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Mi Sheberach

A Focus on Healing



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

Editorial

Our local Jewish community is coping with big losses that took place last month. Among others, Dr. Mark Pescovitz, who was a pioneer in kidney transplants, and two promising Jewish young men whose families immigrated to the United States from Persia/Iran, Jamshid "Jimmy" J. Rastegar and Daniel Farahan, all died in December. On page NAT 3 are obituaries for three people who contributed much to this newspaper. Also Jim Shipley writes about the loss of a close friend on page NAT 7. I had planned in this, our 13th healing/wellness issue, to write about the gifts of death.

However, as I am writing this, I hear about the loss of a beloved and prominent Jewish woman, Debbie Friedman, on Sun., Jan. 9, and another Jewish woman who is in critical condition, Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona. Friedman died from pneumonia, but she also had multiple sclerosis (MS) for many years.

Instead of my writing on the subject, I found eloquent words by Debbie Friedman from her website (www.debbiefriedman.com) that are very appropriate for these circumstances. They are included in page 1 of the Focus on Healing section in this issue. Hopefully you will be comforted by them. Even though she is no longer with us, it is ironic that this world famous singer/songwriter of Jewish music is the person who is consoling me – the one who is deeply saddened by her death.

Jewish congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords from Tucson is in critical condition after being shot, on Sat., Jan. 8, in a rampage by a mentally unstable terrorist. I speak for everyone involved with the newspaper when I say we pray for a speedy recovery for her. One good way to do that would be with Debbie Friedman's beloved *Mi Shebeirach*, prayer for healing. (see sidebar above right)

The following is part of a statement issued on Jan. 8, 2011 by Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism: "Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, a remarkable public servant shot while meeting with constituents today. Rep. Giffords is a member of Reform Congregation Chaverim in Tucson, and our entire community shares her family's concern and pain. We send condolences to the families of those killed in the horrible act of violence, including U.S. District Judge John Roll, and pray for those who were wounded...we pray that Rep. Giffords' husband, Mark, and her entire family find support, comfort and strength among their friends and family, as we join them in praying for her full recovery."

Cantor Bruce Ruben, director of the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in

Mi Shebeirach

LYRICS BY
DEBBIE FRIEDMAN AND DRORAH SETEL

*Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor habracha l'imoteinu*

May the source of strength
who blessed the ones
before us,
Help us find the courage
to make our lives a blessing
And let us say: Amen.

*Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M'kor habracha l'avoteinu*

Bless those in need of
healing with *refuah sh'leimah*
The renewal of body,
the renewal of spirit
And let us say: Amen.

Manhattan – where Friedman taught from 2007 until last spring – called Debbie Friedman a pioneer who has had a "tremendous impact" on contemporary Jewish practice by bringing a folk approach to liturgical music.

I feel very fortunate to have attended three concerts by her, years after I had already fallen in love with her music. The first was at Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education (CAJE) when it was held in Bloomington, Ind., in August 1994. The second was at Four Courts, a Senior Center in Louisville, Ky., in March 1997, and the third was at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis in about 2000.

She was a sterling example of one who practices what she preaches because even though she had ongoing health challenges, she always got up and sang with all her heart. Her concerts were lively and fun. In between her songs – where she would get everyone singing along – she told hilarious jokes. Even at the nursing home in Louisville, she got the very old residents up to the microphone singing Yiddish songs while she accompanied them on her guitar. One could not come away from her concerts without being uplifted.

After the concert at Four Courts, I complimented her with high praise, something to the effect of what a great talent she is and a healing presence. Her response was so humble. She said something like we all have that ability, it is within you also. I say very few have honed it like she has or touched as many lives with her skill as she did. May her memory be for a blessing.

Jennie Cohen, January 12, 2011. ✨

About the Cover

Reflections of the Soul
By Bruce David



Bruce David

Designed to illuminate the essence of many of Judaism's foremost qualities, this composition touches on the stirrings and innermost longings of souls seeking spiritual enlightenment. The hope of someday knowing true peace is probably among one of the greatest desires of individuals who have connected with their inner selves. This aspiration to live in a state of calm, surrounded by true peace, stems from perhaps the greatest of the Torah's blessings, the "Priestly Blessing," as it was given by God to the Jewish people in the wilderness, (Numbers 6:24-26).

In the picture, overlaid on the Torah, the hands of the Cohen (priest) are shown positioned for the recitation of this blessing. Here, the first line of the priestly blessing may be found inscribed in Hebrew calligraphy: *May the Lord bless you, and keep you...*

Additionally, the final part of this blessing may be found in the lower part of the design, also in Hebrew: *...And give you peace.*

Many believe that achieving this desired time of peace is based on the just actions, love and respect shown by individuals in their interactions with life in the world. Indicative of this life understanding are the doves in the design seen carrying olive branches in their mouths. Similar to angels, who take upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, these doves are depicted as bringing peace on their wings.

The search for truth, knowledge and the wisdom necessary for proper decision-making fuels the desires of those seeking to grasp a better (see Cover, page NAT 14)

Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

Jan. 7, 2011, Bo
(Exodus 10:1-13:16) 2 Shevat 5771

With this week's *Parashat Bo* in the Exodus, the intensity of the plagues increases as we read about the final three: locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn. We all know the plagues even if we can't recite them exactly or in order. They are terrible and frightening. I can't tell you if they actually happened. There are those who go to great lengths to prove their validity and accuracy. Without any corroborating evidence or secondary sources they are just part of an amazing story about God, Moses, Pharaoh, and the eventual freeing of our ancestors from slavery.

Some people would like to equate the plagues of Exodus to modern plagues. If God brought such terrible things down on the heads of the Egyptians because of Pharaoh's defiant determination not to let the Israelites go free, then why not believe that there are incidents in modernity that can be attributed to God as well. People equate the plagues of old to hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornados, or erupting volcanoes that are obviously, at least to certain people, acts of God on the sinners of today. Personally, this is just ridiculous to believe that God acts in such a manner, but many people would disagree with me.

At the same time, I do believe that there are things which do plague our society that cause pain, hardship, and suffering to others. Greed, sexual slavery, domestic abuse, hunger, homelessness, despoliation of the earth, drug abuse, religious wars, and war in general are just some of the issues that plague our world and our society today. At the same (see Adland, page NAT 6)

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Chassidic Rabbi

By RABBI BENZION COHEN

At this time of the year, 42 years ago, I reached an important turning point in my life. I dropped out of Hebrew University and went to learn in yeshiva. Here is a story from that period.

This story takes place January 1970. I was 19 years old and learning in the yeshiva in Kfar Habad, Israel. My Mom came all the way over from Indianapolis to see how I was doing and make sure I was all right. Mom was very generous, and often asked if I needed anything. Whatever, she gave me a check. It was one of her paychecks for substitute teaching, for about \$30.

A few days later one of my teachers, Reb Shlomo Haim Kesselman, flew to America to visit the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Reb Shlomo Haim was a very special teacher and advisor who had taught generations of Habad rabbis in underground yeshivas in communist Russia and later in Israel. He was a man of great self sacrifice. The communists in Russia were determined to prove that religion was dead, even if it meant they had to kill all people who stubbornly held onto religious beliefs. He was eventually arrested and put into jail for teaching Torah.

I went to the airport with a group of students to see Reb Shlomo Haim off. When someone goes on a long trip, it is a custom to give them money to give to charity when they reach their destination. That way their trip is connected with a *mitzvah*, and G-d will protect them. I gave Reb Shlomo Haim Mom's check to give to charity in America.

A few days later Reb Shlomo Haim had a private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and gave him Mom's check to use for charity, saying it was from me. The Rebbe asked him how I was doing.

At this point I need to fill in some background. I was born and raised in Indianapolis. On one hand, we were rather liberal, and tended to look down on religion. On the other hand, we went to services every Shabbos, something which I sometimes resented as a teenager. So how did I become a Lubavitcher? I did what many people do. I took an indirect route.

When I was 17, I started college at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. One day I went to a bookstore to find some science fiction. I picked up a book on yoga. It looked interesting and I bought it. I started reading it and thought, Wow! This is amazing!

In America, I knew only one philosophy: Look out for yourself, and only for yourself. Learn a good profession so you can make a lot of money and buy whatever you want and have a good time. On the way, if someone else gets hurt, so what? That's not your problem.

Yoga said something very different: Be careful not to hurt anyone or anything.

Don't eat meat or fish, because you have to kill the animal. I started doing yoga, and soon found myself much happier. One who lives a selfish life will never be happy. Real happiness comes from helping others and other mitzvahs. One part of the yoga I was doing was meditation. I would sit absolutely still, relax completely, and focus on my soul.

Doing yoga opened me to religion, including my own. A year later I found myself learning in yeshiva in Kfar Habad. One day I noticed several of the students sitting very still with their eyes closed before the morning prayers. I thought, hey, that looks like meditation. I asked one of them what they were doing and sure enough, it was Hassidic meditation, which they did to prepare themselves for the morning prayers. I asked, "How do you do it?" They pointed to an old man with a white beard and long black coat sitting in the front.

"That is Reb Shlomo Haim. He will be happy to teach you Hassidic meditation." Reb Shlomo Haim instructed me to learn by heart the beginning of chapter 41 of a book called, "Tanya." There the Rebbe says that before one does one of G-d's commandments, one should contemplate the greatness of G-d.

How does one contemplate the greatness of G-d? By contemplating the greatness of His creation and how G-d is constantly giving life and existence to all the worlds and everything in them. The more we realize the greatness of G-d, the more effort we will put into His *mitzvahs*.

Now back to our story. Reb Shlomo Haim told the Rebbe that I was learning Torah well, careful in fulfilling the *mitzvahs*, and doing Hassidic meditation ten minutes every day before my morning prayers. The Rebbe was very happy to hear this. He stood up and said, "Ben Zion does Hassidic meditation? That would be good for all of the students in the Yeshiva!"

Afterwards Reb Shlomo Haim repeated this story many times, to encourage his students to meditate before praying. Many of those who heard the story are now themselves teachers and rabbis, and they tell the story to their students and congregants, in many continents and countries. And it all started with one act of loving kindness.

P.S. Since the time when this story happened, many major and miraculous changes in the world have taken place. Today the government of Russia does not oppose religion. Today Russia and many other countries in the world support belief in Hashem. According to the Rambam, the first stage of the final redemption is that we will be free to practice our religion, to come to know Hashem. We are grateful, and looking forward to the next stages. It is up to us, to know Hashem and do more *mitzvahs* to bring Moshiach now!

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

Obituaries

Jack Botwin, 90

Jack Botwin died on Aug. 17, 2010 in Sylmar, Calif., where he had been living since the 1980's. He had grown up in an apartment over his family's grocery store in New Jersey. He served in the Navy in the Pacific during World War II and upon returning in 1945 came to live in New York City. It was there, in the window of a neighborhood tailor that he saw a placard about Jewish Science Services in the True Sisters Building on West 86th Street. When he went there, he was surprised to see a woman leading the service for the congregation; but what kept him, and had him return every Sunday morning after that, was the message Mrs. Tehilla Lichtenstein delivered about his personal life and the guidance it gave him in living it. Jack became a member of the Board of Directors and a Life Member of Jewish Science, his passion and enthusiasm and love for Jewish Science was always there at each meeting and service.

Jack took a job working as a driver for the City and for over 20 years, this enabled him to provide a ride to services for Mrs. Lichtenstein on Sunday morning.

The story is told about Jack when he met his love Trudy. He was in love with her, but his family was against the two of them getting married as Trudy was blind. He was very disheartened and sought the opinion of Mrs. Lichtenstein. She asked if Jack loved her and he gave an enthusiastic "yes," and "yes" when asked if she loved him. She asked if he would devote himself to her and help her with her handicap when needed...again Jack responded "yes." "Then there is no reason in the world you and Trudy should not be married," she said. After hearing these words from his mentor, Jack and Trudy were married and lived a wonderful life together.

Shortly after Jack and Trudy decided to move to California, she passed away leaving a second void, the first being no Jewish Science there. This led him to begin his own Jewish Science worship and study group. He got free community room space to hold services, began to advertise, distributed thousands of Jewish Science books to people all over California who saw his ads, and groomed others to start their own groups in other parts of Los Angeles as well. Jack also took Mrs. Lichtenstein's advice, "to have a temple in every home." Here he had all his Jewish Science books, the service pamphlet and Interpreter, and each day would find him reading a chapter, or portion thereof, reciting the affirmations and meditations from his living room chair.

By his presence, his actions and his passion Jack led others to the Jewish Science way of life, bringing Jewish Science inspiration, healing and guidance to untold numbers of people throughout the

United States. To know Jack was to know reverence, enthusiasm, creativity, dedication and innovation. Jack will always be known as one of the greatest Jewish Scientists in our history and admired for his single-handed accomplishments. ★

Velma Cohen, 81

Velma Cohen died on Jan. 5, 2011. Born in Chicago in 1929, Velma has been a member of the Louisville Community since 1960. She was a long standing member of Hadassah, Women of Temple Shalom, Senior Adults of the Jewish Community Center and China, Burma, India Veterans of World War II Association. For over 30 years, Velma worked for *The Kentucky Jewish Post & Opinion*.

Velma was a wonderful wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, cousin and friend. She was preceded in death by her mother, Rose, father, Norman and sister, Roberta.

Velma is survived by her husband, Les; daughter, Cindy Phelps (Mike); son: Larry Cohen (Barbara); grandchildren: Joshua Phelps (Trine); Jessica Phelps; Jennifer Cohen; and Alexandra Cohen. Velma is also survived by two great-grandchildren: Sebastian and Jakob Phelps; as well as many, many family members and friends.

Her funeral was held on Fri., Jan. 7, 2011 at the Herman Meyer & Son funeral home in Louisville. Burial followed in Keneseth Israel Cemetery.

Expressions of sympathy may be made to Temple Shalom, Hosparsus of Louisville or the J. Graham Brown Cancer Research Center. ★

Professor Robert Sandler, 87

Bob Sandler died peacefully on Dec. 18, 2010 after a very short illness – surrounded by his family & friends.

Bob was a native of Boston, veteran of WWII from 1943-1945 serving in Europe during the Normandy Invasion. He was also a very active member of the Jewish War Veterans for many years.

From 1953 to 1956, Professor Sandler taught English Literature at Northeastern University in Boston. He and his family moved to Miami in 1956 after receiving an offer for a position as Professor of English at the University of Miami (UM). He remained at UM until he retired as Professor of English Emeritus in 1990. During his 34 years at UM he introduced many Jewish content courses into the curriculum of the English Department, such as Jewish Literature, Biblical Literature and Literature of the Holocaust. He played a prominent role in the development of the Judaic Studies Program at the University of Miami and served as the Acting Coordinator until the program was officially promulgated by the University. He taught Adult (see Obituaries, page NAT 15)



Jewish Psychology

By EDWARD HOFFMAN, PH.D.

The commercialization of Kabbalah: What's the remedy?

Until recently in the modern world, the Kabbalah was an obscure, forgotten element of Judaism, known mainly to erudite scholars and isolated Hasidic groups. To most European, North American, and South American Jews, the Kabbalah was scarcely acknowledged as an authentic part of Jewish tradition, and certainly nothing to be honored or admired. Nearly everywhere on the globe since the 1870s, cosmopolitan Jews associated the Kabbalah with outmoded speculation or even nonsensical beliefs.

Such was the dominant view for 120 years.

But all this has changed rapidly. Amazingly, in the space of a single generation, the Kabbalah has become a familiar word within the United States, Western Europe, and South America, and even Southeast Asia including Japan. Today, almost all educated non-Jews as well as Jews know that the Kabbalah is Judaism's longstanding mystical tradition and that it has flourished on every inhabited continent. As never before in the Industrial Age, millions of people are now aware of Judaism's cherished esoteric system.

Should committed Jews be celebrating this development? As a psychologist and academician who, for nearly 30 years, has written books about Kabbalah and Jewish spirituality, my answer is: not yet. For as the old age says, "A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing." That is, the vast majority of these millions know almost nothing true about Jewish mysticism. Many have an over-simplified or even misleading perspective, and for example, associate the Kabbalah almost entirely with magic spells and numerology; its powerful spiritual and ethical wisdom remains largely unknown.

In several ways, this situation is due to what I call the global commercialization of Kabbalah in recent years. That is, in a manner completely inconsistent with Torah teaching and study, individuals and organizations in many countries have been attempting to "market" the Kabbalah as an attractive consumer product – replete with such contemporary forms of marketing as Hollywood celebrity endorsements, fancy packaging of common items like red strings, and multi-layered sources of financial gain. The goal of this marketing? To get rich. And, to the dismay of many committed Jews, this business-driven strategy has proven quite successful.

How has this happened? And what can we do to remedy it? To fully answer the first question would consume more space than available within the confines of this article, for it would take us far into the ups-and-downs of Jewish history during the past 500 years. Also, the answer would also bring us to complex dimensions involving the sociology of Western religion in general. Though undoubtedly more urgent, the second question is easier to address. Let's examine each in turn.

Why has the Kabbalah suddenly gained tremendous allure in our high-technology era? Three main reasons seem clear. First, I believe, the horrors of World War II including the Nazi death camps and the use of the atomic bomb convinced many intelligent people that science could not be trusted to guide humanity morally and ethically. For example, the fact that German medical doctors and scientists eagerly joined the Nazi effort to annihilate Jews and other "enemy" groups clearly demonstrated that a university education was no guarantee of morality or humanitarianism. More broadly, the philosophical position known as *scientism* (that is, making science into a quasi-religion) was clearly rendered untenable after World War II.

After Auschwitz, only a fool could still argue that medical doctors and scientists possessed superior morality or wisdom because of their university education. As a result, age-old spiritual systems such as Judaism no longer seemed so irrelevant to modern concerns. Indeed, such brilliant humanistic-existential thinkers in the post-World War II era as Martin Buber, Erich Fromm, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, and Viktor Frankl insisted that for millennia, religion had raised vital questions that could be legitimately recast in contemporary form, such as: "What is the essence of human nature?" "How can human beings realize their full potential?" "What is the best society?" and "What is the meaning of human life?"

Drawing upon early Hasidism for insights, the German-Jewish philosopher Martin Buber particularly helped to spark widespread interest in Hasidic thought. His poetic renditions of classic Hasidic stories (*Tales of the Hasidim*; *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*) and inspiring interpretations of Hasidic philosophy (*Hasidism and Modern Man*; *I and Thou*) motivated many educated persons including non-Jews to explore Kabbalah, which was the theological foundation of early Hasidism. For Buber, men and women in the modern Western world had much to gain from the Hasidic emphasis on joy and deep interpersonal encounter as the essence of human life.

Second, the late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a tremendous growth of interest in Eastern forms of religion and spirituality, particularly in experiential aspects like meditation and higher states of consciousness. Within the United States and Western Europe, such interest was broadly linked to what became

known as the counter-culture, which also embraced such unconventional values as anti-consumerism, communal living, ecology, and organic farming. Initially, such longstanding traditions as yoga, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism attracted the greatest attention, and then Sufism and Native American (indigenous) forms of spirituality.

During the 1970s, a host of popular books by psychologists and philosophers helped spur interest in the Eastern path. They argued that ancient spiritual traditions contained tremendous knowledge about human personality, inner growth, and well-being, and therefore deserved serious study. For instance, the American bestseller *The Relaxation Response*, written by a respected Harvard psychiatrist, insisted that meditation had powerful health benefits for everyone. His book strongly increased attention in the medical and psychological communities to Far Eastern disciplines. In a similar way, the enticing American bestseller *The Tao of Physics* contended that Taoism and other classic Far Eastern systems of thought offered great insights into the nature of the cosmos – and in some ways, even predicted the newest discoveries of quantum physics.

Such books accelerated mass interest in mysticism from a respectable scientific viewpoint, and must be seen as the backdrop for the subsequent rise of worldwide interest in the Kabbalah. Certainly, such intriguing works helped spur my intent to explicate the psychological insights of Kabbalah – a goal which resulted in my influential book, *The Way of Splendor: Jewish Mysticism and Modern Psychology*, published in 1981. To my knowledge, this volume was the first by a professional psychologist to present the basic teachings of the Kabbalah in the context of modern writings about human personality and its potential, such as advanced by Sigmund Freud, William James, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and others. *The Way of Splendor* immediately gained wide international appeal, and brought the Kabbalah to the attention of psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists. Many of these persons had no particular religious identity, but saw its exciting capability for therapeutic work.

Finally, I believe that the Kabbalah re-emerged significantly precisely because of the spiritual emptiness that many Jews and non-Jews felt within their synagogues and churches. In wealthy countries like the United States, these institutions had outwardly erected large, impressive buildings, but had become inwardly boring and lifeless. They offered little involving true religious experience or sacred study, but instead, dull sermons and group prayers lacking passion and intensity. It is no coincidence that millions of persons began seeking inspiration elsewhere, for as the *Sefer HaZohar* (Book of Splendor) astutely declared more than 700 years ago, "the

human soul needs nourishment, just as does the body."

In other words, a vacuum existed for authentic spirituality, and quite understandably, the Kabbalah became available to fill it. Not surprisingly, its dazzling poetic vistas and inspiring picture of human existence quickly proved captivating. As committed Jews, our challenge is not to try to make the Kabbalah disappear once again from modern civilization – a goal which I would certainly oppose – but to minimize the commercialism and distortion that surrounds it. Is this possible? Absolutely. How can we accomplish this? Here are several specific recommendations:

1) We must teach the Kabbalah as integral to Jewish history and theology. Because of the harmful influence of the German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz in the 19th century, most Reform and Conservative rabbis and scholars came to believe that the Kabbalah was not authentic to Judaism. However, as the scholarship of Gershom Scholem and his students later demonstrated in our time, that earlier view was completely wrong. It is now unmistakably clear that many of the greatest rabbinic thinkers of Judaism wrote extensively about such esoteric works as the 13th-century *Sefer HaZohar*. Nevertheless, many non-Orthodox rabbis and Jewish educators still remain wary of studying and teaching Kabbalah, because of the residue of Graetz's influence. Their counterparts today in the Orthodox community also avoid promulgating the Kabbalah, but for different reasons.

This situation must change. We need to produce more books and articles that show how mystical concepts and practices have always flourished in Judaism, even in such seemingly non-mystical works as the Talmud and the writings of Maimonides. The more we can do so, the less possible will it be for money-oriented individuals and groups to market the Kabbalah as their own, unique "product."

2) In teaching the Kabbalah, we must emphasize its ethical dimension. It is ironic that today, this ethical component is so largely ignored, for historically it has been vital to the energy and appeal of mystical Judaism. For example, such revered Kabbalistic works as *The Palm Tree of Deborah* by Rabbi Moses Cordovero in the 16th century and *The Way of God* by Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto in the 18th century drew heavily from Kabbalah to stress how our individual acts, speech, and thoughts impact the spiritual world around us. In order to help show that Kabbalah and ethical guidance have for centuries been closely intertwined in Judaism, I recently produced a new anthology, *The Kabbalah Reader*. Jewish ethics is among the most profound and beautiful aspects of our tradition, and its linkage to Kabbalah needs to be emphasized today.

3) Finally, we must show how the Kabbalah truly provides a time-honored (see Hoffman, page NAT 5)



Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

Shevat began on January 6

It may still be the heart of the winter in many places, but the month of *Shevat* marks a hidden and mystical time of new beginnings. Shevat is a time of rebirth, new inspiration and creativity. The first part of the month may still feel dark and harsh, but that all changes after the 15th of the month, the full moon, and the holiday of Tu B'Shevat.

Be patient. Spring is coming. Something new is going to come forth from within you. Prepare yourself for the new revelation of light and blessing that is available during this month of Shevat.

In this last month of Tevet, we purified ourselves of anger, and learned new ways to respond to challenges in our lives. Through these efforts, the seeds of our vision for expressing our potential have been planted deeper within us. In the month of Shevat, the seed is sprouting.

During the month of Shevat, do not waste time focusing on what you physically see before you, what you have and what you do not have. Much of what we currently experience, we have already birthed previously in our consciousness. The outer world is a reflection of the inner world. Everything has its roots in the spiritual and invisible realms of Being.

Let's empty our minds of the past and call out in the month of Shevat for new inspiration. Say "yes" to the newness of life once again. Invite the awesome potential within you to come forth. Believe that you will bear new fruit and you will.

The energy of the month is best

Meditation for the month of Shevat

Do this meditation as often as you can during this month of Shevat.

Prepare yourself for meditation with slow deep breathing. Then, imagine yourself as a tree. Your branches are now barren, but your roots are hidden, strong and deep. Go deep inside, open to the new creative energy stirring within you now. Breathe deeply and open and attune yourself to this new flow. Open to a new beginning. Keep breathing deeply as you do this simple opening to the new. Let go of the past limiting beliefs of who you thought you are, or what is possible in your life, and open to simply being present.

Open your heart, open your mind. Say "yes," over and over again. Say it silently to yourself, say it out loud, sing it, shout it, whisper it. Breathe deeply. Yes, Yes, Yes. Yes!! You will bring forth beautiful flowers and new fruit this year. Yes, I can! Amen. Amen, Amen. Remember to say Amen to conclude all prayer and blessings. Amen seals the prayer and blessing. Say it slowly from a deep place in your belly.

represented by the holiday of Tu B'Shevat. It is kabbalistically one of the highest and most joyous days of the year. It is called the New Year for the Trees. Though the trees may still be barren at this time, we are told that the new sap begins to flow on Tu B'Shevat. We once again trust in the cycle of life that will produce new leaves, fruits and flowers.

The Torah tells us that the human being is likened to a tree. Like the sap of the trees, our creative juices begin flowing on Tu B'Shevat, so we too will bear new fruit and flowers in the spring.

How do we bear new fruit in our lives? How do we open to newness? We know that a tree needs firm roots to grow and it needs water. In the month of Shevat, we refine and strengthen our roots. If we want to change what is happening in our lives, if we want to birth new possibilities for ourselves, we have to change our consciousness, our thoughts, our feelings and our connection to our bodies. Our consciousness holds the roots of what we create in our life. Prayer, meditation, learning Torah and therapy are powerful tools to change our consciousness.

Interestingly enough, the area of healing this month is eating. Eating is also a mysterious inner process of renewal. We do not just eat physical

(see Ribner, page NAT 14)



Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Making 2011 a year of firsts

I am a closet card-aholic. Its true. Some people eat when they get stressed. Others shop. Me? I head straight to the card aisle at Walgreens or CVS. If I'm really lucky and Hallmark has declared a holiday, like National Take Your Pet to Work Day, I can get lost for hours wondering if there is anyone I know, should know, or might know in the future for whom this type of card would be perfect.

And then, of course, there are the regulars, the ones I stockpile knowing that they will be used in the coming months: birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, bar and bat mitzvahs, Get Well, and my all-time favorite – fun and friendship cards. I buy them and stash them in secret places – in the kitchen behind the bills, in my nightstand under the list of movies I intend to rent, next to my computer in a file marked "Dates to Remember." The problem is I often forget where I put "that special card for my brother" until about two weeks after his birthday so that many of it ends up with the word "belated" scratched into the greeting.

It should come as no surprise then, that I got the inspiration for writing this piece while card-surfing at Trader Joes. The card was enough – a picture of the horizon with a man in a boat sailing on the water. And in finely scripted letters under the picture was this question: "When was the last time you did something for the first time?"

Wow. That really hit me. When was the last time I did something for the very first time? I couldn't remember, although I did make a new sweet potato recipe for Thanksgiving, which I remember clearly because I had to go to the store three times for ingredients I forgot.

I have kept the card on my desk for the past few weeks; its message like a banner before me. And as we begin a new year, I have decided to answer the question by making 2011 a year of "firsts."

I don't necessarily mean firsts that would make my mother dial 911, like bungee jumping or sky diving. Nor am I referring to things that cost a fortune or would require me to update my passport. What I'm talking about is this: Making 2011 the year where each month I try something I've never tried before – for the very first time. Like eating a new food, wearing a new color or style, or reading a book I would never normally choose to read.

Not only is this an exciting way to embrace the new year, but it affords a

very significant Jewish opportunity as well – that of being grateful for the blessing of having new things in our life.

The Jewish tradition has a wonderful way of honoring firsts with a blessing called the *Shehecheyanu* which means "who has kept us in life" in Hebrew. The *Shehecheyanu* gives thanks to God "Who has kept us alive, preserved us and brought us to this special time." On its face, it gives us a way to thank God for new and unusual experiences – such as watching a baby take her first steps, beginning a new job, moving into a new house or tasting the first vegetables from a garden. On a deeper level, it directs our attention and awareness to our surroundings, so that we develop an ability to "see" and "feel" the spiritual significance of events in our life.

The *Shehecheyanu* is also recited at the start of Jewish holidays, like the first night of Chanukah and Passover, and to celebrate any long-awaited special occasion, such as the birth of a child or the retirement from a career.

Making 2011 a year of firsts is a win-win deal. It gives us a chance to grow and learn by expanding our horizons while encouraging us to be grateful for having lived to see the moment. We can bless God and our lives in many ways, and the *Shehecheyanu* helps remind us of who we are, from where we have come and how wonderful it is to be a witness to the people and events around us.

Lederman is an award winning author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney who lives in Tucson. Visit her website at amyhirshberglederman.com. ★

HOFFMAN

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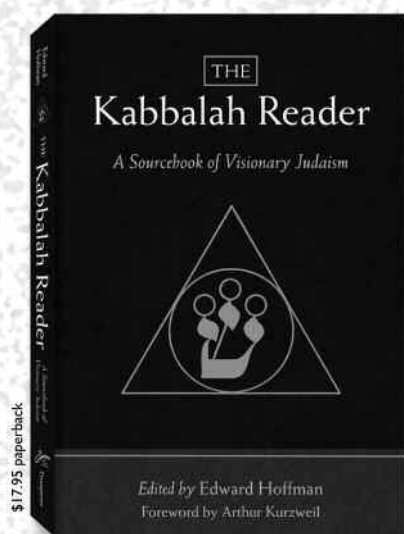
system for inner growth, rather than magical tools for amassing wealth, social status, or material possessions. The more clearly we can present the Kabbalah's lucid ideals and practices for self-development – such as in improving emotional discipline, enhancing willpower and intentionality (*kavana*), and living each day with greater joy and sense of purpose (*tikkun*), the more crass and vulgar to the general public will the "Kabbalah marketers" appear.

As committed Jews, we cannot be passive amidst the global commercialization of this grand feature of our religion. But fortunately, passivity has never been a characteristic Jewish personality trait. By forcefully taking the initiative, and stressing what is profound, inspiring, and enduring about the Kabbalah, we can best triumph over those who distort its true essence.

Dr. Edward Hoffman is an adjunct associate psychology professor at Yeshiva University in New York. He has written many books on psychology and Judaism, including most recently *The Wisdom of Maimonides and The Kabbalah Reader*, both by Trumpeter/Random House. Email: elhoffma@yu.edu. ★

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Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

Chanukah in Israel

Here we are in Israel as we begin a family visit with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Our last visit was over a year and a half ago, and that is too long to be away from a growing family. We are busy now holding great-grandchildren for the first time, watching others walking, talking and busy with life. Chanukah is a beautiful time to be in Israel. This year the weather feels much like summer, all the flowers are in full bloom, and everywhere we go, the streets and the shops are busy.

Your eyes tell you that the tourist business is thriving again. Our plane was filled with large groups of non-Jewish tourists. The street sounds are quieter. There are fewer construction sites and noise, and at the same time, the real estate market is booming. This is a dramatic difference from what we are experiencing in Wisconsin, in our region and the whole United States. Israel escaped the housing disaster because of stricter mortgage requirements. There were no subprime loans in Israeli housing. For many years the population here advocated for lower down payments, but with the exception of some discounted prices where new housing is opening, there was none. That tight policy paid dividends.

The pace of life, in contrast, seems almost chaotic. Big families, constantly coming and going; we call it organized chaos. It starts earlier in the morning and lasts later into the night. Like most grandparents coming to visit, we maintain our own schedules, marveling at their energy.

The most important constant that we notice is the seeming disinterest in the rest of the world. There is a general malaise that you feel here with reference to anything changing for the better. For most Israelis, their country has always been at war or war ready, and life simply had to move on. Our children are not oblivious to what is happening in the world, they simply came to the conclusion, both religious and secular, that they were not at the world table, and that they would be better off simply living their lives.

It is one of the ironies that American parents of Israelis live with. We are more attentive to the daily interplay of Israel with the world than they are, that is, as long as the rockets are not being fired or landing. It is not complacency, just the realization that it just didn't work with their lives.

The circumstances of Chanukah are not lost on them. We have a history when one nation or another has tried to take over our bodies and souls. History has demonstrated that most of those nations have disappeared and we are still here, but, at the same time, they are always replaced by other nations, not impressed with historical lessons. We are here celebrating freedom in the real, and it is a gift of the Almighty open to all of us.

The issue of Jewish relevancy

There is a long standing issue of Jewish relevance-irrelevance in our long history. Even with all the catastrophic attacks on Jews and Jewish life, it seems that assimilation has always taken the highest toll. In every age, the issues that spurred the associated losses were different; the loss was continual and devastating. For many, being Jewish proved to be too great a burden and came at too high a price. At other times, it was simply a matter of wanting a broader palate of life, and the desire to be free of any restrictions.

When the subject of relevance is talked about in the Orthodox communities of the world today, it often centers on the pain of families whose child is "off the derech-off the path." This is a widespread issue today in the whole Orthodox world, and there are a myriad of professionals and organizations trying to find solutions to the crisis a religious family faces when a child "defects." It is an issue within a broader series of issues.

Speaking to the whole issue of irrelevancy is the voice of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, the Rebbe of Plaszecna, known as the Aish Kodesh. Rabbi Shapira perished in the Holocaust, having elected to stay with his congregation through a time in the Warsaw Ghetto and finally dying in a concentration camp. His only work, *Chovas HaTalmidim* was discovered where he had buried it in the Warsaw Ghetto, and a new translation has just been published by Feldheim Books.

Among the revelations is the fact that relevancy and irrelevancy were significant issues in pre-World War II Poland and Europe, and the rabbi thoughtfully and scholarly lays out the causes and effects.

He suggests that our lives and the growth of science have given our children a premature sense of their own experience and maturity, and often then, contempt for the history and tradition of their families and their families' faith. He suggests that this leads to an emotional and intellectual arrogance, in which individuals reject the education and traditions of their families, and often, their families as well. They refuse to be bound by anything that is not the product of their own experience and knowledge.

In this spellbinding book, he goes on to talk about the responsibilities of families and educators to individualize their approach to every child, destroying the concept of "one size fits all."

In the United States today, with the catastrophe of urban education, his voice calls out for all of us to reassess how we have raised our children and how we have taught our children. His voice calls out to reassess how to reach out to all for whom any kind of education is rejected out-of-hand, and to all Jews who have found their Judaism irrelevant.

In 1970 Charles E. Silberman published his landmark study, "Crisis in the Classroom, the Remaking of American Education." Although he received high compliments for his work, and it was widely disseminated and discussed, it did not stop the "rush to public education ruin." Subsequently, he published a small book on the "Crisis in Jewish Education," in which he posited that too often Sunday School education gave its graduates a false sense of knowledge and an immature understanding of Jewish history and tradition, and it ill equipped them to make positive Jewish life decisions in the future. Silberman suggested that the graduates would be better off with no formal Jewish education and no sense of false understanding that they were competent Jewish decision makers.

Rabbi Shapira's important work laid buried in Warsaw until well after the war. And while the miraculous discovery and publishing constituted a miracle, his work, up to now, has not been widely distributed. Silberman's book, though widely distributed, never found an audience to put its suggestions into practice.

All of us understand that there is a crisis in Jewish life. All of us should understand that the demographic count of Jews in the United States and the world are, in the main, hollow, because they do not reference anything other than the incidence of the birth. All of us understand that the efforts that we are making to adequately educate Jewish children fall short. We are, in fact, in the middle of a Jewish tsunami and find ourselves paralyzed by the enormity of the problem.

There is a false sense of security in the religious neighborhoods of Israel, I believe. My grandchildren are in classes of 35 to 40 children, young children with more differences than similarities, who come home to families that are struggling with size and the enormous energy that it takes to live and thrive in Israel. But they, at least, understand the cost of losing their children.

In the United States, too often, parents do not have the experience, knowledge or will to win over their children from an environment full of opportunities "of freedom from" rather than "freedom to." The widespread reach of the Internet, the distractions of texting, the dangers of sexting, the easy access to drugs, the lack of any peer support seem beyond their reach.

If you intend to raise your children in an enriched Jewish environment, you must accept the challenge, and respond

ADLAND

(continued from page NAT 2)

time, the world is blessed with many Moses' who work to lead those shackled in the chains of these plagues to a better land and a better place. Many of those people are you, who volunteer to feed, clothe, shelter, protect, or make others aware. Unlike the plagues in Exodus, the modern plagues in our society can be defeated.

In many ways I have to ask myself, what was the ultimate goal of my people's liberation from bondage? Was it just for me to eventually arrive at a mountain seven weeks later and accept the Torah and *mitzvot* as the central part of my life? Or was this liberation for me, for all Jews, to be an *or l'goyim*, "a light to the nations?" While the former gives me strength, community, faith, and commitment, it is the latter that drives my journey. I celebrate Shabbat as part of my heritage and through this celebration I appreciate what I have and the journey of my people, but even on Shabbat, when we recite the Kiddush, we remember our exodus from Egypt. We recall this to remind ourselves of the responsibilities that come with freedom and those responsibilities include the modern plagues that shackle too many today. Rest on Shabbat, but work for a better world each and every other day (and sometimes on Shabbat too.)

The world is far from perfect and though Shabbat gives us a foretaste of a better world and a better day, it is just a glimpse. To get to this better day, to cross the sea and climb the mountain to be at one with God in a more "perfect" world, we must take on the challenges around us and fight against the plagues of today. We must do this and none of us can turn away from the responsibility of *tikkun olam*, making the world of tomorrow a better, safer, kinder, gentler place for all.

When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light one to remind us of our obligation to others. Light the other candle to help lead us to the top of the mountain so that we, too, can stand in the place that Moses stood.

Rabbi Adland has been leading Reform congregations for more than 25 years in Lexington, Ky., and Indianapolis, Ind. 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." ★

to the self-education you need to be a resource to your family and make time and priority for being involved in things Jewish. The examples of failure are all around us. We need to elect to transfer a tradition full and intact to our children, by living it with them, learning along side of them, and as a family, navigating the challenging American scene.

Howard W. Karsh lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisc., and can be reached at hkarsh@gmail.com. ★



Shipley Speaks

BY JIM SHIPLEY

On the passing of giants

Some of them leave us every day. They were called many things: The Greatest Generation. The children of the Depression. Parents of the Baby Boom. And they were and are many things. Without them this country could never be really called "great."

As Jews, we have and had our own. They were the ones who fought so that the Jews could have their own homeland. Some went to the nascent state of Israel and actually fought to make sure it happened. Some stayed here and fought just as hard politically and financially to see that the birth of the Third Jewish Commonwealth would take place and that no one would stop it.

They grew up at a time when racism was as natural to this nation as apple pie and baseball, where no black man could play in the major leagues, when anti-Semitism kept Jews from elite colleges and out of board rooms. But, they did not quit. They became educated; they took their place in law offices and hospitals and in business and publishing houses and arts organizations. These were Jews who would not be denied. Not in their lives, not in the lives of their fellow Jews.

I am of an age where I was honored to know many of them. Some of those still around, I treasure as friends. And, they leave us. Here in our town, Orlando, Fla., we recently lost a giant. His name was Hyman Lake and I was pleased and honored to call him friend.

I guess you could say that Hy Lake's life was "typical" of that generation. But nothing about these giants was typical. Hy was a street vendor in Chicago as a youth just to put bread on the Lake Table. He worked his way through law school. As a lawyer he took on the bigots and the stuffed shirts and established himself as a righteous Jew.

I met Hy and found that he believed in most of the things I did. Neither of us was particularly "observant," but both of us loved the Jewish people and loved being Jewish. I made fundraising calls with Hy for Israel. His presentation was always reasonable until he met an unreasonable person. Then the street fighter came out – in spades!

He was of that generation. They had to fight for what they thought was reasonably theirs. They had to defy the odds that said unless you were white, protestant and privileged, there were places in this free country where you were just not welcome. And, if you were a Jew, there were places you

were not even allowed. For two newer generations (and half of a third) that might be hard to believe. But it is true. You could look it up – excuse me – Google it.

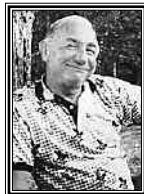
Look, there are many, many worthy Jews on the front lines of today's battles. It's just that the history and the struggles of that particular generation are so amazing and should be so unforgettable but still, I worry that they will be.

I remember a meeting attended by the then executive director of the Jewish Federation of Orlando, Hy Lake and myself. We met with the editorial board of the local daily newspaper, the *Orlando Sentinel*. The *Sentinel*, then as now, was owned by the Tribune Corporation of Chicago. Based on the philosophy of their founder, Colonel McCormack, they were conservative politically and usually anti-Israel.

They had an opinion columnist on staff who wrote some scathing stories about Israel. Most of the facts he quoted were not facts at all – kind of like today. But instead of holding meetings among ourselves or writing letters, Hy arranged a meeting at the *Sentinel* with the editorial board and the columnist. The meeting followed the usual pattern of us quoting facts and showing where they were amiss in their judgments, and they saying that they covered both sides equally.

But then, as the meeting drew to a close, I watched Hy approach the columnist and begin to chat. I overheard him ask the columnist where he was from and about his background and Hy telling him of his own background in Chicago and how he came to Florida. Within a few minutes they left the room to have lunch together. The columns suddenly became pro-Israel and made a logical case for the actions of the Jewish state. At that meeting and obviously at that luncheon, Hy did not yell and pound the table as he did so often when raising funds amongst his own folks. Hy made a friend, and it paid off.

So, they are leaving us. These righteous men and women. Steeped in their own history and that of the State of Israel, they knew. They knew of the blood of 1948 and 1967 and 1973. There is no way the present attitude on most college campuses would be allowed to stand in their day. The Zionist cause has become one of derision. The lies about the State of Israel are becoming endemic in much of the youth on campus. Yes, there are our Hillels and our Birthrights, and such. But we need the passion. We even need the fear. Yes, the fear that is and was in the mind of all those giants that Israel and the Jews would once again be the "Other." "Never again!" said Hy Lake. We should honor his memory by fighting as hard as he did for the rights of our people, the Jewish homeland and for that matter, as he did for the rights of all peoples. I miss you old friend.



Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

Elijah's gift

Have you heard the tale of the 36 *tzadiks* – a rare *midrash* known only in the state of Alabama by me and my rabbi? These *tzadiks*, humbly appearing emissaries from heaven – ragged and unshaven, hobo-like – are known only to the Boss (like undercover CIA agents) with the mission of reporting to him the moral conditions of his universe. He doesn't worry about the mountains, the oceans, the deserts, the meadows – none of which misbehave. His real concern is his latest creation, man.

So, his 36 "spies" – an ugly word, but close to the truth – circulate on Earth and report back to the celestial CEO.

But our Creator, as most physiologists know, believes in back-up, in duplication. Did he not bless us with two kidneys, two lungs, even two adenoids? (So why didn't he think of two hearts? Ask your doctor, not your rabbi.)

But concerned with redundancy, he backs up his *tzadik* reconnaissance force. The back up? The hardworking Prophet Elijah. Elijah, the faithful servant – always ready for a second job. He already has the Passover gig, and unknown to most of us, attends every *bris*; so says the *midrash*. His spare time is limited, to say the least. But now a new job of evaluating the human condition.

As usual, his earthly form disguised his rank. He wore rags and had the dull look of hunger in his eyes. He moved among the people – observed them – and usually tested the warmth of their heart. Then he reported back to the Creator of their world.

There's a strange story wherein the masquerading prophet stops in the village of Chelm – a town noted for its stupidity. And on what door does he knock? At the crummiest hovel in town he knocks and asks for hospitality. Sure, come in, says the householder. "And stay for supper. What little we have we'll share with you." A little? The wife brings out a chipped platter containing a single chicken leg. (Wonderful, thinks the prophet – one chicken leg and they share it.) Though beyond his authority, he can't resist the impulse to reward these warm-hearted people. In short, he

gives them three wishes. They dance with glee. "We want a palace – we want roast goose every night, we want servants and coaches and many rubles in the bank."

The prophet notices with keen disappointment that they ignore love. But that's not his problem. All is granted to them. But what good is roast goose, even in garlic sauce, if your helpmate glares at you across the supper table? And how much fun is it to ride in a gilded coach while your partner is trying to push you out of the door? Three wishes – all for trinkets of this world, but not one for the only thing of value – love, goodness.

I think you can guess the fate of the ex-welfare recipients. Without love, their palace and servants and bank balance faded into nothingness.

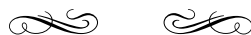
Their neighbors and townspeople watched with curious eyes. And remember, Chelm was a town full of *schmiels* – they misspelled the road sign, even. When the town was transferred from Russian to Polish jurisdiction they rejoiced: "Great, no more of those bone-chilling, Russian winters!"

Soon everybody heard the story of the ragged traveler who turned wooden sheds into palaces if you offered to share your chicken leg with him. "He turns your shabby house into a palace, loads up your bank account, and then destroys your family," the Chelmites whispered. Disintegration – husband and wife at each other's throat – kids running wild. "Don't let him in," they shouted.

Door to door trudged poor Elijah making the same old pitch and meeting the same old refusals. One lady dumped a bowl of porridge on his poor, old, gray head. "Break up my family will ya!" The Chelmites just couldn't integrate the concepts of material prosperity and domestic compatibility. Soon, the prophet gave up and moved on to the next village where the peasants reveled in their new-found prosperity.

Who knows? Maybe those Chelmites weren't as dumb as tradition relates.

Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner, is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. When he's not writing, Ted worships at Etz Chayim Synagogue in Huntsville, Ala., where for 25 years he has served as bar mitzvah teacher. His inspiration is his patient wife, Shirley. Check out his Web site: www.wonderwordworks.com or blogsite: www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com. His collected works The Scribbler on The Roof can be bought at Amazon.com or lulu.com/content/127641. ★



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

On this date in Jewish history

On January 12, 1493

Jews expelled from Sicily.

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



Seen on the Israel Scene

By SYBIL KAPLAN

Methuselah, the oldest seed ever grown and Tu B'Shevat

When I started to think of what theme would best represent Tu B'Shevat for my article this year, an idea popped into my head that soon led me to Dr. Sarah Sallon, director of the Louis Borick Natural Medicine Research Center at the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem.

What best symbolizes the holiday known in the Talmud as *Rosh Hashanah l'ilanot*, the New Year of the Trees, more than dates? Why New Year? Because Jewish literature of the 6th to 11th centuries identifies Tu B'Shevat as one on which the fate of the trees and fruit is decided. The Mishnah, that part of the Talmud which explains, interprets and analyzes the laws of the Torah, indicates the holiday's significance as a day meant to link the Jew to the land of *Eretz Yisrael*.

According to Dr. Sallon, "in 2005 we were interested in rejuvenating lost flora of *Eretz Yisrael*. One of the lost flora is the Judean date. I was discussing with some scientists about their work, trying to extract DNA from ancient seeds. I said, "If we had ancient seeds, why couldn't we grow them?"

Masada came up in the conversation. Masada is the palace built by King Herod overlooking the Dead Sea 2,046 years ago, inhabited by 1,000 Jews who took up refuge and then committed suicide to avoid capture by the Romans in 70 C.E. The site was excavated in the 1960s by archaeologist, Yigal Yadin.



Dr. Sarah Sallon. Photo by Barry A. Kaplan/Israel.



"Methuselah" date plant. Photo provided by Dr. Sarah Sallon.

Three date palm seeds were found, along with other discoveries, and were in the custodianship of Professor E. Netzer in charge of Yigal Yadin's collection. These were stored at Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv with Professor Mordechai Kislav who identified them.

Dr. Sallon's colleague, Dr. Elaine Soloway, botanist of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies at Kibbutz Ketura, actually took the three 2,000-year-old seeds and planted them. After eight weeks, one seed successfully germinated and was named Methuselah.

Initially, the first leaves had white spots because of a lack of chlorophyll, however, after 26 months the plant showed normal development.

Although I was only permitted to see a still photograph and others on the computer, the exact location of the now, two-meter-high (6.5 foot) tree is a secret. Dr. Sallon said it is in a "protected, quarantined site," and she visits Methuselah "quite frequently," every few months.

"It looks like a regular date palm," said Dr. Sallon, in her office at Hadassah Hospital, Ein Karem, "but we have to look more at its DNA. When we compared it to the DNA of a regular cultivated species of dates, it closely resembled the Egyptian type."

Right now Methuselah is simply growing and not showing its sexual characteristics. Its sex will not be known for a few years.

"If it's female, we'll call it Mrs. Methuselah," says Dr. Sallon. Potentially, it could be fertilized by pollen of a male date and possibly produce dates.

This project is part of Dr. Sallon's works, looking at medicinal plants of Israel. The Louis Borick Natural Medicine Research Center, which is funded entirely by donations, researches natural medicines and, according to Dr. Sallon, "one of the most important natural medicines comes from plants."

The center staff of 20-30 people collect seeds, grow plants and harvest them and then test them. The Dali Lama has

visited the center several times because they have done a lot of work on Tibetan plants.

"We have an interest in the highest place [Tibet] and the lowest place [the Dead Sea]," Dr. Sallon said. "We grow plants at Kibbutz Ketura and test them at Hadassah School of Medicine, using ancient and historical sources like Maimonides and Ibn Sana."

They translate ancient manuscripts on medicinal plants from Latin, Greek, Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew and the Romance languages.

"We use the information to pinpoint what we want to test. Some have never been translated before. We call it 'data mining.'"

Currently researchers at the center are screening for tumors, otherwise known as cancers, for Parkinson's (which is not named in the ancient writings but whose symptoms are described) and for Alzheimer's (described as memory loss). The loss of memory was a sign of aging in the ancient writings, thus the center is looking at plants traditionally used to improve people's memory. Melancholy is today's depression; coughing up blood is today's tuberculosis.

Recently the center tested in its early stages and isolated an interesting plant for Parkinson's. "It shows an interesting affect in the laboratory," Dr. Sallon remarked.

"We use the ancient language of the healers and apply them to modern conditions," says Dr. Sallon. "Looking at the date (Methuselah) and other ancient medicines is part of searching for [sources]. It's so precious to us."

Dr. Sallon was born in London and holds a Bachelor of Science degree, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degrees, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, diploma of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, member of the Royal College of Physicians in Pediatrics. She has held positions with Hadassah University Hospital since 1983 and has been director of the Natural Medicine Research Center since 1994. She has worked at hospitals in Hong Kong; Bombay, Hyderabad and Calcutta, India; Wollo Province, Ethiopia; and Nepal and has done research into traditional medicine in India, Victoria, B.C., and Israel.

Seeing the aftermath of the fire through our own eyes

All week we had been watching with horror the scenes on television and reading about the Carmel fire in the newspapers, the 10,465 acres destroyed and 43 victims.

When the Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet l'Yisrael* – see sidebar) invited foreign correspondents to tour Carmel with the professional foresters of KKL-JNF to learn about the fire damages and rehabilitation plans, we were eager to go.

In a few short hours, we were following the giant leaps the fire had taken a few days before. The smell was in

my nostrils, the black embers were under my tennis shoes, and the puffs of smoke were still smoldering in a few places by a house in Kibbutz Bet Oren and in the Carmel Forest, four days after the Carmel fire was declared suppressed.

Standing first at an observation point below Haifa University, where the main command post had been established, Israel Tauber, director of forest management for the KKL-JNF, told us this was the worst wild fire ever experienced in Israel in terms of "intensity, size and casualties."



Burned landscape. Photo by Barry A. Kaplan/Israel.

Michael Weinberger, director of the supervisor's office of forests in the Western Galilee, told us how he saw the mushroom over the Druze village of Isafiya, at approximately 11:30 a.m. on Thurs., Dec. 2, and decided to bring on the northern region fire crews and the duster airplane, feeling "this would be a huge fire," since it seemed to be running a mile per hour. One hundred twenty men and 12 fire engines, 70 percent of the country's forces, were called up to assist what seemed to be man made, probably due to neglect, which had started at Isafiya.

Kalil Adar, director of the forest department for the northern region of JNF, showed us maps, as we stood 1,700 feet above sea level, pointing out how the fire appeared on the peaks of the ridge then to the west and northwest. The strong, dry eastern winds, low humidity and lack of rain for the past eight months contributed to the intensity. "I've never seen such a situation regarding intensity and crazy behavior," said Adar. Seeing the black hills made the fire even more real to us.

Our next stop was Kibbutz Bet Oren. In 1934 the kibbutz was settled as part of a watch tower and stockade camp then after an Arab attack two years later, it was abandoned, only to be refounded in 1939. In 1999, members petitioned the High Court of Justice to classify it as a cooperative society, and today it has been privatized and is a community village. It operates a hotel and spa, horse riding center, lead factory, glass work shop, membership-based swimming pool, pub with live bands and mountain-bike store offering bikes, repairs and guided trips.

We climb a hill and meet Yohay Cohen, born on the kibbutz and now co-owner of the spa attached to the hotel. Yohay explained that although the village had

created an emergency team several months ago, they had no special uniform or identification to show to those who were part of the official fire fighting crews, so when they received a call at 11:30 a.m. calling for evacuation, buses came first to remove the children and the elderly. The rest of the people were also evacuated, leaving only the emergency team. The Haifa Police Chief Deputy Commander, Ahuva Tomer, then came and told them to evacuate.

She continued to the road, across the valley, where the bus of prison service cadets was traveling. It was consumed by fire and she too was fatally burned in her car, while following the bus.

Yohay relates how he stood on the road of the kibbutz, looking across the wadi (the channel of a watercourse that is dry except during periods of rainfall) 600–700 meters in the distance. He could see the bus coming on the road as it hit the fire. “I asked myself, who would send a bus of people into the fire?”

On the kibbutz, Yohay explained how “the fire came down the mountain, its fumes were very strong, it went past the road and burned the [kibbutz] night club.” It continued on, consuming 15 buildings containing 40 apartments.



Burned apartment building in Kibbutz Bet Oren. Photo by Barry A. Kaplan/Israel.

He walked us down the road, past the yellow ribbons, further into the kibbutz. We were shocked to see the burned-out apartment buildings where smoke is still smoldering. Right off the path was a pile of burned objects taken from the destroyed apartments. I was so touched by toys, a doll, a bath tub. Further on were two burned-out skeletons of cars. The kibbutz was unable to get water to the burning areas because the water pumps were electrically controlled and the electricity had been interrupted, he told us.

Adding a little humor to the tragedy, in one burned-out building they found a room, unknown to the kibbutz, where the Haganah had stored weapons, prior to 1948.

Kalil Adar, director of the forest department for the Northern Region of KKL-JNF, explained how the falling missiles in the 2006 Second Lebanon War created fires, “but we confronted the fires. You didn’t see the enemy; you didn’t know when the next missile would fall, and for the first time, we had the feeling we might die because of the missiles falling. As commander of the crews, I can tell you, the people were very brave and very strong.”

Keren Kayemet l'Yisrael (Jewish National Fund) was founded in 1901 and until the State was created, its role was buying land. Since the creation of Israel, its role as a quasi-governmental, nonprofit agency is caretaker of the land of Israel on behalf of Jewish people everywhere. It became the agency for improving the land in the areas of forestry, reservoirs and dams, agriculture and soil conservation.

Michael Weinberger, director of the supervisor’s office of forests in the Western Galilee, says that since those fires, 20 fire trucks were purchased but without the planes sent in to help this time, the damage would have doubled from this fire.

We boarded the van, drove down the hill and out of the kibbutz and then across the wadi to the road to drive past the site of the bus burning. There was bumper-to-bumper traffic with people stopping to gaze at or add to a memorial by laying flowers and candles at this location. It was so unreal to be where this happened.

From here, we drove up to the Carmel forest across the road from the luxury Carmel Spa resort. The smell was strong as we stood among the burned embers. We hear how the area was engulfed in smoke last Friday night and how they saw the fire coming toward the hotel. This is one of the only spots where you could get to the fire from fire engines.

In this mixed forest with pine and oak, we learn how rehabilitation of the forests will take place. They hope the area will have pine seedlings in three to four months and the natural oaks will grow on their own. Every section will be planned because the area is sensitive and the issue is sensitive, but it may be 30–40 years before there is a forest. In the meantime, people will not be allowed to walk in the area while the young seedlings take root.

Dr. Omri Boneh, director of the KKL Northern Region and with KKL for 28 years, spoke to us while we stopped for lunch in a picnic area. Trails, picnic areas and sites located in the burned areas will need to be rehabilitated. On a happier note, all of the animals in the nearby Hai Bar wildlife refuge were saved.

Israel Tauber, director of forest management for the KKL-JNF, told us “there were no forests or vegetation before the State was established. Bringing back the forests was a kind of national goal.”

Kalil Adar, director of the forest department for the Northern Region of KKL-JNF, adds that, “to the KKL crews, the forest is our day-to-day life. A few battles were won but not the whole war.”

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, book reviewer, food columnist, and feature writer who lives in Jerusalem. ★



Jewish Theater

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

The bible dances its way across the Connecticut stage

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat now dances its way across the Connecticut stage. That endearing tale from the Old Testament (or, rather, the Torah), depicting the early days of the Jewish people, serves as a basis for this popular musical. And now a cabaret theater in Bridgeport, Conn. offers up a razzle-dazzle show for the holiday season. Productions numbers in this sung-through musical follow hard on each other, always with bounce and verve.

Downtown Cabaret has fortunately opted for the best of the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice efforts – a show which marked the beginnings of the famed collaboration. (Originally it was a short piece written for a school concert, to be later expanded into a full-length musical.) Though the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice team would go from strength to strength (with *Evita* and others in the future), this early effort reflected the brashness and optimism of youth. How appropriate that they had chosen the upbeat *Joseph* story!

It is an irreverent spoof, but the story is laid out all the same. Jacob, the patriarch favors his son Joseph over his eleven brothers, giving him a coat of many colors. The brothers deeply resent Joseph, and the coat is the final straw. Hence they sell Joseph into slavery, handing him over to the traveling Ishmaelites. But Joseph will triumph with his secret weapon, the ability to interpret dreams. Ultimately, in Egypt, he will interpret the Pharaoh’s

dream and save the country from starvation. “Any Dream Will Do,” the show’s opening song, sets the tone for this adventure tale, with its hills and valleys, its bright and darker moments.

In this production, director Scott Thompson emphasizes the Broadway show-biz side of the musical. The story, unfortunately, gets short shrift, given the relentless non-stop parade of song-and-dance numbers. An occasional quieter interlude might have brought the story itself to center stage, acknowledging moments of poignancy. And it might have made more of the musical message, suggesting the birth of the modern-day Israel.

But Thompson and company make the most of the delightful tunes, and the irreverent lyrics which turn the Bible into modern jargon. It’s all tongue-in-check, as the eleven brothers honor Joseph’s downfall with the delicious “One More Angel in Heaven” or Potiphar’s Wife attempts Joseph’s seduction in “Potiphar.” The music is confined to no one genre, but ranges from rock and roll to calypso to pure Lloyd Webber. They have even turned the Pharaoh into an Elvis Presley look-alike.

Thompson’s well-designed, well-choreograph musical is also blessed with a fine cast. And the show exudes a feeling of good will which spills over into the audience.

If the show’s stronger messages are lost along the way, so be it. It nonetheless offers good holiday entertainment, and there are other ways one can connect to the Torah, such as a return to the Book itself for a direct reading.

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 and invites you to visit her website: nytheater scene.com or at: jewish-theatre.com.* ★



L-R: Jodie Langel, as the Narrator, and Kristofer Stock, as Joseph, in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* at Downtown Cabaret in Bridgeport, Conn.

Jews' News

URJ launches two special needs summer programs

January 6, 2011 – The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) is committed to providing a Reform Jewish camping experience to all children, including those with special needs. In addition to the highly successful special needs programs at Reform Jewish Camps Kutz and Newman, URJ has launched two additional special needs programs, Israel in a Special Way and Camp Chazak.

The Mitzvah Corps program at Camp Kutz in Warwick, NY, and the Camp Nefesh program at Camp Newman in Santa Rosa, Calif., were both created for autistic teens. The two new programs pick up where these existing programs leave off and reach special needs children both on and off the autism spectrum.

Israel in a Special Way, URJ's first Israel experience special needs program, is offered to teens between the ages of 16 and 19 with ADD, ADHD, Asperger's syndrome, learning disabilities and/or mild social or emotional difficulties. This unique Israel travel program integrates spiritual, adventure and learning experiences. This program is made possible with the cooperation of Summit Camp and Travel.

Camp Chazak, located at Eisner and Crane Lake Camps in Massachusetts, was developed for kids from 5th through 8th grades with communication and social delays. Functioning as a therapeutic and recreational camp, Chazak is equipped with a clinically trained staff and utilizes a research-based program. Campers receive all the recreational benefits of a mainstream camp but are given additional resources to help them improve their skills and grow their confidence.

"These new programs offer invaluable experiences for Jewish youth who may have been otherwise excluded from Israel and camp programs," said Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism. "We hope to offer similar programs in the future so that every Jewish child and teen has the opportunity to attend a Jewish summer program."

For more information, please visit the URJ's camp and Israel special needs website or Contact: Annette Powers at apowers@urj.org or 212-650-4154. ★

NCSY to honor Lander's legacy

The NCSY Reception will honor the legacy of Dr. Lander of Touro College by inducting four member into the honor society and presenting three memorial awards.

The Orthodox Union will pay tribute to the remarkable legacy of Dr. Bernard Lander, z"l, and honor Vivian and Dr. David Luchins of New York and Rivkah and Rabbi Zev Leff of Moshav Mattityahu in Israel (formerly of North Miami Beach) for 50 years of involvement with NCSY, the OU's international youth program. The presentations will take place at the Ben Zakkai Honor Society (BZHS) Annual Scholarship Reception, Sun., Jan. 30 at 5:00 p.m. at Bohemian National Hall, 321 East 73rd Street in New York.

In addition, the Society will salute Brenda and Dr. Howard Rosenthal of Kansas City, Kan., with the *Enid and Harold Boxer Memorial Award*; and honor its newest inductees, Aaron Horn of East Windsor, NJ; Jessica Hoffman of Seattle; Noach Klein of Southfield, Mich.; and Rabbi Michael Rovinsky of St. Louis.

Vivian and David Luchins will receive the *Sarah Rivkah and Dr. Bernard Lander Memorial Award*. Rivkah and Rabbi Zev Leff will be the recipients of the *Ezra Ben-Zion Lightman Memorial Award*. Interestingly enough, Vivian and David and Rivkah and Zev were among 400 teenagers who attended NCSY Founding Events in the Catskills and Miami in May 1965. Four of those teenagers have stayed involved for 50 years – Vivian, David, Rivkah and Zev. One reason, perhaps, is that they met their respective spouses in NCSY. The Luchins' are the only married couple who both serve on the Orthodox Union Board of Directors. Both the Luchins' and the Leffs' are regulars at NCSY events including national conventions as well as other Orthodox Union gatherings.

BZHS is an alumni "Hall of Fame" whose new members are nominated by, and voted on, by its current members based on the nominees' service to NCSY and the Jewish community. The Society's main function is to raise funds for scholarships for high school NCSYers for summer programs in North America and Israel and for teens to continue their Jewish education after high school. The Society has helped pay tribute for more than 40 years to esteemed NCSY alumni and community leaders who have demonstrated their dedication to Torah and their service to the Jewish people. The Jan. 30 event will be the 15th Annual Scholarship Reception. Isabelle Novak of Los Angeles serves as chair of Ben Zakkai.

Rabbi Dr. Bernard Lander was the founder of Touro College and served as its president for almost 40 years, until his death on Feb. 8, 2010 at the age of 94. He built the school from a fledgling institution with only 35 students in 1971 to an educational powerhouse with some 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students across the United States and in Israel, Germany, France, Russia and elsewhere, making Touro the largest Jewish-operated educational institution in the world.

Touro offers yeshiva, secular and professional studies to Jewish and

non-Jewish students alike. The Touro educational universe includes the highly competitive Lander Colleges for Men and Women in New York. Along with his Touro involvement, Dr. Lander served for decades in a leadership capacity at the Orthodox Union and played an historic role in creating and nurturing NCSY.

"Dr. Bernard Lander's historic role in helping to create and nurture NCSY ensured him a special place in contemporary American history even before he set out to revolutionize higher education by founding Touro College," declared Dr. Luchins. "Vivian and I are honored to receive an award that bears his and his extraordinary wife's names." David serves as chair of the Political Science Department of Touro College and was founding dean of Touro's Lander College for Women, the Anna Ruth and Mark Hasten School.

Brenda Fogelson Rosenthal and Howard Rosenthal didn't bother to wait until they joined NCSY to make each other's acquaintance – they met in the 6th grade, in Phoenix. Then came NCSY. After completing their medical training in New York, the couple moved to Kansas City, Kan., where they have both served as presidents of their synagogue, Beth Israel, Abraham & Voliner, and participate in and host NCSY events throughout the year.

The four new inductees – Aaron, Jessica, Noach and Rabbi Michael – bring the living membership in BZHS to 935. Rabbi Steven Burg, international director of NCSY summed up the honorees as follows: "The warmth, commitment and passion for Judaism of our inductees has resonated with so many Jewish teens over the years, and I feel very fortunate to have them as part of the NCSY family."

For information on attending the BZHS Annual Scholarship Reception or to contribute to its Souvenir Journal, contact www.ou.org/bzdinner or Elaine Grossman at 212-613-8350 or Grossman@ou.org. ★

Holocaust survivors gather in Las Vegas

A recent weekend gathering of Holocaust survivors and their families took place Dec. 17–19 at The Venetian Palazzo Hotel in Las Vegas. Rabbi Dr. Bernard Rosenberg was the keynote speaker. He is spiritual leader of Congregation Beth El in Edison, N.J., and teaches at Rutgers University in New Jersey and Yeshiva University in New York. He serves as Holocaust chairman of the New York Board of Rabbis and was associate editor of the New Jersey State Holocaust education curriculum. Dr. Rosenberg frequently appears on national T.V. and is the author of numerous books.

His topic was "How to preserve Holocaust memory before it is too late."

Also featured was world-famous Cantor Moshe Schulhof, who conducted Shabbat services with great emotion and beauty. He is an icon of the cantorial world and superstar of the concert stage.

Chairman of this event was General Eugene Lebovitz (retired) who has remained active in quality-of-life projects for Israeli service members, with the group Agudat L'ma'an HaChayal. This organization is analogous to the American USO. In addition to building sports and recreational centers, it also is focused on matters of the spirit, donating synagogues, Torah scrolls, and other elements of a religious nature.

He dedicated a new Torah, ark and reading table to the hotel so that in the future Jews would have a place to pray with a Torah. The kosher food for Shabbat was magnificent and abundant.

Co-chairman was Fred Taucher. Born 1933 in Berlin, Germany, Taucher survived one of the most horrifying periods in human history largely through the protection of Gertrude Nölting, a family friend and high-ranking member of the Nazi Party and a personal friend of Hitler.

Taucher and his brother were the only members of his family to survive the Holocaust. His father was arrested and sent to Auschwitz, where he died a few days later. Shortly before the Soviets liberated Berlin in May 1945, Taucher's mother disappeared and was never heard from. He discussed his new book, *Saved by the Enemy*. Michael Levin, of blessed memory, was also honored and a moving documentary, *A Hero in Heaven*, was shown about his life. He grew up in Holland, Bucks County, Pa. Michael was raised in a Jewish home, attending Camp Ramah, Gratz College, USY High, and NATIV. Since he was a child he had a very strong love for his homeland, Israel. After Michael made aliyah (moved to Israel) three years ago, he was able to achieve his lifelong dream of joining the Israeli Defense Forces. He served in an elite paratrooper unit, #890, and made the ultimate sacrifice defending Israel during combat. He fell in battle in Lebanon on Aug. 1, 2006. He was 22 years old.

Josh Flaster spoke at the gathering. He graduated from Yale University in 2006 and made aliyah to Israel after graduation. He was accepted into the Sayeret (Special Forces) of Nahal Infantry as a lone soldier. Josh served with his unit in Nablus, Hebron, Lebanon, and the Golan Heights and was recognized for his leadership and skill in navigation. Commander Lebovitz was presented with a special plaque for his dedication and service to the lone soldiers of Israel.

Following his experiences as a lone soldier and eager to alleviate many of the hardships lone soldiers face, Josh, together with a group of former lone soldiers, founded the Lone Soldier Center in memory of Michael Levin.

Stephen "Pista" Nasser also spoke. He recovered from the ashes of the (see News, page NAT 15)

Travel

Jerusalem's Beit Agnon (Agnon House): A major landmark

By DR. SUSAN SMALL

The year 2010 marked the 40th anniversary of the death of one of the greatest Hebrew writers of all time, Shmuel Yoseph Agnon, the only Nobel Prize winner for Hebrew Literature. Some of Israel's most celebrated contemporary writers, such as A.B. Yehoshua, Aharon Appelfeld and Amos Oz, have paid tribute to Agnon and have spoken of the profound influence that his writings had on their own work.

In his numerous stories, and novels, Agnon explores Jewish tradition, Jewish thought, and the Jewish experience through the prism of the modern world. He presents the reader with many layered, and richly woven, narratives. The narratives appear to be very simple, and accessible, on the surface. But a careful reading of these texts leads the reader into a myriad of chambers, and treasures, of Jewish civilization.

A most erudite Torah scholar himself, Agnon was probably as learned as any of the great rabbis of his day. Yet he was equally well read in the modern literatures of his time.

S.Y. Agnon (whose name was Shmuel Yoseph Tchatchkes) was born in 1888, in the town of Buczacz, eastern Galicia, which was at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and is presently part of the Ukraine. The town was at one time regarded as the "Jerusalem of Galicia."

At the age of 20, Agnon left his family and made his way to Palestine, as an idealistic Zionist. He lived in Jaffa, part of the new Jewish city of Tel Aviv. Ultimately he settled in Jerusalem, where he spent the rest of his life. In 1912, at the suggestion of the Zionist leader, Dr. Arthur Ruppin, he traveled to Germany to broaden his education. He stayed there until 1924, living in many places, and building ties with scholars and writers.

It was in Germany that Agnon met Salman Schocken, the prosperous owner of major department stores, who became his patron throughout his life. In his works Agnon subtly captures the spirit of the times in Germany proper and among its Jewish population. He lived in Berlin until the outbreak of World War I, then in Leipzig, and after the war, in Munich and Bad Homburg.

In his story, *To This Day* (Ad Hena, in Hebrew), he gives a powerful portrait of the atmosphere of that wartime period in Germany. In its own way it is a most

compelling anti-war narrative. Translated into English as *To This Day*, this story appears in a volume, by the same name, published by Toby Press in 2008.

Agnon's classic novel, *Only Yesterday*, with its memorable hero, Yitzchak Kumer, follows the wanderings of a stray dog through the streets of Jerusalem's Mea Shearim neighborhood. The book deals with issues that are as central to that city's life today, as they were decades ago. The power of Agnon's prose is such that 40 years after his death, there are regular walking tours in Jerusalem that follow in the footsteps of that stray dog, with his novel, *Only Yesterday*, as their guide.

Among Agnon's most unforgettable heroes is the figure of Tehila, the remarkable kind-hearted, elderly Jewish mother, and beloved Jerusalem resident, whose dignified, pious bearing commands the respect of even the British soldiers, under whose mandate the country is run. Other magnificent works by Agnon include his masterpiece, *The Bridal Canopy*, *A Simple Story*, *A Guest for the Night*, and various novels, novellas and short stories.



Agnon's home in Jerusalem's Talpiot section, built in the Bauhaus style, has been open to the public since the writer's death, in 1970. Recently it was completely and beautifully renovated, except for the large study, which has been preserved exactly as he had left it.

Beit Agnon has become a cultural center in Jerusalem, where lectures and workshops are regularly given on aspects of Agnon's writings, and on other topics. There are all sorts of programs and readings of his works, and even programs for children focusing on his writings for children. There are also videos about his life, and dramatizations of some of his writings.

Tours of the House and tours of Jerusalem related to his works are also available. In addition Beit Agnon offers tours to different parts of Israel, weekend retreats, and trips to Eastern Europe in the footsteps of Agnon's writings, and the writings of other authors from that region.

In Israel there are many streets named after this great writer. Outside of Israel there is an Agnon Hebrew School in Cleveland, Ohio. A street in his hometown, Buczacz, now in the Ukraine, has been named after him. That town's museum has an exhibit about Agnon as well.

In Jerusalem, in the heart of the city, at 5 Solomon St., there now is a fine café/restaurant, cum bookstore, named after his masterpiece novel, *T'mol Shilshom*



As I Heard It

By MORTON GOLD

Too soon to perform Wagner's music in Israel

There has been and still is a controversy in Israel about the appropriateness of performing the orchestral music of Richard Wagner. We have a long memory as a people, however, I would observe that the less religiously oriented folk among us have a shorter memory than the more observant.

Many Jews still fast on Tisha B'Av recalling the destruction of both Temples 2,000 years ago. We also observe the martyrology readings on Yom Kippur, which recall various massacres during the Crusades, pogroms, as well as the horrors of the Shoah. The opening prayers of Yom Kippur eve ("Our vows shall not be vows, our oaths shall not be oaths") are based on the persecutions brought on by the Spanish Inquisition, which occurred more than 400 years ago.

However, one does not have to be super observant to notice that the beginning of the Civil War in this country was a non-event except in the Dixiecrat states, especially South Carolina. The Spanish-American War and World War I (the Great War or the War to End Wars) are all noted mostly in the history books as well as the occasion in the latter case for various sales.

Even World War II is something of a non-event, as veterans of that war are in increasingly short supply. The Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War are noted as something belonging to the past, as meaningful especially to our teenagers as the study of the wars between ancient Greece and Sparta.

Just this past Yom Kippur, when a male soloist was singing Kol Nidre, I noticed a girl of about five years of age who was dancing and trying everything she could to call attention to herself. It is likely that she had never heard a trained male voice, had never attended a religious service or had any idea what Yom Kippur

(*Only Yesterday*). The restaurant has bookshelves with Agnon's and other literary works, and it schedules evenings when there are literary readings from writings by different authors. Even the plates in that restaurant come with inscriptions of literary passages.

Beit Agnon now also has, periodically, English programs for adults and even for children, along with guided tours for groups and individuals. The house is located at 16 Klausner St., in Talpiot, the southern part of Jerusalem. ★

was all about. I maintain that she would have lots of company among our people, especially our youth.

Having stated these things, the Shoah is now 50 years old and has little relevance or meaning to many of us. Mr. Daniel Barenboim, the eminent conductor, believes that Wagner's music should be performed in Israel. His feeling is that it is great music, beautiful and powerful. As a musician (though hardly eminent), I would surely agree with him. However as a Jew, there are other factors that are worthy of consideration.

While I cannot get emotional about the various wars prior to World War II or various other conflicts in recorded history, I can and do get emotional about the various calamities suffered by *my* people through the ages. The important factor here is that I can and do identify myself as being part of the Jewish People. Thus what has happened to the Jewish People is something that I identify with. While we may have forgiven the perpetrators of these crimes (the Crusaders, the Spanish, the Catholic Church, the Germans and others who were willing accomplices, or the Arabs), we can and should never forget what they did to us.

Just as one can understand the significance of the Civil War to Southerners in the United States, one can sympathize and empathize with the few survivors of the Shoah living in Israel and elsewhere. For better or ill Hitler and the Nazis idealized and identified themselves with the music of Wagner who was an acknowledged hater of Jews. To make this a win/win situation for most everyone (one can never hope to please everyone) I would suggest that Wagner's music not be performed in Israel for 200 years. At the end of that time the survivors of the Shoah, their children and grandchildren would be dead. Except for the *uber* observant, the Shoah would have as much meaning then as the Inquisition has for us today.

Then, the time would be right for the resumption as well as rehabilitation of Wagner's music. Why? One has to separate the music from the politics of the person who created it. We observe Pearl Harbor Day, but there is now no shortage of products made in Japan in this country. That war happened 50 years ago and we need to get on with our lives. This is also true with music. It may be a long time, but the sensibilities of the victims and their families and descendants need to be respected. Even for a great composer who was an anti-Semite!

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. ★





Media Watch

BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

Holidays 2010

Community

NBC's *Community*, though often off-beat and jolly, is at times downright provocative, and not in a thoughtless way. The 2010 episode that served as harbinger of the "holiday season" reveals the strengths and weaknesses of this better-than-average ensemble comedy series about a study group for older-than-average students at a community college.

The episode is a spoof on film-making classes and also of those who would exploit religious themes for unabashed titillation. It begins with the class looking at a religion-bashing viral video and then being told by their indifferent instructor that 17 million people sought out the video that class evangelist Shirley (Yvette Nicole Brown) found "blasphemous." Yet she admits that by contrast there "were nine people at my church last night."

Fellow student Abed (Danny Pudi), who is Muslim, testifies that he has been reading the New Testament and finds Jesus cooler than just walking on water or telling people not to make abortions." This encourages Shirley to seek some funds from her church and to engage Abed to make a "cool and addictive" Jesus YouTube. Abed pledges to make "a Jesus movie for the post, post modern world."

Abed decides to make his Jesus film from the perspective of a film-maker exploring the life of Jesus – art imitating life so that life imitates art, or something along those lines, so that the film-maker "realizes that he is actually Jesus and being filmed by God's camera, forever and ever, like a mirror in a mirror."

The interesting premise here is that through his souped up, amateurish and crass project, Abed becomes a Jesus figure, both adored and vilified. He is a hero to most of his classmates, and a heretic to Shirley. She bails from his film, determined to produce her own. In response to her withdrawal, Abed declares rather self-righteously, "You're reacting [to me] the way the world did to Jesus."

The writer of the episode, Andrew Guest, makes it clear that Shirley is now regarded as the Pharisee or the opponent to Abed. She is told, "Why don't you go back to your Temple." Quoting First Corinthians, Abed sanctimoniously replies, "It's not blasphemous to say we are God, Shirley." Shirley feels that she must guard the integrity of the Bible against those who would glibly "Scripture" her, including Abed ("Did you just Scripture me, Muslim?") When the Jewish study group member, Annie (Alison Brie), chimes in that "Jesus was Jewish," Shirley chides, "Are you ever gonna let that go?"

If Shirley is a "Pharisee," then she is a Pharisee who has no patience for comments about Jesus from Jews, let alone from film-makers playing Jesus in the name of art. In Jesus-like fashion, Abed predicts that Shirley will shut down his film and become a Pharisee. Truth be told, Shirley does show signs of behaving toward Abed the way that the Pharisees, the angry and confrontational chorus in Christian scriptures, are depicted as behaving toward Jesus.

In several New Testament passages, "the Pharisees" are called "hypocrites and liars." Though Shirley is making a religious movie herself and though she was the first to enlist classmates to make a religious film to counteract the vulgar viral video, she makes an official complaint about a "religious film" being made on "state [or city?] property."

Is Shirley being depicted as a "hypocrite" and "Pharisee" as a spoof on the nasty handling of the Pharisees (the Hebrew Sages in the New Testament), or is the point being made that anyone who opposes an offbeat guru-type will elicit the same human traits of any opposition, for any reason?

Annie's "Jesus was Jewish" remark is the only "Jewish" feature while these rather heady questions are being raised. Yet there is a subplot playing itself out where Jews are more prominently, albeit unflatteringly, depicted. It seems that the senior most member of the group, Pierce, a relatively young retiree, is hanging out with some mischievous old retirees in the community who mock his association with younger people. Two nasty senior delinquents are Jews, and use vulgar Yiddish terms. The seniors bully one of the school deans and take his car for a joy ride, coercing Pierce to follow along. Here is another of TV's ugly depictions of Jewish seniors as part of an older generation who "don't give a damn."

As for the message of the episode itself, this interesting and even historic TV foray into Christian-Muslim relations (with Jews depicted as senile trouble-makers or purveyors of "Jesus was Jewish" slogans), the Muslim student, Abed, realizing that he is not the Jesus of film-making, offers a prayer: "Dear God, my movie is the worst piece of crap I've ever seen in my entire life. How could I have been so blind? It's a self-indulgent adolescent mess. I can barely sit through it. And after all this hype...the critics are going to crucify me. My career will be over before it begins. God, if you're out there, I know I don't deserve it, but I need your help. Please take this project away from me. Make it rain, send a meteor, anything, please, now."

Shirley overhears the prayer and smashes the camera with a bat. A grateful Abed tells Shirley that many people think that she is a villain, destined to destroy the genius. But Abed has saved and edited Shirley's hokey but heartfelt video. As a result of the unavailability of the "artistic" video and the blandness of the available one, the instructor is forced

to teach from books (a salvation for higher education?) and Abed and Shirley have their O. Henry moment during which they tell one another, "You humble me."

I suppose that the message here is that relationships between people of different backgrounds and religions should result in a certain humility which is always good for ensuring religious tolerance. (Indeed, in a subsequent, animated Christmas fantasy episode, Shirley describes herself as having become a "moderate Christian." Yet the implication here is that would-be Jesus figures bring about either blind adoration or understandable resentment, and that those who would destroy their work are not entirely wrong-headed. Another implication, new in the annals of treatment of Jews in popular media, is that Jews are too busy being either old souls or joy-riding old fogies to play the "Pharisee" to anyone, so Christians might as well do it. Such a scenario forestalls any effort to point out the unfair use of the term, "Pharisee," in Christian scriptures and in Western society. But doesn't that just bolster intolerance and misunderstanding, at the expense of Jews?

CSI: New York

CSI: New York offered strange holiday fare. It seems that on "Black Friday," the post-Thanksgiving shopping day, Mac (Gary Sinise) and Jo (Sela Ward) apprehend a pick pocket on time to witness the grand unveiling of the Manhattan store's window display. But something goes terribly wrong and a corpse is loaded up into the window.

The body turns out to belong to the store manager, one Richard Grossman. Right away we learn that Mr. Grossman, who "liked to crack a whip," was not very well-liked and was behind a "lot of belt-tightening" at the store.

Gradually, we learn that Grossman witnessed a female employee, Alena, a single mother of two, stealing from the store. She had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had decided to take tiny bits of money from the cash register, which she knew the store would write off, in order to provide "bonuses" for those whom the store was planning to fire. (It seems that she was not even stealing for her own children.) She had decided to stay on the job, despite her declining health, to help people in this way.

We learn, as well, that Grossman blackmailed her by demanding sex from her. She yielded to him, ostensibly in order to keep helping others, but thought that he was making a one-time demand. But he kept coming after her. When he attacked her physically right before the window was unveiled, she killed him in self-defense. We learn that there were many sexual harassment suits pending against Grossman. Apparently, Grossman was not only violent to women but to men, as well. Alena's former fiancé, a window designer, reports that Grossman was a "little jackass" who had a "Napoleon complex"

and pushed him when he did not like a "holiday display with no holiday."

Despite the obvious ethical problems with stealing, for whatever reason, Alena is affecting and beautiful and comes to represent the spirit of Christmas. Grossman, the guy with the Jewish name, comes across as evil personified with a *nebishy* twist. There was a time in TV drama when Jews were the generous ones. For whatever reason, writers Tray Callaway and Aaron Rahsaan Thomas have chosen to end that tradition.

Brothers and Sisters

If there were a hall of shame for the worst holiday-themed TV episodes however, we would have to nominate the last hour in 2010 of *Brothers and Sisters*, the continuing saga of a not very likeable and not very admirable family who can be counted upon to make tasteless and vulgar choices.

In this episode, written by Stephen Tolkin and Geoffrey Nauffts, the grown (but consistently immature) siblings disagree so sharply on Christmas décor that they engage in competing Christmas preparations. Their mother Nora (Sally Field) had chosen Christmas as a time to escape family squabbles and holiday stresses, and to seek a peaceful respite in a warm climate with her boyfriend. But a "Christmas Carol" type dream (how original) prods her to act on her guilt feelings and to return home on time to save the holiday.

Somehow, the holiday turns out to be beautiful even though the behavior of all the children before the holiday, independent of their mother's presence or absence, has not been impressive. Even the revered Uncle Saul (Ron Rifkin), feels foolish for his sexual indiscretions which have resulted in AIDs.

I watched the episode because in the show's first season, the holiday episode was devoted to the search for Jewish roots by a grandchild. It seems that Grandma Nora, like her brother, Saul, is Jewish, and therefore the four children are Jewish and some of the grandchildren. Just when I was feeling relieved that the "Jewish" aspect had been forgotten, the last few minutes turned to "Jewish blood."

At the most inopportune moment for one daughter and her boyfriend, Uncle Saul decides to pipe up: "Amidst all the abundance of holly and ivy I just wanted to remind my beloved family of our Jewish blood that flows through all our veins. I know that Chanukah is past and we've lit all our candles. I just wanted to share a little blessing that is offered in celebration of new beginnings."

Uncle Saul then proceeds to recite the *Shehechyanu* prayer in thanks to God for enabling us to live and to reach a special occasion. That chanting serves as a mantra to affirm whatever choices the characters have made and to confirm their Christmas spirit.

This vulgarity has taught me to appreciate traditional concern that the

(see Gertel, page NAT 15)

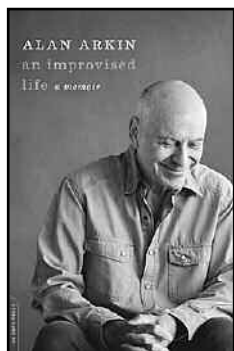
Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

Importance of spontaneity and ability to improvise

An Improvised Life. By Alan Arkin. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2011. 224 Pages. \$16.95.

Actor, director, author, musician, and workshop director, Alan Arkin has appeared in more than 80 films. He received several Academy Award nominations before winning the Oscar in 2007 as Best Actor in a Supporting Role for his portrayal of Grandfather Edwin in *Little Miss Sunshine*. Arkin made an outstanding



screen debut in 1966 as a Russian naval lieutenant in *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*. He acted on and off-Broadway, earning the Tony Award for his role in *Enter Laughing*.

Now 76 years old, Arkin has written this insightful autobiography that recounts some elements of his career while emphasizing the lessons he has learned about living a full life. Born in Brooklyn in 1934 to Jewish parents who de-emphasized any religious identification, Arkin fails to mention anything about being a Jew in his book. Early in his career, when he realized that he "had no life outside the theater," he turned for help to psychoanalysis rather than to religion. After five years, he felt that he had achieved no inner peace and so he started reading Eastern philosophy and began to meditate. A small reflection of Arkin's lack of Jewish identification is his statement that "For me, going to Carnegie Hall had always been going to church."

When he was five years old, Arkin announced to his father that he was going to be an actor. When he was eleven, his family moved to California where he took acting classes in high school and was cast in all the school plays. He also studied guitar and had acting lessons with a private instructor. In 1954, Arkin enrolled in Bennington College which was then an all-female school but which kept four men on the campus to act in plays. After two years, his poor academic record and his marriage to a music and dance student led him to leave Bennington and to move from Vermont to New York. He joined a group of folk singers and supported his pregnant wife and himself by touring through the United States, Canada, and Europe. He returned to New York where he had a role in an off-Broadway play;

then moved briefly to St. Louis to join an improvisational group; went back to New York where his wife had their second child and then left him because of his uncertain career. He finally achieved success in Second City, "a hole-in-the-wall theater" in Chicago that attained national attention. After a year, Second City established a company in New York where Arkin performed before becoming the lead actor in *Enter Laughing*. At last, he realized his dream of becoming an actor. He began to make movies and worked as a director, always trying to improve his performance and to understand what made for achievement as an actor.

Now married for the third time and living in New Mexico, Arkin shares with his readers the conviction he has acquired about the importance of spontaneity and the ability to improvise. Since his talent has been so richly demonstrated through the years, who can argue with his formulation of the key to success?

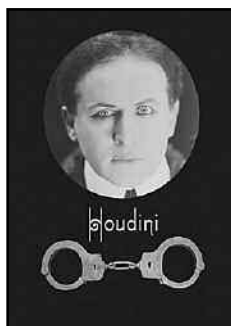
Handcuffs, chains, shackles, and a strait-jacket

Houdini. By Brooke Kamin Rapaport. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. 262 Pages. \$39.95. New York: Jewish Museum.

From Oct. 29, 2010 to March 27, 2011, the Jewish Museum is displaying an exhibition on the art and magic of Harry Houdini. It is scheduled to move to the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles on April 28, 2011; then to the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco and finally, to the Madison, Wisc., Museum of Contemporary Art. This outstanding book, published jointly by the Yale University Press and the Jewish Museum, is the guide to the exhibition.

Beyond serving as a handbook that reproduces many of the items on display, the book includes essays by the show's curator, Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Alan Brinkley, history professor at Columbia University, Hasia R. Diner, professor of American Jewish history at New York University, and Kenneth Silverman, professor emeritus of English at New York University. These essays examine Houdini's life as an immigrant to the United States; his Jewish identity; and the role of his wife as his assistant and, after his death, as "the custodian of his memory."

Houdini, magician and death-defying escape artist, was born in Budapest in 1874 as Ehrich Weiss. His father moved to Appleton, Wisc., in 1876 where he became the rabbi of a small congregation and where his family joined him in 1878.



When his job ended, he moved the family to Milwaukee and then to New York, unable to find another position. Responsibility for supporting the family fell to Ehrich and his siblings. He became an entertainer, changed his name to Houdini, and became enormously successful with his dazzling magic acts and his breathtaking escapes. His celebrity and fame were sources of inspiration to many American Jews, although Houdini married a Catholic woman and celebrated Christmas with her.

In 1920, Houdini began a campaign against Spiritualism, the false belief that spirits of dead individuals could be contacted through mediums. He exposed the tricks used by mediums and had a well-known run-in with Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes and believer in Spiritualism. Houdini unmasked as fake the supposed spirit message from Houdini's mother that was produced by Doyle's wife.

Houdini had literary interests that led him to become a noted book collector. He amassed two impressive collections, one dealing with magic and the other with theater. He accumulated so much material that he employed a full-time librarian to organize the books, programs, and other items that he had acquired.

Perhaps best known for his hair-raising escapes, Houdini used handcuffs, chains, shackles, and a strait-jacket, breaking free even though he was placed in a trunk, a crate in the water, and a milk can. These objects are all included in the exhibition, along with posters, photos, diaries, prints, cartoons, drawings, newspaper clippings, and paintings. The guide also has a useful chronology and interviews with such people as E.L. Doctorow, whose novel, *Ragtime*, features sections portraying Houdini. Other interviews are with contemporary artists who were influenced by Houdini. It should be noted that despite all this material in the exhibition and the guide, nowhere is to be found any explanation as to how Houdini performed his tricks.

Whether or not you are able to see the exhibition, this well-illustrated book stands on its own as a full introduction to the life of Houdini. It celebrates his life which continues to hold a respected place among Jewish celebrities.

Argument between science and religion

The Language God Talks. By Herman Wouk. New York: Little, Brown, 2010. 183. Pages. \$23.99.

Herman Wouk, a prolific novelist and playwright, is 95 years old and is said to be writing another book! His first book, *Aurora Dawn*, appeared in 1947, followed by *The Caine Mutiny* in 1951 which won the Pulitzer Prize and became a successful play and movie. *Marjorie Morningstar* in 1955 and Wouk's fictional biography of Thomas

Wolfe as *Youngblood Hawke*, were among the works that came next. Leading candidates for being considered Wouk's best known books are his two extensively researched accounts of World War II, *The Winds of War* (1971) and *War and Remembrance* (1978), which were made into a popular TV miniseries.

Wouk adopted a traditional Jewish way of life in his mid-20s and remains an observant Jew. His first account of this decision and his beliefs are set forth in his 1959 book, *This Is My God*. His new book, *The Language God Talks*, which is largely autobiographical, continues to discuss Wouk's piety, focusing on the relationship between science and religion. He develops this theme by describing his talks with scientists, including Nobel Laureate Richard Feynman, an American theoretical physicist who worked on the atom bomb at Los Alamos. Others included Murray Gell-Mann and Steven Weinberg who, along with Feynman, were non-observant Jews. Wouk sought these people out as part of his preparation for writing his World War II novels.

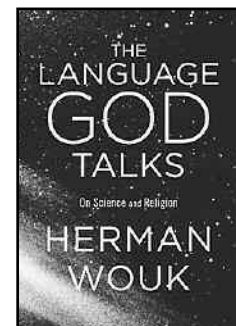
Wouk discusses his interactions with each of the scientists but concentrates on Feynman with whom he had three sets of discussions as well as an imaginary one. The first time they met, Feynman told Wouk that full understanding necessitated his learning calculus which he described as *The Language God Talks*.

Wouk's persistence in exploring the relationship between science and religion led, among other things to his being present at the launch of Apollo 11 in 1969 when it lifted off for the moon. He later tried unsuccessfully to urge Neil Armstrong to write about this exploit. Wouk describes additional space travel experiences and the work on ever larger telescopes to improve our understanding of astronomy.

The book meanders on to mention *Tevya the Dairyman* and *The Analects of Confucius* which were both important to him. He explores several scientific discoveries, leaping to comments on Huckleberry Finn, his trips to China, Israel, and Germany. Sometimes, his rambling wanderings are difficult to follow.

Finally, Wouk examines his imaginary fourth conversation with Richard Feynman which takes place in Georgetown. They debate science and religion, citing various authorities but failing to persuade each other. The closest they come to agreement is when Wouk quotes Steven Weinberg, one of the scientists he interviewed, also a Nobel Laureate, who wrote, "It's not that science makes it impossible for intelligent people to be

(see Teicher, page NAT 15)





My Kosher Kitchen

By SYBIL KAPLAN

Dates for Tu B'Shevat

Dora's Sugar Free Date Nut Cookies

Dora was a good friend from Greater Kansas City, a member of my synagogue, and active in Hadassah. Some health problems motivated her to create these cookies.

- 3 eggs
- 8 ounces chopped dates
- 8 ounces chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a cookie sheet. Beat eggs in a bowl. Add dates and nuts. Drop by spoon onto a greased cookie sheet. Bake in oven 10–12 minutes. Variation: Add 1/4 to 1/2 cup coconut

Date Bars

- 1 cup butter or margarine
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup diced dates

Preheat oven to 350°F. Cream butter or margarine and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla. Add flour and blend into a sticky dough. Add dates and mix. Spread in cookie sheet. Bake in oven 20–25 minutes. Cool.

Optional icing

- 1/2 cup chocolate
- 1/2 cup chocolate chops
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts

Melt chocolate and chocolate chips. Spread over baked date mixture. Sprinkle on nuts. Cut into bars.

Date Nut Bread (2 loaves)

- 1/4 cup butter or margarine
- 1 cup brown sugar or
- 2/3 cup white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 4 cups flour
- 4 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup chopped dates
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease two loaf pans. Cream butter or margarine and sugar. Add eggs. Add flour, baking powder, baking soda, dates and nuts and blend. Spread into greased loaf pans. Bake in oven 40–45 minutes.



Focus II

By RABBI SHEA HECHT

Busy parents, busy kids

Parents nowadays are very busy people – and so are their children, even the babies.

Most are working, some even have two jobs, and everyone has a cell phone. I can't think of anyone who doesn't know how to text a message to a friend, either. It seems the only thing left is to try and give birth by fax – or through Skype.

Hi-tech telephony is such a part of everyday life that the government passed laws to stop multi-tasking drivers from talking and texting while driving. No one has thought of applying the same legislation to baby carriages yet – but maybe we should take a second look.

Have you ever walked in a busy downtown area about 25 minutes before the start of standard office time? Try it.

Last week I saw the most amazing sight: two mothers in business suits pushing three-wheeled baby carriages, both on cell phones and neither one looking at either child. One of the babies was sleeping, but the other was a toddler who was trying to catch his mother's attention. She was too busy, however, so he decided to take matters into his own hands, and simply climbed out of the stroller as she reached the corner.

When the walk light changed, Mom kept going, and Junior stayed behind – headed back, in fact, to see a toy in a display window that had caught his eye a few stores back. A passerby grabbed him, calling to his mother.

Needless to say, she was red-faced with embarrassment and not a little shocked. Her friend, meanwhile, hurried

ahead to get to the daycare center. This is a little out of the ordinary, I know, and I couldn't believe my eyes as I watched. But happen it did. But it seems to me that while technology is being used to keep us "all connected," it is also driving us further apart.

Parents and kids spend more time on computers and phones, and watching movies and television, than they spend on direct interaction with each other. Cell phones are especially convenient and even essential as a safety measure in a world where one must be able to reach a parent in an emergency. But there is still the issue of when it makes sense to answer the call, and when it makes sense to hold the conversation for later.

Another "modern improvement" that has led to the disconnect is the forward-facing design of baby strollers, intended to give the child a real-time, entertaining view of the world around him. It does indeed keep Junior busy and happy, but disrupts the crucial bonding process that should be taking place between parent and child – one that was a "given" just a generation ago.

What I'm saying is this: Cell phones and baby carriages, like anything else, are tools intended to improve our daily quality of life, helping us connect with each other. But when used improperly, those same items can drive families apart.

Beware the day when the disconnect goes two ways, and you some day find yourself saying to your kid, "Hey, how come you never talk to me anymore?"

Rabbi Hecht serves as chairman of the board at the National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, where he has continued the tradition of social services management and outreach that began with his father, the late Rabbi Jacob J. Hecht. He is dean of Hadar Hatorah School for College Youth and a lecturer at the Ivy League Torah Study Program. He is a cofounder of the Ari Program, an innovative school for at-risk kids. He can be reached at 718-735-0200 or at rabbishea@aol.com. ★

RIBNER

(continued from page NAT 5)

food, but we ingest all kinds of food. What we do for recreation, the movies, the television, the books, the music, the friends, the work we do, everything we take into ourselves is food and has the ability to strengthen or weaken us. This month asks us to become conscious of what we take within us and seek to nurture ourselves on all levels.

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

COVER

(continued from page NAT 2)

understanding of God's will. The *Etz Chaim* quote (Proverbs 3:18, 17), in the upper part of the design, refers to the Torah as being the "Tree of Life." By following its instructions, the Torah will provide the guidance necessary for a person to find their place as a worthwhile part of society.

In the lower part of the picture, the menorah tree represents the essence of life spirits that have joined with other parts of nature to find their place as part of the family tree of all creation. There they are seen to be clear shining reflections of the light of God's love.

Since the Torah is known to have many levels and hidden meanings, it may be viewed from many perspectives. As such, this is how it is represented, with a second hidden Torah woven into the drawing. While each corner of the design contains one the Torah's handles, in the bottom two corners, the "leaf hands," seen upholding the Torah scrolls, truly depict it as *Etz Chaim*, a "Tree of Life."

One of the true cravings of the soul is for an understanding of life beyond our current existence. The idea of an endless soul, with a destiny determined by how we choose to live our lives in this world, has become an accepted part of our Jewish heritage. In Proverbs we are told that "the spirit of man [and woman] is the lamp of the Lord." The essence of these same qualities is portrayed symbolically, just above the Torah scroll, by the depiction of the "eternal flame."

According to the Talmud, the world exists on three things, *Emet* (truth), *Din* (justice) and *Shalom* (peace). The word *emet* is made up of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*, the middle letter, *mem*, and the last letter, *tav*, indicating that all parts are needed for the whole, for completion. In the picture, each of these qualities are depicted both through the large Hebrew worlds in the lower part of the composition and through symbolic representations. Together they are shown to represent these same ideals of truth, justice and peace.

With this knowledge, one can advance the next level and develop a greater appreciation for life and a better understanding of the source of true peace. For *Emet* is also an acrostic of *Elokim, Melek, Talmid*, "God is the eternal ruler (king)." God was, God is, and God will always be.

May God's face turn to you, Vayasame Lachol Shalom, and give you peace.

Special note: This picture is based on a stained glass window designed by the artist, Bruce David. The stained glass window is 8 feet tall and 6.5 feet wide, and resides in Louisville, Ky., at the Keneseth Israel Synagogue. It was made using 100% full antique hand blown glass from Europe. ★

OBITUARIES

(continued from page NAT 3)

Jewish Education courses in Jewish history, literature and philosophy, as well as courses in the Tanach and Talmud at various synagogues in the Dade County area. His writings have been published in well known newspapers and magazines including *The National Jewish Post & Opinion*. He has given lectures on a wide variety of Jewish topics all over South Florida.

He is survived by his wife of 24 years, Bernice, children Jeffrey (Debbie) Sandler, daughter Ellen (Robert) Slane of Hollywood, Florida, grandchildren Julian (Maren) Slane, Amber (Chuck) Wadey and Eric Slane, 4 great grandchildren, Preston Slane, Hansen Slane, Lillian Slane, and Aurora Wadey. He is also survived by step children Janet Bearden, Barbara LaVoy, Ed Anapol and Howard Anapol, and grandchildren Erin Anapol, Jeremy Anapol, and Jocelyn and Gabe Ramos. ★

GERTEL

(continued from page NAT 12)

Shehechyanu prayer be limited to very specific occasions. Also, it is sobering to consider how racist or at least hematological references to "blood...in our veins" sound when torn out of authentic moral and spiritual traditions and contexts.

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

TEICHER

(continued from page NAT 13)

religious – science makes it possible for them not to be religious."

The imaginary conversation comes to a conclusion when Wouk tells Feynman that a Talmudic debate may end when both sides agree to disagree by using the aramaic word, "TEIKU," which means "The question stands! Draw, tie, no decision." As they part, they say to each other, "TEIKU." Thus, although Wouk remains a devout Jew, studying Talmud each morning, he acknowledges that the argument between science and religion may well be a stand-off.

Using his superb literary skills, gathered through a long life of auspicious writing, Herman Wouk has made a significant contribution with his newest book.

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. ★

NEWS

(continued from page NAT 10)

Holocaust, at age 13, the only survivor from a family of 21. He is an example of confidence, determination and the power of positive thinking. Stephen wrote a diary in the Auschwitz and Muhldorf concentration camps right under the noses of the Nazis. The diary became the book, *My Brother's Voice*.

Also speaking was Stephen Schwartz, international director of resource development at the Herzog Hospital. Attending were Holocaust survivors and their families from throughout the world.

The Shoah will be forgotten as an event in which six million Jews were murdered unless we develop methods to keep Holocaust memory alive. Rabbi Rosenberg does not mean only more films, interviews, or museums. These are significant in the teaching of the Holocaust, however Jews need to give passion to the third and fourth generation through the development of prayers, an expanded Holocaust Hagaddah, a Holocaust prayer book, the insertion of prayers from the Rabbinical Assembly Holocaust Megillah, and so forth. Rabbi Rosenberg has developed a Holocaust Hagaddah website which soon will be announced. The Jewish people need to consider expanding Tisha B'Av prayers to include major emphases on the Holocaust. The same holds true for the Machzor on Yom Kippur. Holocaust memory is fading and the revisionists wait at the door.

Seeking written contributions for a Holocaust siddur

Rabbi Dr. Bernhard Rosenberg is creating a Holocaust siddur. In addition to the Mincha/Maariv prayers, programming materials, essays from teenagers, and his personal essays on the Holocaust, he is seeking essays that might be appropriate. The theme is "Remembering the Holocaust: Why this is important to me." What must we do to preserve Holocaust memory? Any original poems, essays, art work, and such, which might be used for prayer will be considered. Materials from Holocaust survivors and the second, third, and fourth generation, and rabbis and Jewish educators and Holocaust scholars are especially sought. All material will be considered as he is editing and compiling the siddur himself. There will be no monetary compensation for material submitted, and it is understood that you give him permission to use the material. Simply email Chaimdov@aol.com. Time is running out and we must create vehicles to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

Submitted by Rabbi Dr. Bernhard Rosenberg. ★

Four Firsts – Women Rabbis

BY SANDY EISENBERG SASSO



Trailblazers recall challenges, look forward with hope. (see photo on p. NAT 16)

A few weeks ago I had the honor of participating in a celebration of the first women ordained as rabbis in the United States by each of the four denominations of Judaism. In 1972, Sally Preisand became the first woman rabbi in Reform Judaism. In 1974, I was ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Ten years later, the Conservative movement ordained Amy Eilberg. Just this past year, Sarah Hurwitz was given the title, rabba, in a private ordination within open Orthodoxy.

With some 500 people in attendance, we told our stories about the challenges and experiences we encountered along the way. Each of us faced opposition. We remembered those who were certain we would change our minds and those who hoped that we would fail. That evening it was evident that the naysayers were wrong.

Within four decades women rabbis have changed the Jewish landscape even as women in other religious communities have influenced their own traditions. Women's voices and insights have transformed liturgical and theological language, life cycle ceremonies, holy day celebrations, leadership styles and ways of understanding sacred text. Women's names, voices and stories are now part of our sacred narratives.

When I started rabbinical seminary in 1969, there were no other women rabbis. There are now 815! Classes in the Reform, Conservative Reconstructionist and non-denominational seminaries are now 50% female.

When I began my studies I considered writing a dissertation on women and Judaism. I was discouraged from doing so and told "to write about something important." Now there are hundreds of scholarly articles and more books than can fit in my library on the subject.

On that evening of celebration we all felt that something extraordinary had occurred. People of different ages, from different perspectives, theologies and ideologies, male and female, had come together, not to debate one another, but to find strength in what we could accomplish together. Each of the four of us on the panel knew what it was like to be a lone voice. We did not have to agree with one another in order to be there for each other.

But even as we rejoiced over the strides that had been made, we looked to the challenges still ahead. We have just entered a new year – 2011. A decade into the 21st century, women still earn 73 cents on a man's dollar; 70% of the world's impoverished population are women and children; violence against

women is pervasive; reproductive rights are being threatened. The United States has one of the world's worst parental leave policies and over 90% of the CEOs and top wage earners are male. These are not only women's issues but issues of universal human concern.

To young women today who are just beginning to decide on their careers, whatever they might be, I say:

Don't let anyone tell you what you can't do or what you must do because you are a woman. Find your passion and follow it. You can help change the world. Don't let your career keep you from making loving commitments, from family and friendships, or from cultivating interests outside your chosen field. Don't let criticism paralyze you or praise seduce you. There are those who will criticize you without reason and praise you without merit. Listen to others, but you will know in your heart when you have fallen short and when you have succeeded.

You are embarking on an incredible journey. Remember those who made the road a bit easier to travel and be among those who help others to forge new paths.

There is still much work to be done. Go forth and be a blessing.

Rabbi Sasso and her husband Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso are the first rabbinic couple and have been senior rabbis of Congregation Beth-El Zedek in Indianapolis for more than 30 years.

(This article is reprinted from The Indianapolis Star, Jan. 4, 2011.) ★

MEDAD

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his students insisted on volunteering, too. The nurses were amazed when this young man with a pony tail showed up and then admitted that he had never ever held a baby before and really hadn't the vaguest idea what to do. They taught him.

Why am I suddenly writing this? That's because when I was waiting for tonight's bus, I saw someone whose baby has very recently been hospitalized in serious condition. I went over to speak to her, and all the old memories came flooding out as if it had just happened last week, or even yesterday. I was shaking and close to tears even worse than all those years ago. Yes, that, too is what a mother does...

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



Musings from Shiloh

BY BATYA MEDAD

Yes, thanking G-d for Mud!

We've been so desperate for rain that when I spied the shimmering mud on Monday, I had to shoot it and show you!



Diamonds, gold, silver...? There's nothing more precious and valuable than rain, because rain brings water and there's no life, not people, plants, or animals without water. You can't live on gold and diamonds, but even drinking water only will keep you alive for a long time. Without water we won't have food.

And without rain, it's much too easy for fires to burn out of control, like Israel just experienced in the north, the Carmel fires. So, we must pray for rain and we must do what G-d tells us, because He controls the rain.

Just a drop in the bucket

According to the predictions, this rain is not to last very long. We need 20 hours of rain each day for the next few months. There should be four hours of sunshine so the water will have a chance to seep where it's supposed to seep: deep, deep down in the ground. This drought is far from over.

Keep praying. Pray for rain and for wisdom for us and our politicians in government. We're all in this together.

All it took was a drop of rain for...

... the electricity to poof disappear.



Yes, we're being blessed by rain, and after less than an hour, by my reckoning, electricity was returned. And I'm not complaining, just thanking G-d for His mercy. This is what winter is supposed to look like. G-d willing, in a week or so, there will be lots of green and more rain and mud.

Fun gift from the museum

There's nothing more fun than doing – like in doing arts & crafts.



When my kids were little, they didn't have tons of toys, but there were always simple crafts supplies, like paper, crayons, paste, scissors and such. Over a year ago, when I was in New York, I found modern (plastic rather than metal) pot-holder weaving kits so similar to the ones I had as a kid and my kids received as gifts. So, of course I bought them for my granddaughters. The big girls really enjoy doing them, designing patterns and then weaving.

Here they're busy doing mosaics, pasting little squares onto small jugs.

No computer game gives the same total brain, body workout as these arts & crafts projects.

Some thoughts...

I've been in Israel 40 years, almost exactly (if you count the months) two-thirds of my life, but I haven't been able to totally delete my earliest years. Because of this my perspective isn't what you'd generally expect from the way I dress. We're judged by our "uniforms." Yes, we're all in uniforms, because clothing is like publicizing a membership card. Of course, we can change our clothes and change our image, impression on others.

Chazal, our Sages, say that in Biblical times, when the single girls danced in the Valley of Shiloh, they exchanged clothes, so that they didn't wear their own white dresses. A rich girl could be in a simple, inexpensive dress while the poverty-stricken girl could be in the dress of a wealthy girl. Our clothing is external, superficial.

Because of this, we all must be so careful how we speak to others, because we may accidentally say something offensive. One of my pet peeves is when someone giving a *shiur* Torah Class prefaces something by saying:

"Kimo shekulanu lamadnu b'gan..." "Just like we all learned in nursery school..."

Well, I didn't go to gan, nursery school, and if I had I wouldn't have learned any Torah stories there. Though born Jewish and raised in Jewish neighborhoods, Torah wasn't on the menu, not in the curriculum.

The first time I heard that expression, it was from a distinguished guest rabbi. I sat fuming, because I felt totally left-out, rejected. By his saying those words he excluded me from the group. I was dressed like the other women and understand

enough Hebrew to attend Hebrew-language *shiurim*, so he simplistically took for granted that we in the audience were "all the same."

I didn't feel right getting up and walking out, nor did I think it good form to interrupt him and tell him how he had insulted me. About a year or so after that experience, one of my neighbors gave a class to us and used the expression. Knowing that he would never intentionally or unintentionally hurt me, I politely interrupted him and told him how I felt. I also mentioned that I wasn't the only one in the group who hadn't gone to gan. Some of the women were from even less Jewish backgrounds and even converted to Judaism. You can't tell by looking at us. Since then, he is much more sensitive to the issue.

Should I have spoken to that guest-rabbi? I'll always wonder.

B"H, A muddy Rosh Chodesh Tevet, G-d willing a green and muddy-wet Rosh Chodesh Shevat

There were more women praying yesterday morning at Tel Shiloh than you can see in the pictures. Tel Shiloh is enormous; it's not claustrophobic like *Kever Rachel*. You can have hundreds,



thousands of people and still have room and not feel crowded. The holiness is all around, not concentrated on a stone "coffin" and dead body. So there's no pushing and fighting. This is very Chana, not Rachel. The Biblical Rachel is described as physically beautiful, as are her descendants, Joseph and King Saul. There is no physical description of Chana. She is just a woman who knows how to communicate with G-d.

That's what a mother does

I've been working hard to get a good "working relationship" trust between me and the kid I tutor. Today during the "small talk" part of the lesson, I told him how I go to watch my son play tackle football, even though I don't enjoy the game and feel sick everytime I see him in one of those pile-ups or whatever they're called.

"That's what a mother does." I told him. "Would your mother go to see you play a sport she didn't like, just because you're playing?"

"Yes," he replied.

Being a mother sometimes is a lot tougher than watching your baby play tackle football. When that same football player was two weeks old he had a very serious infection, osteomyelitis. To be cured, he had to get IV antibiotics for six weeks, so we (my baby and I) "moved into" Shaare Tzedek Hospital for that time. All sorts of people helped out, taking care of my other kids and also watching him so I could get home daily for a few hours. I don't even know most of them, since a neighbor did all the organizing and I had made one condition: "Nobody from Shiloh should go to the hospital to be with him. There's enough to do at home. It's bad enough that I have to be away."

A good friend, from Jerusalem, took a double shift every week. A neighbor, who then taught in Pardes, told them the story of the great *chessed* happening. One of

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Four Firsts – Women Rabbis: Left to right: Reform Rabbi Sally Priesand, Synagogue Council of Massachusetts (SCM) President Richard Shulman, Reconstructionist Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, Director of Women's Learning Institute Rabbi Marilyn Lipman, SCM Executive Director Alan Teperow, Open Orthodox Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Conservative Rabbi Amy Eilberg. (See story on page NAT 15.)