his commentary on Rabbi Yaakov Ben Asher's (1268–1340) code of Jewish Law known as the Tur (code #453) quotes the words of Rabbeinu Yerucham, an early Ashkenazic halachic authority (1287–1350): "for those who are accustomed not to eat rice and various legumes cooked on Pesach, this is a *minhag sh'tut* (foolish custom), unless they are doing so to be stringent, and I did not know why." Furthermore, Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg (1237–1299), presenting Ashkenazic practices in his commentary on Maimonides' code of Jewish Law, writes "Even children at the elementary level know that rice and legumes do not come to be leavened. Only because kernels of wheat are mixed in among them, and it is not possible to separate them well, the custom has been to be stringent..."

The custom among many communities not to eat rice on Pesach began two or three centuries ago when the concern arose that some wheat kernels might have been mixed together with the rice. It became common in some countries for wheat fields and rice fields to be situated near one another, and often the same bags were used for the collection of wheat and rice. The bags were not always carefully cleaned in between collections, and it was therefore quite common for one to find kernels of wheat in the packages of rice purchased at the grocery. For this reason, Ashkenazic Jews accepted the custom not to eat rice on

Pesach. In Sephardic lands, by and large, there was no concern of wheat kernels being mixed with rice, and therefore the Sephardim, for the most part, did not accept this custom. A notable exception is the Peri Hadash (Rav Hizkiya Da Silva, 1659–1698), a Sephardic rabbi who was once eating rice on Pesach and discovered a kernel of wheat mixed in with the rice. At that moment, he took upon himself the custom to refrain from rice on Pesach.

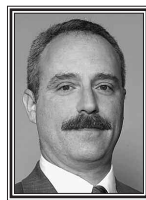
Nevertheless, as mentioned, the accepted custom among most Sephardim is to allow eating rice on Pesach, on condition that it is first checked three times to ensure that there are no wheat kernels. One spreads the rice out on a white surface, so that any dark kernels will be visible and evident, and he or she checks the rice three times. It is preferable not to perform all three inspections in immediate succession, as one may grow fatigued after the first or second time and not inspect properly. One may not trust a minor below the age of bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah to perform this inspection.

Ashkenazim must follow their ancestors' custom not to eat rice on Pesach. Although the Hacham Sevi (Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi of Amsterdam, 1660–1718) wrote that he would abolish this custom if he had the authority to do so, since rice was a basic staple. He also felt that this was a stringency leading to a leniency and could result in a complete transgression of eating *chametz* on Pesach. This stringency would bring about the necessity of baking large quantities of *matzah* and carelessness in the baking process could possibly result in the overt consumption of *chametz* on Pesach. Nevertheless, the custom was accepted by all Ashkenazic communities, and Ashkenazim are therefore bound by this prohibition. An Ashkenazi may, however, eat food that was cooked in a pot that had been used for rice. Since even Ashkenazim do not actually consider rice *chametz*, they do not treat pots used for *chametz* as *chametz* pots.

Before you run out all excited to buy rice for Pesach, a couple more things should be considered. Most supermarket brands of rice are enriched. The enrichment is diluted with starch in order to distribute it evenly on the rice. This can be a corn, rice, or a wheat starch base. Care must be taken to buy only rice that has enrichment that is not mixed with *chametz*. Enriched varieties that are mixed in a non-*chametz* starch are permissible.

Furthermore, in farm areas such as Arkansas, the crops are rotated yearly, and it is very common to find grain in rice fields. Although there is equipment to remove this, it is not 100%. So, check your rice carefully as outlined above.

It should be noted that organic, unenriched white rice and standard brands of white rice that are kosher during the year such as Carolina, Goya, River, Riceland, Blue Diamond, and



## The Roads from Babel

BY SETH BEN-MORDECAI

### He-Wrestles-Bears

We would almost certainly scoff at a new neighbor who declared "When I wrestle a bear, people will know my name!" Boasting is unseemly and bear-wrestling is a poor way to teach one's name, unless the name is *He-Wrestles-Bears*. Yet at least 11 times in Exodus, God declares that when he does some deed, Egyptians and Israelites will know that he is *Y-H-W-H*. If the divine name is merely a personal name like "Bob," God seems to be off track. But if *Y-H-W-H* is a statement, like *He-Wrestles-Bears*, we're dealing with a horse of a different color.

Many Hebrew names are in fact statements: *Yisra'el* (He-Wrestles-with-God) is one example. So viewing *Y-H-W-H* as a statement comports with Hebrew usage. Further, Exodus 3:14 provides evidence that God's name is a statement. There, Moses asks how he should answer Israelites who want to know the name of the God who sent him. God responds, "*E-H-Y-H*," which means I AM: "Tell the Israelites this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" In other words, at least one of God's names is a form of the verb to be.

In Hebrew, all forms of the verb *to be* derive from the root *H-W-H*. In the simple conjugation, the root letters change slightly: the *W* becomes a *Y*, to yield the form *E-H-Y-H* of Exodus 3:14. But in the intensive conjugation, all letters of the root remain unchanged,



Success are kosher for consumption on Pesach as well (after the appropriate checking, of course). Sugat brand from Israel is imported during this time and carries a kosher-for-Passover designation that still requires checking. Consult with your local Sephardic rabbi for the latest up-to-date information. And just in case you were wondering – I am not affiliated with any of these companies.

It's now 1969, and Passover is around the corner. New signs are posted at grocery food stores. The signs read in large print, "Rice is permitted on Pesach" and in small print, "Ashkenazic custom is to refrain from eating rice on Pesach." Happy and Kosher Passover and enjoy your rice!

Rabbi Dr. Eytan M. Cowen received ordination both from Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef at the Sephardic Rabbinical College in Brooklyn, N.Y., and at Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. He has also been practicing integrative medicine for the past 10 years. He is a noted lecturer and speaker in areas of health and well-being and Sephardic heritage and Jewish law. He can be reached at [torahworld@gmail.com](mailto:torahworld@gmail.com). ★

i.e., the *W* remains and does not change to a *Y*. And just as the name *E-H-Y-H* is a verb in the simple conjugation meaning *I AM*, the form *Y-H-W-H* may be a verb in the intensive conjugation meaning "HE CAUSES TO BE." In other words, the divine name *Y-H-W-H* seems to be a statement that God brings into existence all that is.

The hypothesis can be tested. In Exodus, each Plague demonstrates that God is the cause of each force of nature that Egyptians ascribed to their gods. The statement that Egyptians will know "I am *Y-H-W-H* when I turn the Nile into blood" makes no sense if *Y-H-W-H* means "Bob." But if our hypothesis is correct, it is consistent with the demonstrative purpose of the Plagues: By turning the Nile to blood, God will certainly cause the Egyptians to "know that I am *He Who Causes to Be*" – God, and not the river-god Hapi. And by causing frogs to proliferate, God certainly demonstrates that God causes fertility, not the fertility-goddess Heqat.

An attorney and Semitic linguist with degrees from Brandeis, Stanford and Univ. of Calif., Seth Watkins (pen name, Ben-Mordecai) merges linguistic analysis with legal sleuthing to uncover lost meanings of ancient texts. His *Exodus Haggadah* uniquely includes the full story of the Exodus in an accessible format. Email: [Seth@VayomerPublishing.com](mailto:Seth@VayomerPublishing.com). ★

## Bits of Wit

### Queen Elizabeth knows Hebrew

Queen Elizabeth was bestowing knighthood on a group of youths. After she touched them on the shoulder with a sword, they were supposed to respond with a short Latin phrase. One of the youths was Jewish and not very proficient in Latin. He couldn't remember the phrase. He thought if he said something in Hebrew it might give the same general impression and be okay in this situation.

After the queen touched him on the shoulder with the sword he responded, "*Mah nish-tah-nah ha leilah ha-zeh mi kol ha leilot?*"

Queen Elizabeth realized this was not exactly what the others had said, but she didn't know what the difference was so she turned to her advisor and asked, "Why is this knight different from all the other knights?"

Submitted by Louise Rarick, Bloomington, Ind. ★



### LEDERMAN

(continued from page NAT 4)

the privileges and freedoms we have to live today as Jews.

Lederman is an award winning author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney who lives in Tucson. Visit her website at [amyhirshberglederman.com](http://amyhirshberglederman.com). ★



## Healthy & Kosher

BY RABBI BENZION ELIYAHU LEHRER

### Diet for Pesach

When it comes to the question, what should one eat on *Pesach* many of us are dismayed because for the entire world what is considered to be “the staff of life” is prohibited. Whole grains, namely wheat or the other grains are normally eaten in the form of bread which has been made with chemical store-bought yeast or sourdough is *chametz* and prohibited by our Torah to be eaten on Pesach. Not only grains in the form of “bread” and other baked products but even grains which are cooked with water such as farina, oatmeal, cracked wheat/bulgur, and barley are also considered to be *chametz* and therefore are forbidden.

So what does one eat? Whole grains in their “whole form” have a certain percentage of amino acids (protein) together with B vitamins and quite a large amount of complex carbohydrates. These complex carbohydrates when chewed are transformed – even while still in ones mouth – into simple sugars which give us the energy we need to live. The chewing of whole grains which are cooked correctly can produce in ones system the sugar energy we need. Unfortunately, in today’s modern world our need for sugar has taken precedence over the hard work one must do to chew. Instead of ingesting whole grain products which need more chewing, we are eating processed white flour products which have no sweetness on their own, no matter how long they are chewed. Therefore, in order to get the energy we need, we fill the dough with a non-grain products called sugar, commonly called “caked and cookies.” Years of eating sugar and grain combinations are what cause wheat allergies and most of today’s digestive problems.

So what does one do? The answer can be found in *Chazal* (rabbinic writings). Our rabbis have told us that even though during the rest of the year – besides the three holidays – our main staple food must be whole grains. They have also said we have a *mitzvah* to rejoice on the *chagim* (holidays). Rejoicing means eating meat and drinking wine – of course good quality dry wine without sugar, and preferably organic without sulfates – for our sages tell us that there is no element of *simcha* (rejoicing) without meat and wine.

If you are a vegetarian – or even vegan – and if you are not already a Safardi Jew, explain to a rabbi who can give *Halachic* rulings for your situation and give you *heter* (permission) to eat beans and other grains such as whole organic rice, kasha, and millet. As far as quinoa goes, most

rabbis hold that it can be eaten on Pesach even by Ashkenazi Jews.

Myself, I eat a large amount of good quality handmade matzah made from organic stoned ground whole wheat. It is all about chewing, and if you really chew this level of good quality matzah then you will not get constipated. In America, Chicago Matzot are organic – they even have spelt – and they ship to anywhere. Besides eating good quality matzot, good quality organic olive oil is also a great addition. Fresh garlic is also in season at that this time. Garlic is a blood cleanser and the time of year to cleanse our blood is now as we are coming out of the winter months. In the winter our diets are larger amounts and heavier food, and as we are entering the spring it is time to lighten up. Green salads, cucumbers and such are also a good addition to our diets at this time.

A great tasting soup can be made by simply grating carrots together with cut onions, and parsley seasoned with sea salt. Boil it all together in good quality spring, distilled water, or filtered water such as reverse osmosis, which even gets out the fluoride which is good for your teeth though not so good for our bodies!

Concerning our consumption of animal products at this time, one of our major commentators on the Torah, the Malbum explains that from Gan Eden till the great flood, our earth was on a straight axis meaning no seasonal changes, just one season with perfect weather – not too hot or too cold, just right. In this world of Gan Eden with its never changing season there was no need for the ingestion of animal products. However, our world today which is after the great flood now has seasonal changes caused by the tilt in the earth’s axis. The Malbum explains that the source for the new earth with its tilted axis and the changing seasons is in *parshat Noach* (8:22) which states: “all the days of the land will continue; seed planting time, and harvest, and cold, and hot, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease to exist.”

The Malbum goes on to explain that these weather changes which go from hot to cold and even cold to hot actually can weaken one’s body. Therefore we need the strong energy which meat-animal products can give us to counteract this and build up our bodies. Just take a look at *parshat Noach* (9:2) and you will see that it speaks of our new permission to eat animal products. All constricting foods are included in this – even organic eggs – so why not Matzah brah (or brie)...it’s great at this time of year together with garlic.

The *chagim*, both *Chag HaSuccot* and *Pesach* come as we enter a new season – Succot is when the late summer’s heat changes to the onset of the winter, and Pesach takes place during the change from the cold season to springtime. *Chag HaShavuot* is our entry from spring to summer. So now we have it, a very strong reason for us to partake in meat

and other animal products during the *chagim*. Wine too is needed for as our sages tell us: “the wine goes in and the secrets come out.” Wine has an expansive, outward effect on our minds and our bodies which is needed at this time because during the winter months we have rebuilt our inner selves a new you deep inside which now as we enter the spring, must blossom forward to the outside.

The wine we drink during the *chag* and especially the four cups during the seder help us to express from deep inside to the outside. The goal is to bring out to this world, to your friends and family, a new and more pure you which is not tainted by this “outside world.” This is a spiritual reason for our drinking of wine on Pesach. On a physical level the four cups help to prepare our kidneys for the upcoming heat. With both reasons together we can then reach a state of wholeness between body and soul.

As far as our need for super sweet foods, this year try organic dried dates and date syrup. Use them also for your *charoset* together with finely chopped walnuts.

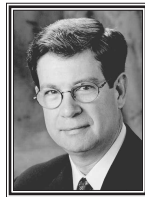
*Wishing you and all of Israel a wonderful happy and kosher Pesach!*

As a health practitioner, Rabbi Lehrer has given formal lectures both in Israel and abroad. In addition to counseling about the diet, he also runs a “healthy meals” program in the Old City of Jerusalem, which includes food deliveries and cooking classes. With his twelve-string guitar, Rabbi Lehrer gives concerts expressing deep words of Torah. About his band, the *New York Times* wrote: “The Returning Light” is “Jerusalem’s hottest Jewish rock band.” He has a new CD called “Come Home” can be purchased on his website. To set up a diet counseling session and/or purchase his new CD, call Rabbi Lehrer in Jerusalem at 05276187701. To watch and hear him speak on Radio Free Nachlaot’s live stream video, go to [www.livestream.com/radiofreenachlaot](http://www.livestream.com/radiofreenachlaot). The show is called *The Returning Light* and is aired live on most Thursdays 4:00 p.m. Jerusalem time. His website is: [www.thereturninglight.com](http://www.thereturninglight.com) or [www.jewishyeardiet.com](http://www.jewishyeardiet.com). ★

### House for rent in Tzfat for summer

Owners of spacious, light-filled home in Tzfat’s Artists Quarter seek responsible tenants for the period from June 14 to August 17th. Magnificent view, large private garden/courtyard, and balconies. Details and photos upon request. Write to Reuven & Yehudit Goldfarb: [poetsprogress@gmail.com](mailto:poetsprogress@gmail.com) & [yehudit@avirtov.com](mailto:yehudit@avirtov.com), or call, in Israel, 04-697-4105 or 050-414-0262; from the U.S., 510-542-8350.

## We welcome the stranger



BY RABBI DENNIS C. SASSO

I speak proudly as an American citizen who is a Latino immigrant (Panama), and as a Jew.

At the heart of the Jewish heritage and experience there is a tradition of fair treatment and hospitality towards the immigrant. Even more often than the commandment “to love your neighbor,” the Bible asserts:

*“The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the home born, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* (Leviticus 19:33-34)

*“For the Lord your God befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* (Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

This type of injunction is repeated a total of 36 times in the Torah – the Hebrew Scriptures.

Migration has been a central theme of the Jewish historical experience since biblical times when Abraham and Sarah set forth in search of the Promised Land. Later, famine forced the Israelites to flee Canaan and resettle in Egypt, eventually to return to the Promised Land. This experience has been mirrored in American-Jewish life with the immigration of Jews to the United States in search of religious freedom and economic opportunity. As a reflection of our history, and based upon the biblical imperative to welcome the stranger, the American Jewish Community has been and remains a strong advocate for fair and just immigration and refugee policies.

There is much talk these days about “American Exceptionalism,” the notion that America is special, unique. I believe in American exceptionalism, not as an endowment or guaranteed condition, but as a constant striving, an achieved status. Our uniqueness is expressed in the diversity of our citizenship and in the quest to continue to be a refuge for those “yearning to breathe free.”

Let us continue to labor for an America that is both secure and friendly, strong and hospitable. Let us champion just and fair business opportunities, the protection of civil rights for all, the health, education and well being of our children and families.

Let Indiana’s leadership focus on making our state a welcoming destination. Let us be proactive and visionary; let us not be driven by fear but by pride, not by rancor but by reason, not by a spirit of envy but by generosity of heart and clarity of mind.

This is the American exceptionalism to which Indiana should subscribe.

Sasso is senior rabbi at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis. ★





## Jewish Theater

By HENRIK EGER

### Doyenne of Jewish theater critics (Part 2 of 2)

(Continued from the P&O Mar. 9, 2011 – pages 8 – 9 online at <http://www.nationaljewishpost.com/WebProject.asp?CodeId=7.4.4.3&BookCode=#>)

**Editor's Note:** While the readers of The Jewish Post & Opinion have become accustomed to finding the unique critiques of Irene Backalenick under this banner, instead, in this and the next issue, we are pleased to present a special interview of Ms. Backalenick, reprinted with permission from the website All About Jewish Theatre. Her work has been invaluable to our pages for nearly 30 years; her first review was on Nov. 9, 1983.

#### Editing a Zionist paper in New York City How did you get a foot in that New York City door?

Through a publication called *Editor and Publisher*, I found an ad for a secretary in the public relations office of a New York company, and was hired via mail. I arrived in the City with a battered suitcase, a half-finished telescope, a few clothes and dollars. It was not easy finding accommodations in those busy post-war years, but I rented a bed in the Martha Washington dorm. It was like a hospital ward, and I left as quickly as I could.

And, in answering an apartment-share ad, I lived briefly at the Beaux Arts Apartments on East 44th Street. However, this arrangement ended abruptly, when my roommate objected to my entertaining visiting college friends, like my friend Dorothy Hiller, who had come for dinner and stayed overnight.

#### Loss of a new home, job hunting during economically hard times. Were you thinking about calling it quits?

No, I didn't give up. My new employer was Radio Inventions, or RI, a company comprised of engineers. They had invented a process called "radio facsimile" which sent printed copy over the air waves, arriving at the other end in print form. They expected this process to revolutionize the newspaper industry. However, RI never did succeed, though others would develop the fax process which would not replace printed newspapers, but would serve other purposes. Working there for a year as they struggled for success, I found myself stuck in the secretarial job, and, when a copywriting job opened, a young man, a MAN, was hired from the outside.

#### Was there any chance of getting a job in the Jewish publishing world?

I had forgotten this, until you raised

the question. Although disillusioned at first, I began to hunt for newspaper or magazine jobs. After graduating Brown University in 1946, and having moved to New York, I eventually got a job on the editorial staff of a small Zionist paper. At that time, in spite of my upbringing, I hardly knew I was a Jew. I certainly had little, if any, knowledge of Zionism, a movement which aspired to a Jewish state in Palestine.

My job was mostly rewriting interminable, convoluted editorials written by German-born Board members into understandable English. I earned less pay than I had at RI, that is \$40 a week, instead of \$50. However, I found the job was gratifying, especially as it gave me the opportunity to attend and review cultural events of a Jewish nature – plays, films, etc.

#### What was the name of the Zionist paper in New York City?

It was called *The Answer* and was sponsored by an organization called the American League for a Free Palestine. It had strong right-wing views, insisting that all of Palestine and Jordan should revert to the Jews, based on Biblical authority.

#### How did you, as a young writer and editor, handle the task of working with German-born Jewish exiles?

As a political neophyte, I was not interested in its politics, but the position gave me the opportunity to edit copy of cultural events, dealing with Jewish themes. It was during that time that the new Jewish state – Israel – was born, and I covered that event as well. It was also, for me, the beginning of a true and dawning sense of identity with my Jewish roots.

#### Post World War II experiences: Marriage, children, and theatre criticism

*With the end of World War II, a new life dawned for many people around the world. What impacted you during those days?*

Actually, it was the marrying time, right after the war. Bill Backalenick and I were on a bike trip through Connecticut when he proposed marriage. He claimed he was kidding, and I said, "I'll let you know in Old Saybrook."

And?

Once we reached Old Saybrook, the answer was "yes."

*That sounds very romantic. I guess like most young professionals who become parents, you spent many years juggling many different responsibilities.*

Very much so.

*How did you recognize that you wanted more than the American dream of marriage, family, and a white picket fence, that you actually wanted to break away from a conventional life to study drama criticism?*

At first, I didn't – though I'd always loved reading plays, which I saw as literature. I came to theatre by way of journalism. Working for small Connecticut newspapers, I found that an



Irene Backalenick.

editor would occasionally throw theatre tickets on his desk for any staff member who wanted to cover a show. I found this far more interesting than covering crime or politics.

Then in 1979, I took a leave of absence from my job and enrolled in a summer program at Oxford University. Seeing Shakespeare and other productions all over England, I fell in love with theatre. It marked a turning point.

#### Wonderful. What happened next?

Returning home, I applied for and was accepted into the doctoral program in Theatre History and Criticism at City University of New York (CUNY). Thus began a new journey.

#### Academics and theatre critics as role models

*Mazel tov. What stood out for you the most in your Ph.D. studies in Theatre Criticism?*

I had applied for this CUNY Graduate School program over one offered at Yale because I felt that New York was the heart of the theatre world. This proved to be true – for me, at least, although initially, I wondered what could be taught about theatre that couldn't be covered in one lecture. I learned differently – that, in fact, the history of theatre is the history of the human race, or so I felt and still do. It was a wonderful experience, on many levels.

Moreover, the program itself proved to be a global experience. Of the ten in our class, eight were from Africa, Iran, Korea, and South America – and two from the U.S. We became a close-knit group, learning from each other as well as from the professors. I also took copious notes in shorthand, sharing the notes with my fellow students who were struggling with English.

#### Who were some of your drama professors?

I had many memorable professors, including Albert Bermel who wrote the definitive book on farce, Glenn Loney who specialized in contemporary theatre, and my beloved advisor Charles Gattnig. The two day-long comprehensive exams were a snap, but the orals were tough. However, Dr. Gattnig saw me safely through that harrowing experience. Finally, in 1987, aged 65, I completed my degree –

certainly the oldest in my class, and perhaps in the program.

*In the theatre department at CUNY, how much emphasis was placed on the nitty-gritty of writing effective reviews, compared to theoretical approaches to theatre criticism?*

The emphasis at CUNY was on the theoretical, not the practical business of mounting shows. My courses called for researching the various playwrights, like Strindberg, O'Neill, etc., and historical eras. The program wasn't preparing me per se to become a critic, but in fact proved to be excellent training for just that.

I had seen pursuing this degree in theatre criticism as a stimulating, gratifying way to spend my waning years. Little did I realize that it would lead to a serious career.

#### What was the subject of your dissertation?

*The Jewish Repertory Theatre.* My dissertation was published by the University Press of America in 1988: *East Side Story: Ten Years with the Jewish Repertory Theatre.* It won several national awards, including a first-place National Book Award in History and one from the National Federation of Press Women in the early 1990s. I also received awards in journalism and theatre criticism, including a New York Times Publishers Award, which I received while writing for the *New York Times* – "The Gray Lady" of American journalism.

*Irene, I don't know anyone as hard-working as you are. You certainly deserve an article about your life as a theatre critic.*

Thank you. I hardly deserve this attention, and feel that there are others out there more worthy of your good work.

*I admire your modesty. Allow me this immodest proposal: Could you arrange for a theatre person to shoot some photographs of you sitting in a theatre, taking notes?*

But I am too old, too gray. Couldn't I get someone to take a picture of a young, attractive actress instead? Well, maybe I could ask a friend who directs a theater in Connecticut to use his theater for a picture of me – one of the gray ladies of theatre criticism.

*Wonderful. Who were your greatest role models among theatre critics in those days, and what was it about those critics that attracted you?*

Then, and now, among the critics I've most admired are Robert Brustein, who had written numerous books on theatre; John Lahr, one of the critics for The New Yorker; and, reaching back in time, George Bernard Shaw.

I'd say John Lahr in particular was an influence. I admired that he took the broader view, setting his piece against an historic background. I've rarely had that opportunity, since newspaper reviews must be brief, succinct, to the point. I'm not writing for scholars – but for readers who want to know whether they should



see a show. In any event, years of writing articles for the New York Times has trained me to write in that fashion – and I find it difficult to break the habit.

### Coming into one's own as a theatre critic

*When you look at your work now, compared to your early theatre criticism, how would you describe your evolution as the senior, the doyenne of Jewish theatre criticism in the U.S.?*

In some ways, the writing hasn't changed at all. However, I don't find it easy to start a review, or any kind of piece, and the thoughts whirl around in my head. I find myself wondering if I can clarify the ideas, organize the material. But, usually, once that opening paragraph takes shape, the rest begins to fall into place. As to critiques, I now have much more of a basis for comparison, and, indeed, frequently draw comparisons. Once I get started, the words do come more easily than in earlier years. There are times when I suspect that I am on automatic pilot.

*Of the hundred reviews that you have written for AAJT, the world's largest Jewish theatre website, which did you enjoy writing the most, and why?*

I can't single out any particular reviews, but when I've had an occasional reader response from time to time, that has been pleasurable. For instance, when I reviewed Robert Brustein's off-Broadway play, *The English Channel*, I got an enthusiastic letter from him. Apparently the critic, for a time, had turned playwright. Imagine! That eminent critic writing to me! It initiated a correspondence which went on for a time.

### A critic caught between theatres and readers?

*Looking back at your reviews, what's the most difficult review you have ever written?*

You might want to know that I've gone back through my e-files to find a "difficult review," but to no avail. Sometimes, reviewing can be formidable, sometimes it goes smoothly – depending on my state of mind, exhausted condition, or outside distractions. But this has to do with the techniques of reviewing, rather than the subject matter itself.

*What do you do when you see a play that is poorly written, or poorly directed, or some of the actors are doing a poor job? Do you give yourself permission to be blunt and direct or do you try to salvage whatever you can?*

I do or did find it hard to be bluntly critical. Over the years I've tended to be gentle, muting the criticism or not even mentioning poor performances. Even in a critical review, I would seek out the good points, adding the "on the other hand." But, of late, I've become blunter, more ornery, letting the arrows fall where they may. It's probably an indication of old age, now that I'm turning 89 [on August 12, 2010].

*Seen from another perspective, have*

*you written reviews where you regretted having written them the way you did?*

There is always the feeling of doubt, especially when I find myself alone in my view, with all other critics lined up on the other side. Sometimes, reading a New York Times critic I respect, or John Lahr in the New Yorker, with an opposing view, I question my response: "Did I miss something here? Do I know what I'm talking about?"

*On which websites can readers access some of your articles and how can people reach you directly?*

Of course, All About Jewish Theatre (AAJT) ([www.jewish-theatre.com](http://www.jewish-theatre.com)), the world's largest and best Jewish theatre website. For New York area theatre criticism [www.ctcritics.org](http://www.ctcritics.org) and, my own website: [www.nytheaterscene.com](http://www.nytheaterscene.com). Readers can also reach me directly at [ireneback@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ireneback@sbcglobal.net).

*How much influence do you think theatre critics have on directors and actors on the one hand, and on the general public on the other?*

That's a big question. It warrants a book. Why don't you write it?

Thanks, Irene.

Seriously, critics do influence readers in their own regions, and the *New York Times* reviewers probably nationwide. We critics all have our fans, I guess. Here in Connecticut, I've had readers call and ask advice as to what to see, or meet me on the street and say they went to a show after reading my column.

But, no doubt, the Times critical power is waning in the face of the growing power of the Internet. It's always interesting to note when a Broadway show, which most of us critics have hated, goes on to a long run. So how do we gauge this "influence"?

*Interesting question. Could you give some examples of some of the best and worst responses you received to your reviews?*

Lots of acclaim over the years, which has been nice. Every so often, a director cries out in protest. For instance, I criticized a production of *The Boys Next Door*, a play about a group home for retarded men. As it happened, one actor in the show had just such a son, and he took my critique very personally and thus the director fired off a letter to the editor. This happens rarely, because producers, directors, and even actors know it is unprofessional to respond by chastising the critic openly.

I frequently go to a neighborhood coffee-shop run by an actor who has since become a good friend of mine. "You critics," he often said to me, "you do such harm to the actors, who work so hard!" Consequently, I set up a critics' luncheon at his place, where he was able to have a dialogue with about 14 of our Connecticut critics. It was a lively, informative and, I think, fruitful exchange. We may not have all ended up best friends, but we acknowledged there was a place for both.

### Sensitivities in different Jewish communities

*Addressing those Jewish playwrights who tend to ignore tackling problematic issues within the Jewish community, Theodore Bikel, at the conference of the Association for Jewish Theatre in Vienna, Austria, in March of 2007, advised: "To Jews and non-Jews in the audience, we must show not just a rosy picture, glossing over blemishes, but a picture as close and sometimes as painful to the truth as we can come." Do you agree with Theodore Bikel's suggestion? If so, could you give an example or two where you observed one-sided portrayals in contemporary Jewish drama?*

I'd call it as I see it. Playwrights can do what they will with their material, but it's up to the critic to lay it out for the public. If the critic sees it as a black-and-white piece, lacking the nuances, he should say so.

*If it's true that the Jewish community is the most supportive of all theatre goers in the U.S., do you find that such support can also be problematic? Given the horrendous history of persecution of Jews and its aftermath in form of latent anti-Semitism, even in our own time, some Jewish theatre goers and Jewish organizations have pressured theatres not to perform certain plays. Against this danger of enforced censorship, what could theatre critics do to write with fairness about dramas which address problematic issues that could be interpreted as being critical of Jews or Israeli politics, such as My Name is Rachel Corrie or Seven Jewish Children?*

We're in tricky territory here. There are all kinds of Jews, with all kinds of attitudes of right and wrong. It's true that Jews do support theatre enthusiastically. I've read that Israel, for example, has the highest percentage of theatre goers of any nation in the world. In that sense, they are strong lobbyists. But I would hope that theatre producers would not be influenced by protesters within one segment of the Jewish population. If I were reviewing these two plays, I would hope to review them without bias. Or, if I thought the plays had a particular message, I would bring that out in my reviews.

*As a theatre critic, how do you deal with plays such as Lebensraum or Born Guilty that seem to thrive on black and white portrayals of Jews and contemporary Germans as an "us vs. them" dichotomy?*

I've been mulling over this question, a kind of heavy self-examination. On reflection, I honestly believe that I assess a play, not on its political message, but on its quality as a drama. If a play is simply didactic, hammering home a message, it's not going to be an effective piece. On the other hand, whether or not one agrees with the politics presented is beside the point.

I think of *Masked* by Ilan Hatsor, an off-Broadway play I saw a few years ago about three Palestinian brothers. That play was very human and nothing short of wonderful. They were three beautifully-drawn characterizations, and their impassioned interchange was most believable. I can imagine that some Jewish protest groups might have banned the show, but I didn't feel that way at all. I gave it a rave review.

### Can political and emotional responses to Jewish-themed plays lead to pressure and boycotts?

*How do you feel about special interest groups protesting a particular play or musical, seeing it as an attack on their values?*

You cite as an example *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, which I didn't see. Personally, I feel that we as a nation have become much too litigious and too willing to stage protests, carrying this trend to ridiculous extremes.

I think of a recent example which has nothing to do with Jewish groups. I'm a director and co-founder of the Connecticut Critics Circle, which gives annual awards for outstanding work in Connecticut theatre. We recently cited a young girl playing Helen Keller in "The Miracle Worker." I hadn't seen the show and didn't know she was deaf, but other critics praised her overwhelmingly, so she was given the award and invited to our annual ceremony. Next came a note from her mother, a deaf woman, who demanded a "signer" at the ceremony.

Before we critics had a chance to respond to this unexpected request, wondering where to get a signer, how much it would cost, etc., we learned that the state's entire deaf community was furious with us. Within days, we were told, there was a widespread protest from the deaf people, a condemnation of our group.

Mercifully, this story ended happily, when we explained that, of course, we would cooperate. But it was an inappropriate reaction, to say the least.

*Do you see similar emotional responses among some Jewish groups?*

Yes, many of these protests from special interest groups, including Jewish groups, are similarly out of line. Most importantly, writers should be able to offer the truth as they see it. And we critics should consider how well the play works, how dramatically effective it is – plot construction, character development, etc. Politics should not enter into it.

*Could one's own bias as a critic interfere in the way one presents plays?*

Yes, I must confess that deep-seated, unexpected feelings rise up in me when I see a play with Jewish themes. These are feelings that have grown with the years, certainly not felt in my earlier years. Something in the genes, I suspect. Thus, I have a tendency to want to support pieces which make the Jews

(see Eger, page NAT 18)





## Seen on the Israel Scene

By SYBIL KAPLAN

### Learning about the Druze – first hand

From Jerusalem to “Druze country” is only an hour and a half drive but it is a different world. Daliyat el Carmel is the largest Druze town in Israel, on Mount Carmel, in the heart of the Carmel National Park, 10 miles southeast of Haifa. It was established 400 years ago and has a population of 13,000. Isfiya, also on Mount Carmel, is 8 miles from Haifa. It was founded in the early 18th century and has a population of 9,000.

#### Background of the Druze

The Druze community is a religious entity, officially recognized by Israel, with jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, maintenance and adoption. During the Mandate period, they did not take part in the Arab-Israel conflict and during the 1948 War of Independence were active participants on Israel's side. Between 1948 and 1956 their men volunteered for the Israel Defense Forces. Since 1956, service has been obligatory.

The first Druze settled was in southern Lebanon and northern Israel. From 1516 to 1918 they were governed by emirs as a semi-autonomous community. Worldwide there are approximately one million Druze living in Syria and Lebanon; 86,000 live in Israel and 18,000 live in the Golan. The Druze in the Golan consider themselves Syrian.

The religion was founded in the 10th century and no converts have been allowed since 1050. The religion has always been secretive but they are monotheistic with mentors or prophets from Judaism, Christianity and Islam such as Jethro and Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus and Salman the Persian and Mohammed. There are no rituals and ceremonies, no daily liturgy, no fixed holy days and no obligation to pilgrimage.

The religion is secret and closed to converts. They believe in reincarnation. The body is not important; the soul is immortal and goes from body to body. Faith is taught from generation to generation and the six religious books are accessible only to the religious leaders. These leaders cover their shaven heads with a white turban; they have a mustache and a beard. They do not eat pork, drink alcohol or smoke. The religious women wear a white head scarf. The prayer house has rugs, cushions and mattresses on which they sit when praying Sundays and Thursdays. Men and women are separated by a see-through fence.

#### Meeting author Salman Natour

Salman Natour is a Daliyat el Carmel born author, 62 years old, member of the Committee of Palestinian and Israeli Writers Against Occupation and for Peace; works as author and playwright; serves as Director of the Emil Tuma Institute for Palestinian and Israeli Studies in Haifa; and is editor of Madar, an Arabic language journal published by the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies in Ramallah. He has published 30 books – all but one in Arabic – and translated more than 10 books from Arabic to Hebrew.

“I write short stories, articles, novels for the past 30 years,” he tells us in the Daliyat el Carmel community center auditorium. He says he writes Palestinian memories because “I am a Palestinian, I am Druze.” He says “policy makes problems of identity.”

Are they Palestinian? Arab? Israeli? He describes the Druze as citizens who serve in the army not Israeli “because the State is defined as a Jewish state.”

“We pay taxes, we serve in the army, we are good citizens but we are not equal in rights. The Druze society is divided on the question of loyalty...I think the policy of the State with the Druze is not democratic.”

As we were about to leave the Daliyat el Carmel community center, we popped into a room where Chef Walid Sharcowi was testing a group of local women who had taken a course to be pastry chefs.

#### Isfiya Community Council Head

*[From a news report, Dec. 7, 2010 – An Israeli teenager on Monday admitted throwing a piece of burning charcoal into the woods, causing the massive fire that ravaged northern Israel in the past three days, local daily Ha'aretz reported. Police suspected the 14-year-old of negligence and detained him early Monday. The boy confessed his acts to the investigators afterwards, saying that he smoked a waterpipe near the Druze village of Isfiya and later hurled burning charcoal into the forest. After seeing large fire broke out, the panicked boy ran away without reporting to anyone. Isfiya is located at northern Israel's Carmel mountain range, where the massive bushfire broke out early Thursday. The fire claimed 41 lives, forced the evacuation of 17,000 residents from their homes and left behind 50 square km of torched land before being fully subdued on Sunday evening.]*

Wajeeh Kayyoub is a soft-spoken, genteel man in his 50s. He sits at the head of a board room table in a room with photographs of the Carmel Fire around the walls.

He is salaried and was elected a year and four months ago.

He begins speaking to the foreign correspondents – “Druze, Christians, Moslems, Jews live in Isfiya and show how coexistence can be.”

There are 11,800 people living in Isfiya – 18% Christians, 8% Muslims, 2% Jews (112 families) and 72% Druze. The bad news is 60% of the children are under



Isfiya Druze place of worship. Photos by Barry A. Kaplan/Jerusalem.

the poverty level and 51% of the families depend on National Insurance.

December 2 at 11 a.m. Wajeeh was sitting in his office when he received a phone call that there was a fire. He asked his secretary to tell the employees to follow him and called the Haifa fire department.

“We are the only town in the north surrounded by 30 million trees. We are the unofficial guards of the Carmel Park. We are here 400 years. We belong to the land. Keren Kayemet planted the trees on the land of Isfiya. I am 10th generation,” says Wajeeh, who served in the Israeli army.

“I am a citizen of the State, my Nationality is Arab, and I am loyal to the State of Israel.”

Wajeeh said he learned at that moment fire knew no borders. It can burn everything equal and it gave him knowledge, philosophy and vision for his life. (113,000 dunams [27,922 acres] were burned during the fire.) Keren Kayemet (JNF) which manages the forests entered and made decisions without consulting the local council.

“I want to be a partner in decision making.”

Isfiya has no fire department, no ambulances, no technology or equipment. Between 500–600 people were moved to

the east side of town. After an hour and 15 minutes, the Haifa fire department arrived. People who lived near the forest suffered. Fields were burned, animals were killed and three or four houses were destroyed. Isfiya depends on tourism but there is an imbalance. There are basic problems in infrastructure and education. Most of the residents work in Haifa; 8% work locally. Although 35–38% Druze work for the police, border patrol and army, only a few are from Isfiya.

“The majority of Druze in Israel considers themselves as Israeli citizens.”

#### From a Young Druze in the Israel Defense Forces

A is 20 years old, a Druze born and raised in Isfiya, currently serving in the intelligence branch of the Israel Defense Forces. He takes us to the old village of Isfiya, established 78 years ago, now primarily inhabited by old people and the religious elders. By the old arc is a prayer house for women, dating back before 1948.

When the Abba Khoushy (later mayor of Haifa in the 1950s) was running from the British, he came to the old village and the home of Sheikh Labibe. The women gave him the clothes of religious women and hid him three to four weeks. He started building the relationship between the Jews of Haifa and the Druze of Isfiya.

Druze villages are built on peaks and mountains and from one point, we can see the view of Haifa Bay. Druze have a good family life, everyone knows each other, less than 2% leave. Every Druze parent must teach their children the basic principles of the Druze community. Then at the age of 15 they reach the age of religious decision. It is not uncommon for parents to be religious and their children not or vice versa. Approximately 12% decide they want to become religious and therefore the young men do not serve in the IDF.

There is no intermarriage and no conversion to Druze. Young men can identify Druze women by certain pronunciations in Arabic and Druze (see Kaplan/Israel, page NAT 19)



The 93-year-old Sheikh in Isfiya demonstrates how coffee is ground on the 100 year old azam.





## Jewish Theater

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

### Mother of God knows who

Mother of God? Oy, vey! Yes, we're talking about You-Know-Who (or Whom). This time around, Mary, mother of God, a major divinity to millions of Christians, becomes a different woman. In Michele Miller's *Mother of God!* she is Miriam, a Jewish mother who gives birth to a Jewish son. The play has just opened off-Broadway in a "workshop production," and, if it can be considered a workshop – a play in progress – many of its sins may be forgiven.

Billed as "The Greatest Story Ever Told," "chutzpah" is the operant word here. Playwright Miller has taken on a major challenge. The Immaculate Conception becomes a Greek myth with Jewish underpinnings – or something of the sort. The God comes down from on high, offering Mary one night of divine love, which results in her pregnancy. He might be, for all we know, Zeus or Jupiter or Allah or Yahweh. (One is certainly reminded of Zeus and his many peccadillos.) "They're all the same, all one God," the unruffled Mary says at one point. She has fallen for G-d, much as a teen-ager might worship a pop star.

Miller is indeed ambitious, reaching, as she says in the program notes, for layers of meaning. As she claims, her play is filled with "arcane historic references," "deliberate archaisms and anachronisms, foreign terms, and Hebrew prayers...." Though much of this, somehow, bypassed this reviewer, we accept the possibility, given Miller's interest in ancient times and her doctorate in archeology.

But does the play work, layers or no layers? Is the theme, the message, clear? Unfortunately, not for this viewer. The play and the production both suffer from a multiple-personality syndrome. One is

never sure whether it is meant to be satire, farce, low comedy, high drama. Or is it a circus (as the background music sometimes suggests?)

And what of the plot itself? Miller makes some interesting changes in the traditional story. Miriam is betrothed to a wealthy elderly man, Joseph, chosen by her parents. It is during this betrothal period that G-d visits the naïve young girl. "And he knew her," as they say in the Bible.

She is thrilled to carry his child, and assumes Joseph will be pleased, too. It takes her shrewd cousin Elizabeth (who is pregnant with her own child, the future John the Baptist) to set her straight. Miriam must marry quickly, get Joseph into bed, pretend it's his child. But it is too late. Joseph discovers the deception. It is only when she is in labor that he finally forgives her and accepts the soon-to-be-born child. And, thanks to the three kings from the East, she has a successful delivery, aided by their gifts of myrrh, frankincense and gold.

Miller's version makes for an intriguing story, one with potential, with its best moment a comic exchange between Miriam and her mother Hannah. When Hannah learns of her daughter's out-of-wedlock pregnancy, she becomes a cliché of the Jewish mother, screaming and moaning, "It's all my fault! Where did I go wrong!"

In fact, there is far too much screaming and exaggerated performances in this production, directed by Melody Brooks. Whether Brooks' cast of eight is capable of more subtle, in-depth performances is anybody's guess. In any event, there are few signs of fine acting here (despite the cast credentials listed in the program) – the chief exception being the appealing Keona Welch as Miriam.

But Brooks' other problems are not of her making. This venue at the off-off-Broadway Richmond Shepard Theatre, is very limited – a small "black box" (actually, a two-sided box), with few amenities. And obviously sparse funds have forced the company to utilize make-do props and bare-bones staging. Cardboard cut-outs provide the materials for each short, choppy scene. (But such off-off-Broadway productions

have been known to overcome limitations with imagination and skills.)

In all, coming to this highly-touted play with high expectations, we could not help but be disappointed. But we do not abandon hope for its future. *Mother of God!* is still in workshop mode, and may very well ultimately emerge as a worthy play.

#### Shylock holds sway in New York

Shylock, Shakespeare's wily, vengeful, mistreated Venetian, has really taken over Manhattan. First, there was Al Pacino's impassioned version at Public Theatre's Shakespeare in the Park. Then, Pacino and company moved to Broadway, to continued acclaim.

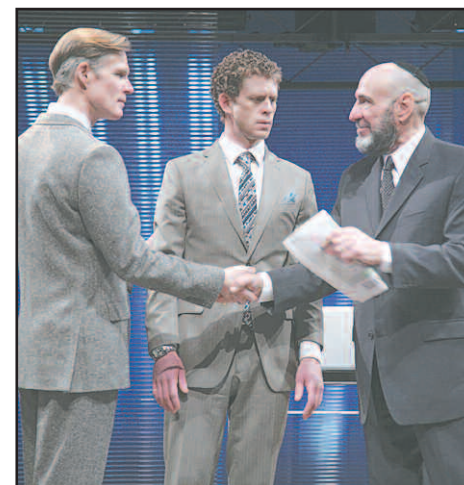
And now, yet another *The Merchant of Venice*. F. Murray Abraham offers a different interpretation of the Jewish banker (usurer, as the Christian Venetians would have it), in a production directed by the controversial Darko Tresnjak, now being shown at Pace University's downtown arts center.

Tresnjak has chosen to set the play in today's world, with as many scenes at the stock exchange as at Portia's home. Laptops, cell phones and I-Pods abound. It is a slicked-down sterile set, with practically no props. In fact, the only props are three tables on which sit the laptops, with a large screen (TV? Computer monitor?) over each table. When Portia's suitors must choose between three caskets (laptops, in this case) to gain her hand, the results are flashed on large overhead screens.

Tresnjak's idea, we suspect, is to point out the similarities between Shakespeare's imagined Venice and our own modern times – amoral, sterile, and money mad, as he sees it. Greed, not sex, dominates the scene. Tresnjak is not far from the mark – at least in terms of the enigmatic play. It can hardly be called a comedy – or a romantic comedy. Nor is it a tragedy, since no one dies at the end. It is, if anything, a wry, satiric take on a particular society.

No wonder there have been so many interpretations of Shylock over the years. Is Shakespeare being sympathetic to the treatment of Jews? Did he really know anything about Jews (who were practically non-existent in Elizabethan England)? Or was he merely writing a play that would sell tickets, having culled his sources from many earlier pieces.

*The Merchant of Venice* is actually two stories in one – a love affair and a business deal. (But the love affair is also a business deal.) Bassanio, a penniless gentleman, asks his friend Antonio (the merchant of Venice) for funds, so that he can court the beautiful heiress Portia. Antonio agrees, and, with his many cargoes at sea as collateral, Antonio asks Shylock for a loan of 3000 ducats. Shylock agrees, but asks for "as a whim" his "pound of flesh" should Antonio renege. Meanwhile, Portia is entertaining other suitors. According to her father's will, a suitor must choose between three caskets, one of which contains Portia's



(L-R) Tom Nelis, Lucas Hall, F. Murray Abraham in *The Merchant of Venice*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

portrait. Ultimately Bassanio appears, chooses the right casket, and wins Portia (and her estate). At the same time, all Antonio's ships are sunk at sea, and he cannot repay the loan. But Portia goes to Venice (disguised as a young male clerk) and wins the case against Shylock, turning his suit upside down. Shylock gets away with his life, but little else, forced to give up his religion and his worldly goods.

In our supposedly tolerant era, the emphasis has been to humanize Shylock, evoking audience sympathy for his plight. And certainly Al Pacino did that, with his human, emotional portrayal. But F. Murray Abraham is a different Shylock. Mostly his Shylock is a confident businessman, shrewdly assessing his clients – and managing to survive in the anti-Semitic world in which he lives. In fact, all the way through, Abraham maintains a detachment, somewhat tinged with cynicism. It is only at the play's very end, that he shambles away, a broken, destroyed Jew, does he reflect emotion. Nor do other cast members enrich the production, with two remarkable exceptions. Jacob Ming-Trent, who plays Shylock's servant Launcelot Gobbo, has one marvelously comic monologue, milking the play for its moment of comedy. And Melissa Miller gives a thoughtful, moving interpretation of Jessica, Shylock's daughter.

But, on the whole, it is difficult for a reviewer to be moved by the Abraham performance – and by the production in general. It is too sterile, too detached. And despite John Lee Beatty's clever minimal set, Tresnjak's well-paced direction, and Shakespeare's memorable lines, this production leaves the reviewer as detached as the play itself.

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



Scene from *Mother of God!* Photo by Rafael Jordan.





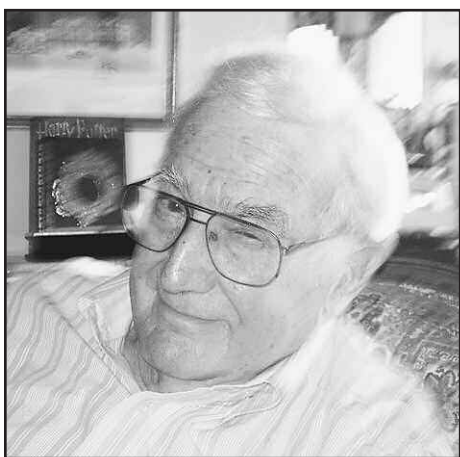
## Jewish Theater

REVIEWED BY MARION DS DREYFUS

### Kimber Road: A serious musical comedy

*Kimber Road* is a spirited new satire on synagogue life and star-[of-David]-crossed lovers in America and the Old Country by retired Cantor Harold Lerner and directed by Scott Klavan.

*Kimber Road* opens in flashback mode in 1980, as key characters Rosa Leah and her papa, Cantor Moishele Bratzker, recall events of 40 years earlier, when Rosa becomes smitten with David, the son of a rival religious leader, Reb Sholom Finkelman. With the knowing persistence of the tough, magical matchmaker, Chaye Sur'l, the two opposite-family scions are with effort affianced. Not so fast: The arduous engagement is torpedoed almost instantaneously by a dispute between the two religious factions before a wedding can transpire. From there, the dispute flares to engulf the community, when the full-blown feud is confronted with an unexpected common enemy. Each congregant must sort out his reasons for where he or she stands.



Cantor Harold Lerner, writer of *Kimber Road*.

Playwright and lyricist Cantor Lerner perfected his understanding of the rhythms and vaulting melodies of Jewish cantillation in 60 years of singing in and creating soaring music for synagogues in upstate New York. Themes addressed in the satirical musical offering – and the threats such modern-day concerns pose to the survival of the Jewish people, particularly in an environment defined by contemporary cultural assaults, generational cross-currents, and ubiquitous doubt – find their robust and pleasing outlet in the play. The large issues addressed through zesty humor and delicately restructured liturgical compositions by cantorial greats of the past, good-natured chiding,

and acutely observed Yiddische zeitgeist provide an insider's peek at life in a just-yesterday bygone era. These provide meaty insights into some of the strains that cleave our generations today.

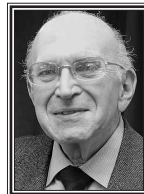
Although the theme of disharmony is necessarily at the center of these conflicted relationships, Lerner and director Klavan deviate slightly from the iconic originals to create an opposition between the modern man or woman who “loves love” and the hard-fought images and values of a religiously and ideologically strict *ancient regime*. With the character of the parents giving way to the modernity of their offspring in the *goldene medina*, America, the invocations and definitions of the past fuse with the choral invocations of the opposing synagogue members' activity, and brushes over the aesthetic of the poignant musical satire as a whole, with its own repeated dramatic, plaintive and narrative motifs of loss and redemption. Klavan casts a dozen talented actors and musicians in roles that give each a chance to shine musically and, often, dramatically.

Serviceable plays about the workings of faith and its adherents are noticeably sparse. Those that manage to dramatize intergenerational disputes without losing the cohering thread are indeed smaller still. As entertaining as is the plight of the youngsters who seek to be with those they choose, the true target audience is parents and adults who forget that under the temporary rivalries of place or community group, it is incumbent upon grown-ups to strive for understanding of the “other,” even in one's particular religious stratosphere; to listen with open hearts to those we might dismiss or impugn for less-than-exalted reasons.

*Kimber Road* is a flash we need to heed: Though surely society is partially to “blame” for the occasional dysfunctions of our various groups, the miraculous effort of love and open-heartedness can heal the fissures that crop up and threaten to calcify our interactions.

Though the characters do not have extensive speeches on the stage, since the staged-reading production is a swift 90 minutes, they all come across as fully dimensional, without artifice or separation from people we all know. Lerner manages to sketch a character in a few lines of potent dialogue, and extend that reality with lilting music that combines the best of Old Country *nigunim*, cantorial liturgies, with a satisfying awareness of Broadway and contemporary music. And for his part, the director marshals the elements of Jewish *weltschmerz*, poignancy, wringing Polish pathos, Russian recognition and Talmudic tradition out of the script and tapestried music.

A wee caveat is that the name of this tuneful satire does not immediately convey to a prospective audience what delights are to come. I would have preferred a name with more *gemutliche* resonance to tease the theater-goer with



## As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

### Highlights of a singing seder at home

As Passover approaches, one notices many new CDs on the market that deal with the holiday. One of these is *Let's Make a Seder: How to Conduct One* produced and featuring (Hazzan) Paul Zim. In smaller type is the following: “Highlights of a Singing Seder at Home for the Contemporary Jewish Family.” There is an informative booklet within that helps with the first part of the title, but it is the second part of the title that is the strongest and most appealing part of this CD.

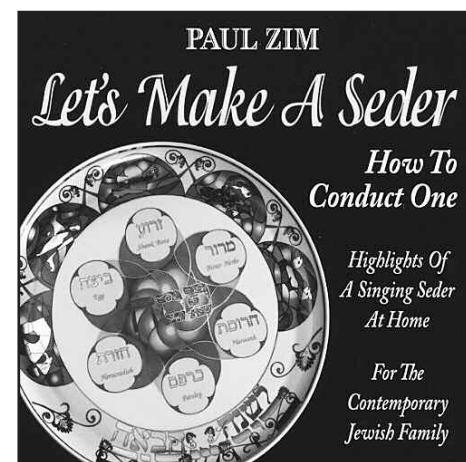
Not every singer or cantor can speak as well as Zim does. His speaking voice is well modulated and his diction is clear. Although not a panacea or one size fits all, this CD does accomplish its aims for many parents and their children, at least in the U.S. I have no statistical study to back up what I suspect is the case.

There are probably many Jewish as well as mixed Jewish families of limited Jewish religious background that would like to host a seder and find the prospect daunting. They may wish to do this for their own experience and/or for the benefit of their offspring. Their children may or may not be familiar with the traditional songs sung at a seder. This CD offers an excellent religious as well as musical experience.

There are many good points in this CD. The one that I believe is the most effective is the fact that each step in the seder, each prayer as well as its significance and/or relationship in the seder, is first explained prior to the saying or singing of the text. There may be many an ah-ha moment because of this.

The tunes Zim sings are carefully and artfully arranged. The instrumentalists and members of the youth choir were identified, but inexplicably, the arranger was not. Although most of the melodies

what joyfulness, humor and perceived story lies ahead. But with inspired and inspiring lyrics, melodies that stay with one and, thanks to a cast that is top-notch and professional, and an author with so many years of musical expertise under his belt, *Kimber Road* offers at once a resurrection and construction of beloved sounds and imminent sense that beguiles an audience, even in a reading. With a full-bore staged piece, this would be a complementary sidecar addendum to the likes of a *Fiddler* or even a folksy, repurposed *Oklahoma!* ★



*Let's Make a Seder: How to Conduct One, Highlights of a Singing Seder at Home for the Contemporary Jewish Family, produced and featuring (Hazzan) Paul Zim.*

are traditional, several are not.

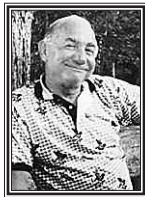
The treatment of the texts of “Ha Lachma” and “B’chol Dor Vador” by Zim as well as “Baruch Hamakom” by Kenisberg are imaginative and their performance well done. I could quibble about the inclusion of the spiritual “Let My People Go” or the treatment of “One Is Ha Shem” by Zale Newman.” Although charming, the genre that this song suggests (to me) is the style of the Beach Boys, and this style is not a musical fit to the rest of the selections.

With regard to Zim's singing, it is always lyrical and suitable for the younger audiences and their parents. I would be remiss if I did not mention that Cantor Zim has many other excellent CDs to his credit that amply demonstrate the variety and richness of his voice as well as his musical persona. I can and do recommend this CD. One could obtain it at places where Jewish CDs are sold or by calling 1-888-3-sameach, or one can find it online at: [www.jewishjukebox.com](http://www.jewishjukebox.com).

As an aside or observation with the coming of Easter, have you noticed the number of performances of various passions by Bach and others, or the Easter section of Handel's *Messiah* in our concert halls and over the air waves, usually on FM stations? What music that deals with Pesach have you noticed? What is my point you may ask? How many performances are there of oratorios or other works in these same concert halls? Ahem. I have composed two works that deal with Pesach, “Songs of Triumph” and “Haggadah: A Search for Freedom.” Even though critically acclaimed when performed, neither has been performed for at least ten years. They require a decent chorus, cantorial soloist, and an orchestra. I believe there are probably other works like this gathering dust. “If not now, when?”

Dr. Gold is a composer, conductor and music critic for the Post & Opinion. He is the 2010 recipient of the Kavod Award given to him by the Cantors Assembly of North America at their recent convention. He can be reached at: [drmortongold@yahoo.com](mailto:drmortongold@yahoo.com). ★





## Spoonful of Humor

By TED ROBERTS

### Taxes, old as Bible times

We Jews are the inspiration of most innovation in the wide, wide world – maybe a slight exaggeration, but basically correct. We held the torch of truth in every nook and cranny of our dynamic spinning world.

Take taxes. Maybe some prebiblical civilization imposed it on their subjects, but it's not recorded. (Maybe they were ashamed of it.) But look in Genesis. Moses inspired, not by the IRS, but by the creator of *shekels*, pounds, dollars, yen, and ruble levies a half *shekel* tax. A census shall be taken, says the Lord to Moses, and you'll extract half a *shekel* for the sanctuary. The language is a little convoluted – almost as though the half shekel is a ransom or a guilt offering. Broad-minded readers can see a glimpse of later Christian practices that trafficked in atonement merchandising and even worse, indulgences. (Give the church ten bucks if tomorrow you intend to commit adultery with Betty Sue. You'll be off the hook. A mechanism frowned upon and dropped by Protestantism.)

So, this was the beginning. This half *shekel* donation that went toward the maintenance of the sanctuary or the *mishkan*, as we called it later. Not so bad by current standards and maybe even deductible from the "federal" Israelite tax that came later. One attractive feature of this levy – besides its small amount is that it was a flat tax – another "first" for Judaism!

Everyone dropped his half shekel in the collection plate. "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less," said the head of the Israelite IRS – Moses or maybe even G-d. A small enough price for "atonement." The money is clearly for the maintenance of the *mishkan*.

As usual – as in all human affairs – there is an undercurrent of politics; for those who serve in the many sacrificial activities – assumedly the Levites – shared in this largess. If only the poor, hardworking Israelites who put up with this tax, as well as the sands of Sinai, which penetrated their food, clothes, and the crevices between their toes, could imagine how much more complex their 1040 will be in 2011. Whole new industries will spring up; CPAs, accountants, tax lawyers. Even penal institutions for tax evaders.

The next thing you know, the people, evidently feeling leaderless, asked Samuel the prophet to appoint a king over them. "We want a King, they shout." Samuel (who knows about taxes)

## A memorable seder in wartime Korea 1953

By MICHAEL BLAIN

I have celebrated *Pesach* in several countries in many cities. But the most memorable one took place in Korea in 1953. As I reported to the London *Jewish Chronicle* (JC), the Passover services "were the nicest I have had for many years). And I also reported to the New York 92nd Street Y Bulletin that "the troops spent a very pleasant *Pesach*."

shakes his head but reluctantly consults with G-d, who basically says, Okay give them a king, but warn them of the consequences, whereupon Samuel, who has taken political science courses at the Yeshiva, makes speech number 35, which tells the deluded Israelites about Taxation 101. "He will take a tenth of your grain." And much more. You'll regret it, he tells them. (I wonder if that half *shekel mishkan* tax was deductible.)

All this occurs as the Israelites glance around their world and see that dangerous nations with kings – then as today – live in their neighborhood. They are convinced they can't survive without a king. But Samuel, since he is a prophet and can predict the wheat crop next year, the lottery winner, and taxation policies of a king (ANY KING – they're all the same) cautions the potential taxpayers again. He explains – to paraphrase – that kings love golden palaces, and large armies, voluptuous wives with jeweled fingers, and they reject any food not served from plates of gold.

And guess who shall pay for the kings' love of luxury? You the people, says the prophet. But the people, even as today, thought that rulers gave them the dignity of their heathen neighbor. So, Saul was made king. And then David. Next, Solomon ascended to the throne and people knew why Samuel was a peerless prophet. His nightmare vision of future taxation was astoundingly real. True, Israel's empire shined throughout the Mideast, but it was not exactly the light of Zion. Solomon the wise believed in bailout, and he shrugged his imperial shoulders at deficits and tried to tax his way to economic health even weighed down with the expenses of building a Temple. Upon his death, rebellion broke his kingdom into two pieces, Israel and Judah because his son, Rehoboam, was a champion taxer. My father whipped you with whips he says – I'll whip you with scorpions. As Solomon himself states in Ecclesiastes: There is nothing new under the sun. Especially taxes.

Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner, is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. When he's not writing, Ted worships at (see Roberts, page NAT 14)

Another reason why this *Pesach* was so memorable is that I was reunited with two of my childhood friends, Joe Klein (Cleveland) and Sidney Farkas (New York). We had met in Prague in 1946, 15- and 16-year-old orphaned Holocaust survivors. Together with 100 boys and girls, we were preparing to travel to London where we were hosted by the Jewish community until we found other countries in which to settle.

Joe Klein and I arrived in New York on Dec. 15, 1949. A few months later, the Korean War broke out. Within a year of our arrival, we were drafted and sent to Korea. (While living in London, I read the *Jewish Chronicle* regularly and it followed me to Korea. I wrote several reports and sent photos to the JC, which usually appeared on the front page.)

My report to the JC continued: ...distinguished guests included General Maxwell Taylor, 8th Army Commander, Jewish Welfare Board Officials and non-Jewish Chaplains. "General Taylor followed the entire Seder service from the Hagada. In a brief address to the 'man of the Jewish faith' he compared the fight of the enslaved Israelites with the fight we are now engaged in. As the Red Sea parted for the Israelites, so may a Red Sea open for these people (Koreans) at which end will be freedom.

All branches of the armed forces provided their men with three-day passes and transportation to reach the services on time. The National Jewish Welfare Board shipped tons of *matzahs*, wine, Hagadas and other ritual provisions. *Pesach* gift packages with matzos, gefilte fish, nuts, chicken and Israeli chocolates sent by the Passover League of Philadelphia were distributed to the troops before they returned to their units.

To this day I am most grateful to the Army, the six Jewish Chaplains in Korea and the Jewish Welfare Board for making sure every Jewish G.I. had a chance to be at a seder in the middle of a war.

I still have the invitation and instructions



Michael Blain (center) reunited with his childhood friends, Joe Klein (left) and Sidney Farkas (right) in Korea 1953.

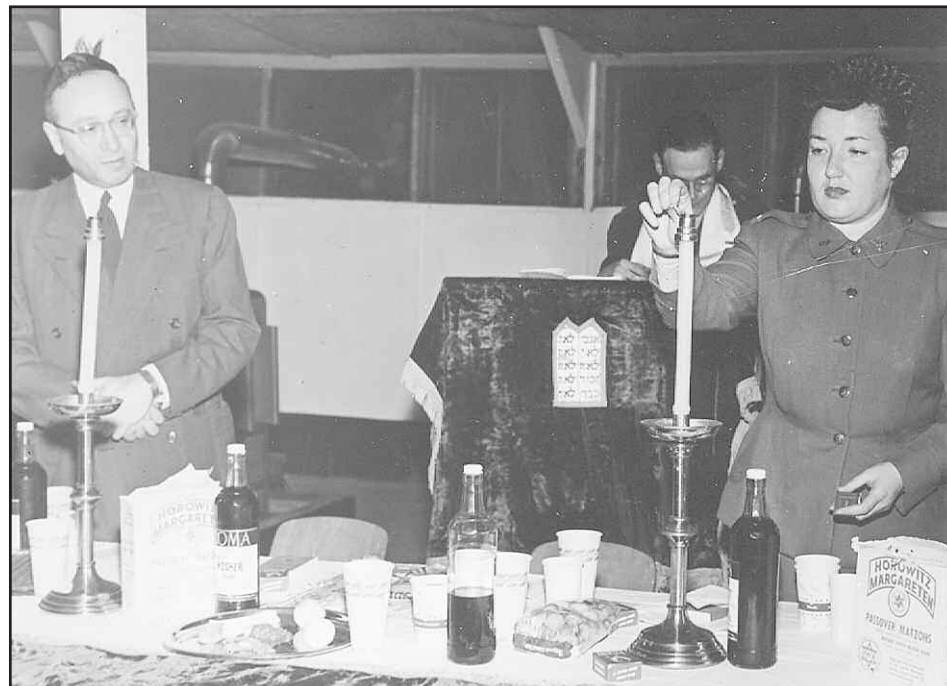
Chaplain Norman Goldberg sent to Jewish troops. He writes:

Now, more than ever, it is important for you to show interest in the culture and religion of your forefathers by joining your fellow Jews to celebrate *Pesach*.

The letter includes a message from the Commanding General, Thomas Herren, in which he wrote:

I take this opportunity to greet all Jewish personnel on the occasion of the Passover festival. That historic victory of freedom over slavery marked the first such struggle, which was to be repeated in every age. We in Korea are fighting for this physical and spiritual freedom. May the Almighty God deem us worthy of that freedom today and assist now, as He did then, in our struggle to keep his His divine principles alive.

Michael Blain became a U.S. citizen only after he returned from Korea. He graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with a B.S. degree and lived in Cleveland from 1957 to 1971, working for the World Publishing Company. In 1971 he was transferred to Indianapolis, later joining Israel Bonds as Executive Director. Blain retired in 2007 after 33 years with the Israeli Bonds Organization. In Rochester, N.Y., he met and married Sylvia Kramer. They have three sons, twelve grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. The Blains moved back to Cleveland recently. ★



The candles are lit at the head table of the seder.





## Cover Art Description

BY BRUCE DAVID

### The "Storytelling" Seder Plate

*"And you will tell your child on that day: It is because of what God did for me when I left Egypt." (Exodus 13:8)*

The celebration of Passover is perhaps the most widely celebrated holiday of the world's Jewish population today. Central to this practice is the participation in its ritual meal, the *Pesach* (Passover) *Seder*. One of the main parts of a Passover seder is the section titled *Maggid*. It is at this time of the ceremony that we share the Passover story leading to the redemption of the Jewish people from over 400 years of slavery in Egypt. During the recounting of this saga, we are reminded of many of the events that took place in leading up to the exodus.

This "Storytelling" Seder Plate was designed to assist in the *mitzvah* of retelling the Passover story. It visually depicts many of the noteworthy events and their symbolic significance in connection with the items included on the seder plate.

In the upper right corner of the "Storytelling" Seder Plate, the Hebrew word, *z'roa*, refers to the roasted shankbone. Traditionally, it is meant to remind us of the Paschal Lamb, one of the two sacrifices eaten at Passover in the Temple during the days of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple). However, in relation to the Pesach narrative, and in the seder plate, it is also a reminder of the lamb that each Jewish family obtained for their special meal offering before leaving Egypt. It was from these lambs that the Jews took the blood which they painted on the doorposts of their homes in order that God would pass them by when inflicting the last of the ten plagues on the Egyptians (Exodus 12:2-13). The seder plate's illustration includes the Jews both acquiring a lamb and placing its blood on their doorposts.

The Hebrew word, *z'roa*, actually translates to mean "an arm." Many believe this particular term was chosen to refer to the part in the *haggadah* (the special prayer book used at the seder) that tells about God bringing the Jews out of Egypt with "an outstretched arm."

Just beneath the *z'roa*, on the right side of the plate, a depiction underscores the significance of the *haroset*. This is a mixture usually made of chopped apples, nuts and wine, although some people include cinnamon, other spices and fruits. The *haroset* is meant to look like the mortar and clay used by the Jewish slaves, and as such, is a reminder to

us of the grueling labor forced upon them by the Egyptians. In the illustration, under the watchful eye and whip of their Egyptian taskmaster, the Jewish slaves are seen stirring the mortar and pouring it into molds. The oven depicted in the background is where it will eventually be baked into bricks.

Proceeding clockwise to the lower right corner of the design, one may find a symbolic depiction of the third traditional item included on the Seder plate, *chazeret*. Emphasizing the bitterness of slavery in Egypt, *chazeret* is one of the bitter herbs, which we eat twice during the seder. The majority of people use romaine lettuce (or horseradish) for the bitter vegetable on the seder plate.

In the design on the plate, the Jews gathering straw for brick making symbolically represents the bitterness of the Jewish suffering. This job was made all the more difficult when Pharaoh, in defiance of God required the Jews to collect their own straw for the task. Although the straw had previously been provided, the Jews daily quota for finished bricks was not decreased. When the Jews were unable to achieve this impossible task, as it is depicted in the seder plate, the Jews were whipped and flogged by the Egyptians.

Moving to the upper left hand corner of the Seder plate design, one may find the representation for the roasted egg, or *beitzah*. A reminder of the second Temple offering (*z'roa* being the other), the egg symbolizes the festivities that took place in Jerusalem at Pesach time. Traditionally, the egg is also a symbol of mourning. By using it rather than another piece of meat signifies the sadness at losing the Holy Temple. The rendition of the Temple, the priest and the altar in the plate's design are reminiscent of these events.

Just beneath this, on the left side of the design, the Hebrew word for *maror*, represents the second bitter herb included on the Seder plate. Horseradish is most often used for this bitter vegetable, which also denotes the bitterness of the Jewish lives in Egypt.

While this suffering is underscored by the hard labor being inflicted on the Jews as they build the Egyptian's pyramids and cities, a unique and notable rendition is also included in this part of the seder plate. In the lower part of this illustration is an individual who may be seen in three different ways. The first view is of a Jewish slave assisting his fellow Jews in moving the large heavy block for building. Additionally, he may be seen as a reflection of the Jewish nation in Egypt as he is falling and praying for help. Finally, this same individual may be seen as announcing the coming of a redeemer and the redemption from slavery. In this single form, seen in three different ways, one may find a summary of the Jewish situation in Egypt.

The last item included on the seder plate is located in the lower left side of

the design. During the seder, *karpas* is dipped into salt water, and then eaten. For this ritual food, most people use boiled potatoes, celery or parsley. While the salt water is a reminder of the tears and sweat of the Jews in Egypt, the *karpas* itself is to be eaten while relaxing.

Dipping the *karpas* in the salty water is meant to signify the new status obtained by the Jews in becoming a free people. Some compare the *karpas* (a plain vegetable of the earth, which becomes part of a holy feast), with the Jewish people who started as slaves, but eventually became a holy people. Others say we eat the *karpas* to remind us that Passover is also known as the Festival of Spring, *Hag HaAviv*, a season of new growth.

In this part of the seder plate design, the Jews may be seen celebrating their new growth and freedom. Here, they are enjoying their festival meal in the proper spirit, love and thankfulness to the One who, through miracles and mighty acts, made their freedom possible.

The momentous occasion that effectively ended this saga of Jewish history occurred when God destroyed the Egyptian army with the miracle of the splitting of the sea. Israel had now personally seen and experienced the power of their God and were ready to resume the journey toward their destiny.

The large Star of David in the design on the seder plate depicts the Jewish people as rising up above their past trials in Egypt. It is here that Moses, Miriam and the Jewish people, along with their children, are seen celebrating their salvation and freedom. With instrument and song, the people join together in the *Mi Chamocha* prayer/song in recognizing and giving thanks to God for all the miracles and wonders done on their behalf.

The reason for the Passover celebration, God's march of the Jewish people to their redemption, is still happening today. May the remembrance of our special Pesach gifts; the knowledge of God, the preciousness of freedom, and the roots of our heritage, be among those we carry with us always, and pass on to our own children.

*May the light of God's love shine on you and your loved ones at Pesach, and always!*

This authentic hand carved Seder Plate is part of an extremely limited edition designed and certified by the artist Bruce David.

© Bruce David All rights reserved.



#### ROBERTS

(continued from page NAT 13)

*Etz Chayim Synagogue in Huntsville, Ala., where for 25 years he has served as bar mitzvah teacher. His inspiration is his patient wife, Shirley. Check out his Website: [www.wonderwordworks.com](http://www.wonderwordworks.com) or blogsite: [www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com](http://www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com). His collected works The Scribbler on The Roof can be bought at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or [lulu.com/content/127641](http://lulu.com/content/127641). ★*

## Confidentially yours: Shiva schmoozing could lead to love

Dear Avi and Adele:

*I'm a 27-year-old guy, and I met a girl recently at a function. Okay, I admit it, it was at a shiva (mourning for the dead). And somewhere between the chopped liver platter and the pickled herring, I found myself locking eyes with her. I very much felt a connection, but couldn't work up the nerve to get her number. How could I have worked the room better, or have I lost my bashert (soul mate) forever?*

~ Shameless after Shiva

Dear Shameless:

We're surprised that a young Jewish man even has to ask the question! Everyone knows you have to do what it takes to meet your *bashert* before you settle for marrying someone your Aunt Sadie sets you up with. Finding love should have no boundaries, and a shiva is no exception. You're not as shameless as you think, actually – there's a hot new trend out there called "casseroling," which involves singles showing up at the *shivas* of departed strangers and trolling for dates. We totally think that's tacky, so we do not recommend this course of action!

Now back to you. While at the shiva, you could have been inconspicuous by writing your number on a napkin and passing it to her with a piece of rugelach. Now that it's after the *shiva*, a little detective work is in order. Consider putting your family members to work to determine your girl's identity. Simply saying, "I saw this girl at the *shiva* last night, with the green sweater and red hair..." should be enough to get the wheels of fate in motion. Be proud: whoever you involve in tracking down this lovely lady will *kvell* (swell with pride) that they were a part of your match. Who doesn't have a little matchmaker in them?

Just remember, as the old Yiddish saying goes: *far a bisel libe batsolt men miten gantsen lebel* (for a little love, you pay all your life). Make sure she's the one!

Livin' and lovin',

Avi and Adele

To submit questions to Avi and Adele, email [aa@letmypeoplegrow.org](mailto:aa@letmypeoplegrow.org). For additional Jewish content, go to [www.letmypeoplegrow.org](http://www.letmypeoplegrow.org). ★

## On this date in Jewish history

On April 6, 1848

Jews of Prussia emancipated.

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



## Travel

BY HAROLD JACOBSON AND ROSE KLEINER

### The Great Hotels of Israel: The Renaissance Jerusalem

An official in the Tourism section of the Israeli government commented recently that Israel will be making a concerted effort in the near future to increase the number of Christian tourists visiting the country.

That is a worthy endeavour; the official in question might want to consult with management of The Renaissance Hotel in Jerusalem, which, since its opening more than 30 years ago, has been attracting scores of thousands of Christian tourists.



In a stay at the hotel in late November 2010 the above travel writers noted that more than 700 of the latter were crowded into the Renaissance's dining room for breakfast, partaking of the sumptuous food fair that is the staple of the hotel's daily menu.

The Christian groups represented there that morning were preparing for day long excursions to Masada and other sites of Biblical interest. And when they returned to the hotel in the evening they were treated, by the tour's organizers, to lectures, films and discussions about Israel's history and other subjects germane to their religious heritage.

While the Renaissance's role as one of Israel's favorite foyers for Christian visitors the hotel is equally renowned as a major magnet for observant Jews as well. One of the reasons for this is that it has the highest standards of Glatt Kashrut in its kitchens, provides special electronic timers for Shabbat lighting in its guest rooms and offers synagogue services for Shabbat and week days.

Respect for Jewish religious sensitivities is also reflected in separate swimming hours for men and women in the hotel's indoor pool. On Saturday evening after twilight the beautifully beaded curtain reception area of the hotel's restaurant habitually becomes the venue for young men and women on *shidduch* (match-making) dates.

The Renaissance has 650 well appointed rooms with every modern



## Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

### Nissan – the headquarters for newness

Greetings and blessings from the holy city of Jerusalem – the most beautiful, vibrant, compassionate and loving city in the world. A little more than a week ago, I impulsively booked a ticket to Israel and zoom in a short amount of time I am in a new reality. As soon I got off the plane, I am immediately hit by the intense energy and powerful blessings a person receives by simply being here physically. I am also struck by all the joy I see in the smiles, and laughter I hear on the streets and in the buses.

When we hear of terrorist attacks occurring in the land of Israel, people living outside of Israel wonder how the Jewish people living in Israel are able to live so joyfully and productively when confronted with enemies within and outside of their borders. Does it get to them? I have wondered from time to time what the long time impact of living with these kind of challenges have placed on people. To me, the people I know who have chosen to live in Israel are not bitter, narrow-minded or even angry as a result; rather, they are more refined, more joyful and open hearted than people in other places.

It came to me during the most exquisite beautiful Friday night *davening* (praying) this past Shabbat, that to live in Israel a person needs great faith and trust in *HaShem*. Because faith is a necessity here, it is thankfully plentiful. It seemed to me during the davening that faith pours down abundantly like rain upon the people whose hearts are open to receive this divine gift.

Faith is what enables us to be hopeful, optimistic, creative, loving and joyful, no matter what is happening to us, no matter where we are. Faith is something that we all need to develop and strengthen but it is ultimately a gift. I encourage everyone to come to Israel as often as possible, if it is not proper to live here to bear witness to what it is to live with faith.

I came this time to attend a girlfriend's wedding, *Mazel Tov* to Helaine and Yitzchok, but deep inside me was also

amenity (Internet access is available off the lobby) and its location, just at the entrance to Jerusalem, is walking distance to the Israel Museum, the Bible Land Museum, the central Bus Station, the Knesset and the International Convention Center. ✨

the call for renewal within me. What better place to do this opening and healing than in Israel during the month of *Nissan* (which began on April 4).

The Torah says this about Nissan, "This month shall be for you the head of the months, it is the first for you of the months of the year." (Exodus 12:2) Whatever is the first is the most beloved, the most precious, with the greatest benefit and impact. In the month of Nissan, we should also learn to trust our first impressions and to not second guess ourselves and others.

Nissan is called the headquarters for newness. A sign that we are close to God is that everything feels new, full of wonder and possibilities. These are the precious moments in life when we may be doing what we always do, and suddenly our consciousness is lifted upwards, our hearts open and we are filled with the awareness of the sanctity of life itself. We are so happy to simply be alive. This is a taste of the joy of Nissan.

This is the month to leave our personal restrictions and move to greater freedom. There are significant life changes possible in Nissan. If you feel stuck in a life routine that is limiting, take heart, Passover is coming, Nissan is here.

Nissan was the month when the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. It will be the month in the future when the final redemption will take place, and in every Nissan there is the hope and expectation that something new and wonderful will happen. In this month we celebrate the holiday of Passover. Many of us are already planning for where we will be for the Passover Seder. The scent of spring in the air makes us aware of the new life emerging in nature and that reminds us to pay attention to the new energies stirring within each of us as well.

At the Passover Seder we are reminded that the exodus from Egypt was not just a one time historical event. The Haggadah says, "In every generation one should regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt. (Ex 13:8) Metaphorically, we are still in Egypt.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzraim* which means "narrow straits" which represents all psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical constraints. While we are in the physical world, there are varying degrees of bondage that we experience. On Passover particularly and throughout the month of Nissan, it is a propitious time to free oneself from internal and external constraints, to make a personal exodus from our personal *mitzraim*.

How do we really move forward to greater freedom in our lives? That is the question. It is not easy to change, to become unstuck, and feel free to be who we really are. To help us to spring forward in our lives, we are given the holiday of Passover in the month of Nissan with all its rituals and observances that help us break through

limitations and go forward in the ways that our soul yearns to do. We can not do it alone. We need divine assistance.

By forging a stronger connection with God through prayer, meditation, and doing acts (*mitzvot*) we place ourselves in alignment with Divine blessing. We feel most alive and vibrant when we are connected to God. Give yourself time each day in personal prayer to stand in the question. What does God want of me? What does my soul need to heal, to grow and to shine? Talk to God and listen carefully to what opens within you.

In this month of Nissan, it is particularly important and helpful to watch your speech. The healing dimension for this month is speech. It is through our speech that we redeem or enslave ourselves. We create our reality through our speech. Be sure to take time each day to express your gratitude to God and people around you. A word, a look, a gesture of appreciation, a blessing to another person just for being in your life can be a holy passport that opens gates for greater freedom for each of you. We may never know how precious words of blessing and appreciation are to both the giver and receiver.

King Solomon said in Proverbs: "A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his month. Death and life are in the power of the tongue." This is the month that we need to make a strong effort to increase virtuous speech and eliminate loathsome and forbidden speech such as speaking ill of others. We do need to remember that we also have the right to limit what we hear from others as well. We do not have to listen to *loshon hara* (gossip).

Note how your energy increases when you engage in virtuous speech and how your energy decreases when you speak ill of others. The therapist in me wants to remind people, as well as myself, to make "I statements", to take responsibility for one's feelings rather than vent one's frustrations and blame others for the feelings that are clearly your own.

The more mindful we are of our speech, the more powerful our words are when we do speak. That is why it is said that when a *tzaddik* (righteous person) speaks, God fulfills his decree. Guard your tongue carefully. Don't waste words and your words will be more powerful. You can actually heal people with your words.

What has been shared above has been taken from my book *Kabbalah Month by Month*. There is so much more information available in the book to guide you through this upcoming month.

Melinda Ribner, L.C.S.W. is a spiritual psychotherapist and healer in private practice ([www.kabbalahoftheheart.com](http://www.kabbalahoftheheart.com)). She is a teacher of Jewish meditation and Kabbalah for over 25 years. Author of *Kabbalah Month by Month*, *New Age Judaism*, and *Everyday Kabbalah*, she is also the founder and director of *Beit Miriam* ([www.Beitmiriam.org](http://www.Beitmiriam.org)). She can be reached at [Miriam@kabbalahoftheheart.com](mailto:Miriam@kabbalahoftheheart.com). ✨





## Media Watch

BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

# Israelis in the current TV season

## Ziva and friends of NCIS

This is not the first time that the wildly popular CBS show, *NCIS* (short for Naval Criminal Investigative Services), began a TV season with a two hour look at Israelis through the eyes of Israeli-turned-American crime investigator, Ziva David (Cote de Pablo). One gets the impression that this character is supposed to challenge our sense of the boundaries between self-assured and arrogant, cold-and-calculating and street smart, aloof and responsive. Is she supposed to get under our skin like an aggressor's DNA, or is she poised to ease her way into our affections like a snapping puppy? And what are we to make of the other Israelis, as depicted on this series?

Viewers know from previous brushes with Ziva that she defected from the Mossad mainly because her father (Michael Nouri), the head of that organization, was all too willing to sacrifice her (that is, to leave her to die in the Somalian Desert) for the survival of his country. The David family is so dysfunctional that Ziva had to kill her own brother who tried to assassinate her beloved boss and mentor, Jethro Gibbs (Mark Harmon). Ziva had come to work with NCIS as a kind of foreign exchange investigator.

The opening two episodes of this season dredged all that up again. Ziva, now a proud American and an embittered ex(?)-Israeli pursues possible terrorists only to find her former colleague Malachi (T.J. Ramini) and her Mossad replacement, the lovely but lethal Liat (Sarai Givati). When these Israeli agents taunt her for "leaving" and becoming an American "insider," Ziva resentfully retorts, "You left me."

Ziva and her partners are searching for terrorists because a couple of Cuban nationals are found dead and can be traced to a huge crate with air holes which was, apparently, used to smuggle some men with nefarious motives into the United States. As it turns out they are three Palestinian diehards (literally), the last left standing of an anti-Zionist terrorist group, responsible for many Israeli deaths, who have been rendered extinct by targeted Israeli hits. The reason that they have gone through great lengths to smuggle themselves into the United States is that they have learned that Ziva's father, Eli David (Michael Nouri) who has been so effective at eliminating their murderous group, will be at a Washington conference.



Cast of NCIS.

They are confident that, in D.C., they will have a good chance of killing him, something they would not dare to try in Israel.

But writer Jesse Stern does not suggest that the Israelis are impervious or omniscient. He takes pains to point out that even the Israelis do not know how terrorists found out that David was to visit America. In short order, David's protecting officer, Hadar is found dead and David missing, and the director of NCIS severely wounded. Though Hadar was annoying, smoking in the faces of his American counterparts, the viewers are obviously expected to mourn his demise.

It is hard to tell when Stern is complimenting or criticizing the Israelis, especially since what he might intend as a compliment does not always go with appropriate rhetoric or behavior on the part of the Israelis. Thus, for example, when Ziva's colleague Tony DiNozzo (Michael Weatherly) jokes with Malachi about sleeping with Liat, the Israeli agent winks that he is of course sleeping with her. In that winking spirit, Tony wishes, "I've got to get back to Israel." Malachi quips, "Next year in Jerusalem, my friend." So Israel is the land where casual sex prevails even among agents on whom the Jewish State's future security depends? Or is this just intended to show that macho Israeli security officers enjoy the same jive and locker room talk as any other men anywhere?

Whatever the show's Israelis say about themselves, whether it impresses or offends, it is clear that some of the show's most popular characters do not think much of Israelis. "O God," says Tony, who in a previous year had a bad time in Israel (for killing Ziva's inebriated lover, another Israeli agent, in a fight), "the Israelis are back." And Abby, the hip and guileless medical examiner, wishes aloud, "It would be good if they [Mossad] did things above board once in a while." Indeed, Abby comes across as gracious, and her words as indisputably insightful when she tells Ziva to talk to her father before it is too late. But what impression do her words leave about Mossad and the Israelis in general?

But of course Ziva gets the opportunity to see her father when she is assigned to the detail that is protecting him, though she insists, with anger and resentment, that her chief duty is to protect her boss, Gibbs. Dad is hardly endearing to her or

to anyone else. The director of our NCIS group, Leon Vance (Rocky Carroll), an African American, has his own memories of Eli David from years before, as one who purposely endangers Leon's life as bait for Israel's Russian enemies, though Eli does save Leon's life when time and opportunity allow. Leon's theory from the beginning is that Eli David himself saw that the terrorists, who would like nothing better than to kill him, were informed of his travel plans. If so, was this to lure the terrorists to some kind of trap, or an indication of the size of Eli David's ego?

We expect Ziva to call her father a workaholic. But the usual calm-as-a-cucumber Ziva flies off the handle right away, accusing him, "A human man would want to talk." Dad responds quite calmly and fairly to Ziva's contemptuous remark: "If you choose to let me be part of your life, Ziva, I would welcome you with open arms. I am saddled with responsibilities that you cannot possibly fathom – the safety of a nation, when every one of our neighbors wants us dead. I don't want the luxury of allowing my feelings to dictate my actions."

Are we supposed to buy this if Ziva doesn't? "You do not have any feelings," she says. A nice-looking, baby-faced Palestinian assassin also gets his say after he is captured by Ziva and friends. He says of killing Jews: "It's not murder. It's war. I pity you Americans because you inherited it. You tried to reason your way into it economically, politically, theoretically. But we have seen the blood, we have heard the cries. Our war is here."

These powerful words are left to stand unanswered. So, according to this episode of *NCIS*, America has "inherited" the war with Palestinians because of its alliance with the Israelis – the calculating, defensive, unfeeling Israelis introduced here?

Though that question seemed to be the real cliffhanger, the second episode, also written by Jesse Stern, never addresses it. As if in rebuttal to the Palestinian's moment to speak, Liat is allowed to observe at one point, "When your whole country can be wiped away in a day, you don't take too much for granted." But then again, Ziva is made to reflect, "Maybe my father is lying. That is what he does." Both symbolically and practically, Ziva is given this line to recite in a synagogue sanctuary: "Abba [Father], show yourself!"

Yet neither Ziva nor Liat is depicted as being very gracious or appropriate. Ziva figures out that her father is hiding in a *beit kneset* (synagogue), though Liat has tried to hide this from her. Ziva confronts Liat on the beautiful *bimah* of what I believe I recognize as the Wilshire Boulevard Temple of Los Angeles, and they get into a physical, martial arts cat fight right on the *bimah*. Eli finally shows himself, after Ziva points out that she is "not looking for the *afikomen*" when Liat objects to Ziva's calling out loud for her father and possibly endangering him.

And yes, father and daughter get their touching scene in the end.

But to what do the *NCIS* producers, including writer Jesse Stern, depict Ziva and the other Israelis in the aforementioned ways?

If I may venture a theory, I would surmise that Mr. Stern and Company honestly believe that they are presenting Ziva and Liat and Malachi and Eli as heroes, not as anti-heroes, in a TV genre in which brashness, rakishness, street smarts, and use of violence are the premium postures and skills. After all, the American *NCIS* people share such behaviors and actions to a degree, but perhaps not to the same degree. The antics of these Israelis are too much even for the arrogant and brazen DiNozzo. Perhaps, then, these episodes of *NCIS* are intended to illustrate and even to confirm the old adage that "Jews (especially Israelis?) are like everybody else, only more so."

## Israelis on *Detroit* 1-8-7?

Fans of the ABC series, *Detroit* 1-8-7, await the fate of this show that hangs in the balances. This show has had some good writing and some fine performances, particularly by Michael Imperioli as an officer being bullied by a New York mobster.



Detectives of *Detroit* 8-7-1.

I would point out that this program has manifested a rather nasty gallows humor with regards to Jews, Judaism – and to Israelis. This is the series, mind you, on which writer Nick Bentancourt gratuitously depicted a seemingly sweet Jewish zaide (grandfather) as a mass-murdering mobster, also resulting in a dysfunctional family.

At the end of the 2010-2011 season, in the show's second-to-the-cliffhanger which may well be one of its last aired episodes, writer Mike Flynn puts the word, "Israeli" into the mouth of a ruthless weapons smuggler, a Pakistani national named Amir Sakhani. Amir, now based near Toronto, brags that he can bring into the United States, via Canada, any kind of military-grade weapon, "C-4s, automatic weapons, you name it" because, as he puts it, "I have an Israeli connection."

In this episode Republican African Americans, along with Pakistanis with Israeli names and "connections" are the villains. If the show is cancelled, these gratuitous associations will be its legacy.

Rabbi Gertel has been spiritual leader of Congregation Rodfei Zedek since 1988. A native of Springfield, Mass., he attended Columbia University and Jewish (see Gertel, page NAT 18)



# Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

## Novel about Spanish Civil War

*The Second Son.* By Jonathan Rabb. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011. 295 Pages. \$26.

The backdrop to this intricately structured novel is the Spanish Civil War which started 75 years ago in 1936. For three years, bloody battles raged between the left-wing Popular Front government and the Fascists under Francisco Franco. What happened in Spain became a rehearsal for World War II since the Nazis and the Soviet Union sent their forces to join the hostilities. Volunteers from other countries, including the United States, poured into the conflict. Among the more than 600,000 deaths were substantial numbers of the volunteers.

The protagonist in the story is Nikolai Hoffner, a half-Jewish German police officer who is forced out of his job as Chief Inspector in Berlin at the age of 62 because his mother was a Jew. He has two sons, Georg who is 25 and Sascha who is 33. They have different attitudes toward their Jewish backgrounds. Georg is married to a Jew named Lotte and has completely embraced the faith of his mother and his wife. Lotte and Georg have named their son, now four years old, Mendel. Sascha, by contrast, hides his Jewish background, calling himself Alexander Kurtzman. He worked for the Nazi government until he was fired when he was found out to be a Jew. The brothers have nothing to do with each other until tragic events bring them together.

Georg is in Spain, ostensibly working as a news photographer for the *Pathé Gazette*. When an unusually long period goes by during which Lotte has had no communication from her husband, Nikolai goes to Spain to track him down. His risky efforts to do so make up the bulk of the book, tracing his narrow escapes from each side in the civil war as he pursues leads throughout the country. During the course of his dangerous travels, he meets Mila Piera, a woman physician, and a romance blossoms. She accompanies him as he pursues his grimly persistent hunt for his son.

The story becomes more and more complicated as a host of characters are introduced with many of them shuffled off the stage as they meet untimely ends.



Confusion inevitably sets in as the identities of these individuals are concealed and revealed. Tension mounts as authorities on both sides of the war are suspicious of Nikolai's story. He has a number of hairbreadth escapes as he endangers both his life and that of Mila. Unlike Hollywood's blissful endings, there is considerable adversity as the story draws to a close even though not all is bleak.

Patient readers will be rewarded by what is a stirring story, especially if they are attentive and go back to scan previous pages in order to gain clarity regarding some of the book's puzzling features. It might also be helpful to read Rabb's first two books in the series, *Rosa* (2005) and *Shadow and Light* (2009). These books were characterized as "richly drawn" historical mysteries. *The Second Son*, which fully shares these features, is the last entry in Rabb's Berlin trilogy.

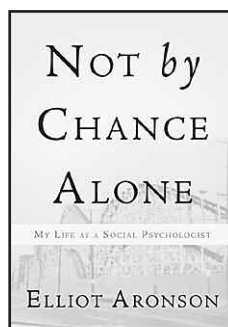
## Autobiography of social psychologist

*Not By Chance Alone.* By Elliot Aronson. New York: Basic Books, 2010. 284 Pages. \$27.50.

Social scientists study individuals, groups, culture and the interaction among them. While there are some similarities, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have their own approaches, language, and methodologies. For a time, sociologists and psychologists worked together in the field of social psychology but, in recent years, despite continuing overlaps, there has been increasing specialization with the psychologists emphasizing experimentation to learn more about individuals as they interact with others and with situations. Sociologists focus on groups, group dynamics, group development, as well as social change and social identity.

One of the foremost psychologists in the field of social psychology is Elliot Aronson, author of this fascinating autobiography, winner of major awards, highly esteemed by his colleagues, and important contributor to our understanding of human behavior. He has written or edited 22 books.

Born in 1932 in Chelsea, near Boston, Aronson moved three years later to Revere, another Boston suburb, where he grew up and where he began holding part-time jobs at the age of 14. His family was poor and there were tensions between his parents as well as between Aronson and his father. Also, he had problems with the anti-Semitism of his Irish Catholic classmates and neighbors. His father died when Aronson was 17 – "a dark presence had been lifted from my world."



Aronson won a scholarship to Brandeis University where his older brother, Jason, was a student. He scraped by financially and was inspired by psychology professor, Abraham Maslow, to major in psychology and to pursue graduate work. He met Vera, a Holocaust survivor, and a fellow student. They married after graduation and obtained jobs at Wesleyan University where they spent two years. Aronson earned his master's degree and was influenced by David McClelland, the department chairman, to study achievement motivation. He met two of McClelland's former students, then Ph.D. candidates at Stanford, when they visited Wesleyan and urged him to go to Stanford which he did and where he earned his doctorate.

Before they left Wesleyan, Vera gave birth to their first son, who was named Hal after Aronson's father, in accordance with Jewish tradition. Poignantly, Aronson writes, "the birth and naming of my infant son opened my heart to my father and his plight."

At Stanford, Aronson studied with Leon Festinger, a leading psychologist, and he contributed to the development of Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, an important landmark in social psychology. The combination of Maslow's "positive psychology" and Festinger's emphasis on science and research formed the basis for Aronson's significant input to the progress of social psychology.

Aronson's career flourished as he moved to Harvard, "(with its elite, gentlemanly anti-Semitism)," the University of Minnesota, the University of Texas, the University of California at Santa Cruz, and finally, Stanford. Throughout the years, he conducted research and developed findings that exercise great influence in social psychology to this day. At the age of 68, he was diagnosed as having macular degeneration, leading to the loss of his eyesight. He successfully coped with this problem, partly because of the warm support of his wife, as well as his closeness to their three sons, their daughter, and grandchildren.

This well-written and enthralling narrative tells the memorable chronicle of Aronson's life while also setting forth the story of social psychology's expansion as it contributes critically to our understanding of human behavior.

## Epic novel ends in 1920's Lodz, Poland

*The Brothers Ashkenazi.* By I.J. Singer. New York: Other Press, 2010. 458 Pages. \$16.95.

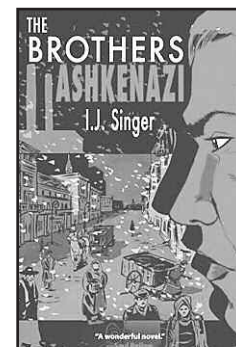
Originally published in 1936, this highly regarded epic novel has been re-issued with two introductions. Both the one by Irving Howe and the one by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein stress the fact that I.J. Singer is the older brother of Isaac Bashevis Singer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978.

I.J. Singer was born in 1893 to a rabbinical family in Poland and he grew up in the Hasidic tradition. By the time he was 18 he abandoned ritual Orthodoxy and settled in a Warsaw slum where he became a writer. Attracted by the promise of communism, he moved to Kiev in 1917 but became disillusioned and returned to Warsaw in 1921. His writing impressed Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Forward* who read Singer's work while visiting Eastern Europe and who hired Singer as a correspondent for his paper. In 1933, Singer, responding to Cahan's urging, moved to New York, where *The Brothers Ashkenazi* was serialized in the *Forward* and published in English in 1936, becoming a best-seller. A year earlier, Singer brought his younger brother to the United States where he wrote for the *Forward*, won great fame, and lived until 1991. I. J. Singer died of a heart attack in 1944, at a time when he was contemplating a move to Palestine.

*The Brothers Ashkenazi*, Singer's major literary achievement, focuses on the social forces that affected its characters in Lodz, Poland during the century that ended in the 1920s. He traces the development of Lodz from a sleepy village to a major textile center as seen through the lives of twin brothers, Max and Jacob Ashkenazi. Their successful father maintains his Jewish identity and tries to steer Max into a rabbinical career. However, even though he was a Talmud prodigy, Max is determined to succeed in business. He does so, winning control of a large factory but marrying a woman who does not love him. His unhappiness in marriage is magnified when his brother, Jacob, is wed to the granddaughter of the richest Jew in Warsaw. Both marriages end in divorce and Max's second wife is a wealthy widow whose fortune enables him to expand his business although he continues to be an unhappy man. Jacob marries his niece, Gertrud, Max's daughter.

The story of these tangled relationships unfolds against the backdrop of bloody strikes; the German occupation of Lodz during World War I; the impact of the Russian Revolution; and vicious pogroms by the Poles during the 1920s. The fortunes of the two brothers wax and wane with Max being aggravated by his brother's success. Their eventual reconciliation turns out to be brief and deadly. Many other characters are introduced by Singer, most notably Nissan, a Socialist agitator, who suffers imprisonment and emerges to lead the workers but is eventually rejected as a counter-revolutionary.

The book is replete with human (see Teicher, page NAT 19)







## My Kosher Kitchen

By SYBIL KAPLAN

### Healthy Passover recipes

*Passover the Healthy Way.* By Bonnie R. Giller, AuthorHouse, \$21.95 paperback.

This kosher cookbook, by a registered dietician from Long Island, came out last year, but somehow I missed reviewing it.

The recipes are designed to reduce your intake of calories, fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. All recipes include Nutrition Facts for calories, total fat, saturated fat, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, protein and dietary fiber. The American Dietetic Association and American Diabetes Association exchange lists per serving are included. The ingredients used are common and easy to find.

There are 12 soups and salads, 14 poultry and other meats, 6 fish, 8 vegetables, 17 side dishes, 11 kugels, 11 dairy dishes and 24 desserts and baked goods – a total of 103 recipes. Many familiar favorites are here with modifications or decreased amounts in ingredients.

As she writes in her introduction, “these healthy and creative recipes will help you breeze through Passover without sacrificing taste and originality.”

I love her numbering of directions. That makes is ever so easy to follow. Each recipe occupies its own page with serving size, exchanges per serving and nutrition facts at the bottom which makes this information very convenient.

What surprised me was the inconsistency in styling. For example, part of the time she starts a recipe requiring baking with instructions to preheat the oven; other times it is slipped in at the time we are to place the dish in the oven for baking or broiling. Along the same line, she rarely gives the direction for preparing the baking pan in the beginning after the preheating of the oven and slips it in at the time the food is being placed in the baking dish.

Still, this cookbook is a great gift, ahead of the holiday, for yourself or your hostess! Here are some recipes from the book.

#### Herbed Matzah Balls (Serves 12)

2 whole eggs  
6 Tbsp. seltzer  
1/4 cup canola oil  
salt and pepper to taste

1 cup matzah meal  
2 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh mint  
2 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh dill  
1 tsp. ground ginger  
4 egg whites

Mix eggs, seltzer, oil, salt and pepper. Stir in matzah meal and herbs. Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form. Fold into matzah meal mixture. Refrigerate for 2 hours. With wet hands, shape matzah balls. Add to boiling water. Simmer matzah balls for about 28–30 minutes.

#### Potato Broccoli Knishes (Serves 6)

1 cup mashed potatoes  
1/3 cup matzah meal  
2 Tbsp. potato starch  
1/2 finely chopped small onion  
2 egg whites  
1/2 tsp. black pepper  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1 cup fresh or frozen steamed and finely chopped broccoli

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a bowl, combine potatoes, matzah meal, potato starch, onion, egg whites, pepper and salt. Knead together. Divide the dough into 6 balls and flatten each. Divide the broccoli evenly onto each circle, fold over and press edges to seal. Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray. Arrange the knishes in a single layer and place the baking sheet on the bottom rack of the oven. Bake for 15 minutes on each side. Serve hot.

#### Matzah Meal Mandelbrodt (Serves 21)

2 eggs  
2 egg whites  
1/3 cup canola oil  
1/4 cup unsweetened applesauce  
2/3 cup sugar  
1 1/4 cups matzah meal  
1/4 tsp. cinnamon

Beat eggs, egg whites, oil and applesauce together. Add sugar and matzah meal and mix well. Shape dough into 2 loaves and place on a pan sprayed with non-stick cooking spray. Bake for 20–25 minutes in a preheated 350°F oven. Slice and add cinnamon on top. Return to oven for another 10 minutes.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food writer, compiler and editor of nine kosher cookbooks, and feature writer. She leads walks in Jerusalem's Machaneh Yehudah Jewish produce market and has a weekly spot on RustyMikeRadio.com, Israel's only English-language radio station on the internet. ★

#### GERTEL

(continued from page NAT 16)

*Theological Seminary. He is the author of two books, What Jews Know About Salvation and Over the Top Judaism: Precedents and Trends in the Depiction of Jewish Beliefs and Observances in Film and Television. He has written for The National Jewish Post & Opinion since 1979. ★*

#### EGER

(continued from page NAT 9)

look good and feel negative about those which do not. I even tend to have a loving, forgiving attitude toward a poorly-written play if it has a Jewish theme. It's rather like a parent looking indulgently upon a less-than-perfect child...I am aware of this trait, and I deal with it.

#### Advice for young theatre students

*Irene, what advice do you have for theatre students who would like to become drama critics?*

Not only participate in theatre itself, but see as much theatre as you can. Read widely and live life fully – whatever that means to you.

Also, join and become actively involved with professional organizations, such as the American Theatre Critics Association (<http://www.americantheatrecritics.org>), the Association for Jewish Theatre (<http://www.afjt.com>), or the Drama Desk (<http://www.dramadesk.com>). I belong to all of them, including the Actors' Equity Association (AEA) (<http://www.actorsequity.org>), the Outer Critics Circle (<http://www.outercritics.org>), and the Connecticut Critics Circle (<http://www.ctcritics.org>). But, truthfully, I hardly dare advise anybody. It's a strange, wonderful business, and, for me, a great joy.

*A number of theatre students want to know how you prepare for a review, and how you go about composing it? Also, how do you deal with deadline pressures, etc?*

Whenever I can, I tackle the review the very next morning after seeing the show. I've had an overnight to let the experience simmer, but it's still fresh in my mind. Sometimes, at 2 a.m., lying awake, I have the opening paragraph, and that's a big help. It gives me the impetus and the theme. But more often, I wake in the morning and think, “Oh God, what am I going to say? How can I pull these jumbled thoughts together, organize them, express them?”

It's often challenging to get started, and I think, “Perhaps I've lost the skill? I'll never write another review?” But somehow, once I get started, the words pour out, as if I'm on automatic pilot. From where do these words come? From somewhere in the recesses of my mind? I suspect that the best part of writing a review is seeing the finished product.

#### Balancing one's personal and professional life as a theatre critic

*As a prolific theatre critic in the New York area, how do you balance your professional and your personal life?*

Not so exhausting at this point. I've cut back. I'm running out of energy. Maybe six or seven shows a month. I used to cover that many in a week, mostly in New York. To a great extent, seeing theatre became my social life. I either brought along a family member or

invited a friend. Dinner before the show, and there you are.

*You began writing your memoirs about the earlier parts of your life. Will you write more about your later life?*

I considered continuing with my memoir into later life, but vetoed it. However, this interview with you has given me another idea: to write the story of my life as a critic, how it evolved, peak experiences, challenges, etc.

*Great, please send me an advanced copy. I would love to review it.*

#### How do you see the future of live performances?

*Given the poor economic situation and the growth of film, television, and web-based entertainment, how do you see the role of live theatre in our own time and in the foreseeable future?*

I know it's tempting to think theatre will fade away, given the electronic competition. But I put my faith in live theatre. It has managed to survive for over 2000 years...and if it faded in various bleak eras, it always bounced back. There's some kind of human need, it would seem, to have that living breathing players-audience exchange. Recently, observing a group of excited young kids, my own grandson among them, put on a version of *Twelfth Night*, I came away with hope for the future.

*Irene is there anything else you would like to share?*

Definitely. I'd like Moti [Sandak, editor-in-chief of AAJT] and his readers to know just how remarkable I think his All About Jewish Theatre website is. He has done – and continues to do – a monumental job. He offers world-wide coverage of Jewish cultural activities, with an amazing amount of information and resources. At the same time, he manages to keep the website lively and entertaining, as well as informative. It's attractively-designed, with a wealth of pictures to break up the text.

*Irene, it was an honor listening to you. Congratulations on your 100th review for All About Jewish Theatre. I wouldn't be surprised if you reached the 200th mark soon – your reviews in other publications.*

Dr. Henrik Eger is professor of English and communication at Delaware County Community College in Media, Pa., and Philadelphia correspondent for All About Jewish Theatre ([www.jewish-theatre.com](http://www.jewish-theatre.com)). Born and raised in Germany, he studied in Europe and the U.S. His Ph.D. in English is from the University of Illinois at Chicago (1991). He has written, produced or directed several plays including *Metronome Ticking*, *Mendelssohn Does Not Live Here Anymore*, and the *Anne Frank* play *The Girl on the Other Side of the Fence*, as well as books, and other media. Read more about him on his website: [www.henrikeger.com](http://www.henrikeger.com). He can be reached by email at [henrikeger@gmail.com](mailto:henrikeger@gmail.com). ★





**BENZION**

(continued from page NAT 3)

you can't change it." I think Dad, of blessed memory, realized what was happening to me. He understood that if I stayed another week I would stay forever. I flew to New York and spent Simchas Torah by the Rebbe. We danced nonstop for 48 hours, and all of my enthusiasm for Torah came back.

A day or two after *Simchas Torah*, I had my first private audience with the Rebbe. In those days the Rebbe would receive visitors three times a week, from eight o'clock at night until five or six in the morning. I was instructed to keep in my pocket two pieces of paper and a pen. On one piece I wrote my name and my mother's name and the blessings I requested. This I would give to the Rebbe. On the other piece of paper, I would write down what the Rebbe told me, as soon as I left his room.

The Rebbe's secretary told me that my turn would be around one o'clock in the morning. When I came, there were about ten men in front of me, waiting in line next to the Rebbe's office. They were a little nervous, and so was I. My turn came. I walked into the Rebbe's office. It wasn't a big room. All of the walls were covered completely with books of Torah. The Rebbe sat behind his desk. I put the first piece of paper on the desk. The Rebbe read it and gave me a blessing. My audience was over quickly, I didn't want to use too much of the Rebbe's time. As soon as I left the Rebbe's room, I took out the second piece of paper to write down what the Rebbe had said. I couldn't remember even one word.

What do I still remember from this audience? I remember a strange feeling in my chest, around my heart. Afterward I learned that when you have your first audience with the Rebbe, the Rebbe removes the covering from your heart. What does this mean? Deep in our heart is our *neshamah*, our G-dly soul. This soul is our essence and it is eternal. When we are born, it comes down into our body, and when we pass away, it goes back to heaven. Our soul wants to learn Torah and do mitzvahs in order to unite with Hashem, our Father.

Why don't we always feel this desire? Because our soul is covered and concealed. During my first audience, the Rebbe removed one of those coverings. Since then it is easier for me to feel my soul, and live a life of Torah and mitzvot, not only in Kfar Chabad, but even in Indianapolis and Vancouver.

We wish all of you a kosher and happy *Pesach*. *Pesach* is the holiday of our redemption. In the month of *Pesach* our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt, and in the month of *Pesach* we will be redeemed from our present exile, hopefully this year. We want *Moshiach* now!

*Rabbi Cohen lives in K'far Chabad, Israel. He can be reached by email at bzcohen@orange.net.il. ★*

**KARSH**

(continued from page NAT 5)

magnitude could come our way? The Israelis will not buy peace at any cost, but the cost of Israeli lives is dear. What a pivotal moment in history we are watching, and what a shock to all of our views and how the world works, if something great can happen. Our landscape has been filled with Iraqi killing Iraqi, Afghani killing Afghani; the new model of "one nation" is ripe with possibilities.

*Howard W. Karsh lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisc., and can be reached at hkarsh@gmail.com. He has recently been named as a community columnist for the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. ★*

**KAPLAN/ISRAEL**

(continued from page NAT 10)

women usually don't wear earrings before marriage. There are no arranged marriages and women and men can date but they do not live together before marriage or have sexual relations. The average age for marriage is 24 for women and 27 for men. Approximately 72% of the women and 27-30% of the men go to university. Approximately 40% of the Israel Defense Forces are Druze men. Women do not do military service.

**A visit to the Sheikh Guest House**

The 93-year-old spiritual leader and three elders host us in a special room. These elders come daily to sit and tell stories. The five-colored Druze flag is on the wall. They pass around pumpkin candy and strong coffee which took three to four hours to prepare while elders shared stories.

The Sheikh explains that 1000 years ago in Egypt, there was a meeting of five leaders elected to go around the world to explain about the Druze religion. In the 11th century, they split off from Islam. Only those reincarnated can be Druze; intermarriage is prohibited. It is monotheistic, belief in only one G-d. They respect and honor other faiths and beliefs. Druze women have the right to divorce and equal rights are spiritual and community. Women can go to work, be educated, and have their own careers.

Faith, protecting the land and the honor of the family are main principles. The age of 15 is the age of religious decision; 12% decide they want to become religious. Every Druze parent must teach the basic principles of the Druze community. The 93-year-old Sheikh then demonstrated how coffee is ground on the 100 year old *azam* (coffee grinder) from his grandfather in Syria (see photo on NAT 10).

A short walk from the community house is the main worship house of Isfiya with mattresses on the floor, blankets and some back rests. A metal see-through divider separates the men's and women's sections.

**Status of Druze Women**

Mi'ad Kayyounf Natul accompanied us during the day. She explained that Druze women are different. She is a Druze, a wife, a mother. "We have the same rights."

"From the beginning, I said, I am different. My parents were open-minded. My father had pressure from his family; my mother was very strong, supporting him and me. They let me choose for myself that I wanted to be an academic woman."

And so, Mi'ad attended the Interdisciplinary Center, a private college in Herzliya and received a degree in diplomacy and communications.

"To go to IDC was a dream for me. To go outside the village and see the world, I felt I was going outside the country without duty free."

For the past five years she has worked as a TV producer, the past three years with Arabic services. Prior to that, she worked in the Knesset with Channel 99 for two years.

"All the time you work around the clock and I have a son one and a half years old."

Working with men, she says, "every day I feel they look at me as a strange woman."

Mi'ad is not religious and feels she has as multi-culture.

"Today, Druze women realize they must be career women. Most study academic education."

Mi'ad's husband served with the Israel Defense Forces three years; his brother is an officer in the permanent army. If her husband would have continued in the army, "I would have had to do easy work like a teacher. My husband did not study academic and my way of thinking is different. We don't have the same dialogue."

Among the Druze, Mi'ad says, "we don't have a clean border between religious and not religious. All the time I have to be acceptable in my community, in my culture. Until now, I am inside the fence."

Asked about the Druze women in Lebanon, Mi'ad feels they are more liberal, more open minded than Druze women in Israel and "they have crossed the line."

*Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food writer, Jerusalem Post columnist and cookbook author who lives in Jerusalem. ★*

**TEICHER**

(continued from page NAT 17)

foibles, as well as with economic and political episodes. It portrays war, business chicanery, pogroms, and revolution as the backdrop for depicting personalities, their blemishes, their development, and their tragic termination. Offering a microcosm of East European Jewish history, Singer wrote tellingly about anti-Semitism as its continuing feature almost as though he was predicting the Holocaust that followed after his story was done. We are indebted to Other Press for reprinting this substantial saga.

*Dr. Morton I. Teicher is the Founding*

*Dean, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University and Dean Emeritus, School of Social Work, UNC at Chapel Hill. ★*

**SCHUSTER**

(continued from page NAT 20)

is kept alive. Indeed, while scholarly historiography always recounts in third-person plural terms – *they, them, theirs* – our Passover seder is a unique observance in its first-person plural *reliving* of a group-memory. *We. Us. Ours.*

Surely no other historical occurrence has been kept so *personally* alive as our Exodus, and we owe the infinitely renewable vitality of our story to ourselves, having never failed to ardently nurture our first-person plural genetic memory.

As we learn through Torah study, our Hebrew Bible is unambiguous in commanding memory. Its injunctions to remember are unconditional and the Hebrew word *zachar* (remember) appears in various forms no less than 169 times. And just in case we fail to be absolutely clear on the concept, the Torah often complements the "remember" imperative with its partner command, "do not forget."

But as Columbia University's Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi wrote, "collective Jewish memory is not about the historicity of the past, but its eternal contemporaneity." Our tradition, in other words, is not a dusty obsession with antiquity, but rather our unique ability to personalize and *contemporize our memories*, thereby constantly *remaking and reforming* Judaism as a living thing.

At *Pesach*, we exemplify this by observing the Mishnaic command *b'chol dor vador* – in every generation we Jews must see *ourselves* as if we went out of Egypt. For in that phrase lies the latent power of the Haggadah to move our hearts. Through seder ritual, liturgy, and even culinary elements, we internalize our Exodus with *personal ownership* of the pain of slavery, the struggle for liberation, and the ecstasy of freedom. Through seder magic, we effortlessly reach across millennia to slip our feet into Israelite sandals as one unified people. And through our seder tradition, wherever and with whomever we observe it, we again demonstrate to ourselves our stubborn determination to keep this Judaism of ours very much alive. *Chag sameach!*

*Stephen Schuster is president of Temple Sinai in Worcester, Mass., where he lives with his wife, Julie, and their four children. A writer and engineer, Steve is CEO and founder of Rainier, one of the leading marketing consultancies for complex technology companies. Steve has BSEE and MBA degrees from Northeastern University and is an avid musician, hiker, photographer, gardener, and yoga practitioner. He can be reached at steve@rainierco.com. ★*



## El Al Airlines welcomes 31 Chilean miners

NEW YORK, NY – Feb. 24, 2011 - EL AL Israel Airlines carried 31 Chilean miners on a nonstop flight from Sao Paulo, Brazil to Ben Gurion International Airport in Israel as special guests of the airline and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism. The miners captivated the world during the 69 days they were trapped underground and during a successful and miraculous rescue.

On the flight, the miners enjoyed a short film about their rescue that was specially produced for them by EL AL and Israel's Channel 2 broadcast news station. While in Israel, the miners are touring the country and visiting many important historical and religious sites. ★



Upon their arrival to the Holy Land this week, 31 Chilean miners were greeted by the Chilean Ambassador to Israel Joaquin Montes (center left), EL AL President Elyezer Shkedy (center) and the Israel Minister of Tourism, Stas Misezhnikov (center right). Photo credit: Sivan Farag.

## Jacob's Blessings

Our father Jacob upon returning Home wrestled with a divine being,  
Wresting a blessing at dawnbreak.  
My father Yechiel ("May God Live")  
Fleeing home never to return,  
Became a Red Army soldier.  
Following night-long fighting in  
The Starra Russa forest he  
Faced a German paratrooper for  
A final act of struggle.  
Invoking his grandfather's name,  
Martyred Rabbi Jacob of Zamosc,  
He charged forward with a  
Fixed bayonet, blessing himself  
With survival.

Rabbi Israel Zoberman,  
Congregation Beth Chaverim,  
Virginia Beach.



(Above) Rabbi Israel Zoberman with his grandfather Tzvi Zoberman at the Wetzlar Displaced Persons Camp in Germany in 1948. He was 3 years old.

(Left) Rabbi Israel Zoberman's great-grandfather, Rabbi Jacob Zoberman who along with his wife Dena Manzis (of Spanish ancestry) of Zamosc, Poland were murdered by the Nazis.

(Right) This chuppah cover called Tree of Life was created by Suzanne Richter Neusner, wife of long-time writer for P&O, Jacob Neusner. Order at her email: sneusner@frontiernet.net.

## Got Shabbat?

By JENNIE COHEN

In a recent communitywide tribute concert to Debbie Friedman held at the Arthur M. Glick JCC in Indianapolis, Rabbi Benjamin Sendrow of Congregation Shaarey Tefilla gave the benediction. His words were comforting. He said that although the Jewish world would not be enjoying more new music created by Debbie, for years to come we will be able to hear new music created by a generation of living musicians who she influenced.

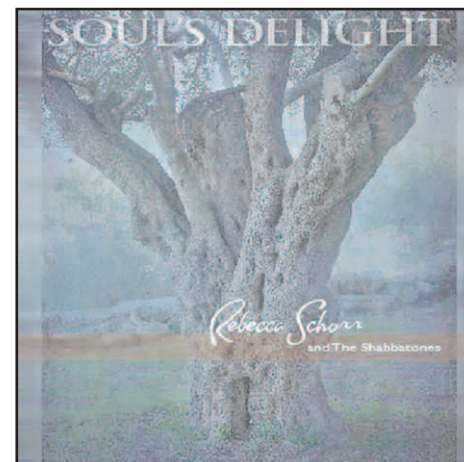
A new CD by Rabbi Rebecca Shorr of Congregation B'nai Tzedek in Fountain Valley, Calif., is a good example of that.

*Soul's Delight* contains selections from a musical Shabbat Service created by Rabbi Shorr known as "Got Shabbat?" A lifelong lover of music, Rebecca has always found music to be the most basic conduit between one's soul and God. This album explores some of her favorite liturgical melodies.

Go to [www.cdbaby.com/cd/rebecca\\_schorr](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/rebecca_schorr) to listen to and purchase the CD. Although I adore all of the songs, my favorite is Adonai Li.

"The instrumentals, the rhythm and personality of the music are super and refreshing," said Charlene Gubitz.

Gubitz is a singer, pianist and songwriter with a wide and diverse musical background. Comfortable in both the synagogue and on stage, she has been performing in both the secular and religious world since the age 15. She spends her summers in Zionsville, Ind., at the Goldman Union Camp Institute working with teens. During the year she guests as a Cantorial Soloist at Valley Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio and enjoys leading services in Knoxville, Tenn., where she currently teaches Judaic in the JCC preschool. ★



## Tradition in first-person plural

By STEPHEN SCHUSTER

Keeping Judaism Alive is a multi-dimensional, multifaceted and sometimes even a multimedia proposition. But no event instantiates the concept of Keeping Judaism Alive more personally and with such universal participation than does our Passover seder.

Wherever in the world we Jews are on each 15 of Nisan, we make or we find a seder. In late March of 1980, for example, my friend Kenny and I walked into Shabbat services at the Tempio Maggiore di Roma (The Great Synagogue of Rome), which, from its perch on the banks of the Tiber River, overlooked the former ghetto where the city's Jews were required to live until 1870. Before the evening ended, Rome's Jews had settled their quarrel over the honor of hosting us for seder two nights thereafter, setting our stage for an indelibly memorable seder adventure that year.

At whatever table we find ourselves reclining, the object of and commandment fulfilled by each seder experience is, of course, the vivid retelling of the grand Exodus pageant. And whereas unbiased narrative historiography is the customary method of chronicling bygone events, critical historical analysis is *not* the principal medium through which the collective memory of the Jewish people

(see Schuster, page NAT 19)



Gene Simmons, born Chaim Witz, (second from right) a founding member of the rock band, KISS, visited his birthplace at the Rambam Health Care Campus in Haifa, Israel. Photo credit: Pieter Fliter.