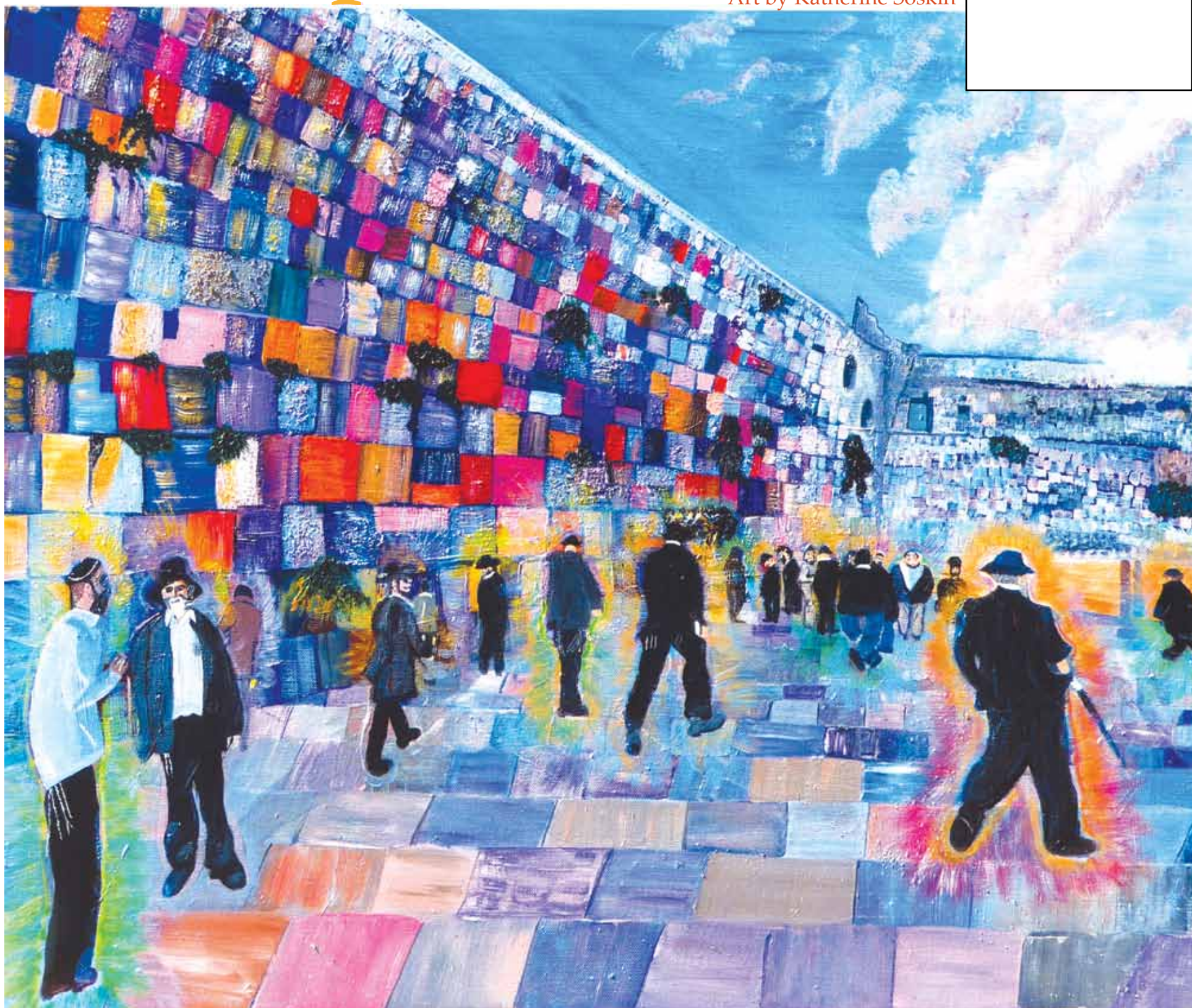


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# Men's Spirit at the Wall

Art by Katherine Soskin





# Editorial

One of the perks of my job is receiving new books for review, sometimes arriving before they become available to the public. Many come by mail looking enticing, but I could not possibly read them all.

Recently one caught my attention with the title, *Hope Will Find You: My Search for the Wisdom to Stop Waiting and Start Living*. I couldn't ignore it, and once I started reading, I couldn't put it down. It's easy to read and the story moves at a fast pace. The author, Naomi Levy, takes complicated biblical texts and also simple everyday experiences and turns them into meaningful teachings that are easy to understand.

Levy was a rabbinical student in the first class that allowed women to become Conservative rabbis. The book is about how she, her husband and their older son cope with an enormous challenge of raising a daughter who is disabled. The worst part is her doctors weren't sure whether or not what she had was degenerative and eventually fatal.

One of the key teachings of the book is that while most people have a particular goal for themselves and that is good, what happens is they put their lives on hold waiting until that goal is reached before they allow themselves to live fully.

Levy writes that as a rabbi, the most common human condition she helped to guide people through is "an overwhelming feeling that life hasn't yet begun." People would say to her, *My life will begin when ... I lose weight, when I fall in love, when I get a job, when I get married, when I have a baby, when I buy a home, when I get divorced, when I quit my job...* and so forth.

In the book, Levy describes how she also does this while waiting to see if her daughter will get better, but it is her daughter who makes her realize that she doesn't need to wait, that hope will find her. And it does.

Levy writes, *...when you open yourself to it, hope is everywhere.... Once I started believing it, I started seeing it. Hope comes in the form of helping hands. It comes when someone offers the words you need to hear just at the moment when you need to hear them most. Hope arrives in all sorts of disguises.*

One of my favorite scenes in the movie *Eat Pray Love* is a perfect example of the exact opposite of waiting to live fully. This movie is based on a true story about a woman from New York, Elizabeth (Liz) Gilbert. Julia Roberts plays the lead role of this woman who had divorced her husband but jumps right into another unhappy relationship.

Never having lived alone, she decides she needs some time to herself. She takes a year off dividing her time traveling to Italy for the delectable cuisine, India for prayer/meditation, and finally to Bali, where she finds love.

In the prelude to the scene Liz is spending the day in Naples with a

female friend whom she met in Rome. The two travel there to eat at a restaurant that serves the most incredible tasting pizza.

When their pizza finally arrives, Liz notices her friend hardly touches hers. When Liz asked her why, her friend said she was afraid she would put on weight and her boy friend would not be attracted to her anymore. Liz persuades her she can enjoy life by eating the pizza, and afterward they will go buy some bigger fitting jeans.

As they were purchasing the jeans, Liz admires a beautiful negligee she sees on a mannequin next to the cash register. Her friend asks her if she is going to buy it. Liz who is single at the time replies, "For whom?"

They leave the store, return to Rome and go their separate ways. Just before Liz reaches her apartment, she sees another gorgeous negligee on a mannequin in a store window.

In the next scene, Liz is in her apartment wearing that negligee from the store window, cooking herself a gourmet meal. She then sits down on her living room floor and slowly savors every bite. She obviously decided not to wait until she has a man for whom she will look attractive and for whom she can prepare and present a colorful and delicious meal.

My favorite scene from the book takes place one morning when Levy's daughter, Noa, wakes up with a terrible bout of ataxia, an inability to keep her balance. It was always worse in the morning, but this time it was so bad Levy had to hold her up so she could eat her breakfast without falling over. Levy suggests that she stay home from school that day.

It was the second week of second grade, and her daughter wouldn't hear of it. Noa said, "If I pray for a while, I'll be okay."

Levy writes, *She picked herself up, held on to the wall, made her way to her room, stood before the mirror, and started singing her morning prayers in Hebrew. She sang with great joy and purity. I was watching from a distance, not wanting to disturb her or make her feel self-conscious. A serenity started to flow through her body. I could see it. Her mood changed, her posture changed, her expression changed. When she was done singing, she walked straight up to me with strength and steadiness and said, "I'm ready for school now." And she was.*

What impressed and inspired me about this scene is that it demonstrates how simple, easy steps can make a big difference. This action taken by Noa could be done by anyone with a voice, even someone who cannot carry a tune or someone flat on their back. If one does not know Hebrew or the specific prayers, one can sing directly to God in their own words.

Several years ago, I wrote about a similar experience I had when I was feeling pretty sick, but after singing Shabbat Zimerot (usually joyous songs praising

## About the Cover

"Men's Spirit at the Wall," one of a two-part series, was conceived after Katherine Soskin had been to Israel for the second time. She was walking in the shuk and saw a soft small pastel of the Wall, the only Wall she had seen with any color. That became her springboard from soft pastel to a multi-media "Wall," embodying thousands of years of people's souls and spirits.

People have come to the Wall with their prayers, hopes, fears, needs and strengths. The Wall is alive with their energy and auras. Katherine has created such a wall. Almost moving, the men's side, illuminated by the radiance of the



Katherine Soskin

God) for about 45 minutes nonstop, whatever I had was gone.

I will leave you with a prayer by Levy from the preface of the book.

Jennie Cohen, October 13, 2010. ☆

### A Blessing

May God bless you and protect you.  
May God bless you with wisdom and vision.

May you dream great dreams and may you see them come true.

May you be blessed with courage and the power to be bold.

May you be blessed with kindness, compassion, and hope.

May you be blessed with love, and a loving resilient heart.

May your smile be contagious and your joy outrageous. May you shine and light up the world.

Amen.

sun, casts this light across to the woman's side of the Wall. The light from the men's own energy and aura combines with the light of the sun.

A second piece called "Woman's Soul Rising" (not shown), though showing the dividing wall allowing the sun's illumination to peek under the wall and creep through the slats, is, nevertheless, mostly in the dark. Since Orthodox Judaism is very patriarchal, these two paintings depict the men but not the women in the light; however, on closer examination, illumination emanates from within the women, usually considered the more spiritual.

After her first love of music and singing was no longer an option, Soskin turned to art. Based upon a few lessons and classes, she has taught herself to paint, first with oils, then with watercolors and, finally, utilizing the various facets of acrylics. When physically able, Soskin travels with her husband, Ron, all over the world, taking photographs, and then returning home to either enlarge the pictures or to paint the landscapes to share with others. Although fortunate to travel extensively, Soskin still finds the Indiana sky at sunset to be one of her favorite and inspiring subjects. Besides landscapes, Soskin has painted several Jewish pieces depicting "Shalom."

Her husband, Ron, chairs the Tax Law Group of Bose McKinney & Evans, LLP in Indianapolis. Residing in Carmel, they frequently travel to New Mexico to be enveloped by the land and sky that so feeds them.

Soskin is the mother of two grown children and she has assisted in raising six step-children; she also has six grandchildren and many more step-grandchildren plus two great-grandchildren. Her grandchildren are the radiance that fills her heart.

For more information on Katherine Soskin, go to [www.ksoskin.tripod.com](http://www.ksoskin.tripod.com) or [katherinemsoskin@att.net](mailto:katherinemsoskin@att.net). ☆

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## Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

Our new grandson had his bris last week at the Lubavitcher Rebbe's shul at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. His name is Moshe Mordechai. He is named after our father, of blessed memory, Gavriel Moshe, and after my wife, Malka's, grandfather Yehoshua Mordechai. We got to hear the bris on the phone.

Baruch Hashem, Rosh Hashanah, the new year got off to a good start. On both days of Rosh Hashanah, I walked to our local hospital to blow the shofar. I was a little apprehensive. It takes an hour to walk to the hospital and another hour to walk home. Blowing the shofar hundreds of times is also a big effort, especially for a grandfather. Would I be able to do this both days?

I was pleasantly surprised. The first day I had a great time. My son-in-law David and my eight-year-old grandson Shragi came along to help. The patients, visitors, and the staff of the hospital were really happy to hear the shofar. And when my grandson also blew the shofar for them, that put some big smiles on their faces. I could see that the sounds of the shofar moved something in their souls. By the time I got home I was quite tired but very happy. The next morning I got up feeling years younger. I guess all that exercise and all of those mitzvahs were good for me.

In addition I received a very special fringe benefit. I spent a lot of quality time with my dear grandson. Hashem has blessed me with many wonderful children and grandchildren. I am also very fortunate that most of them live within an hour's drive, so we see each other often. They come for Shabbos or we go to them for Shabbos. This is a terrific arrangement. Instead of a two hour visit, our visits are usually 26 hours, from before sunset on Friday until Shabbos goes out Saturday night. We sit together at the Shabbos table and have a great time. However, I don't usually have the opportunity to spend a lot of time with them on an individual basis. So walking home from the hospital, just Shragi and I, was very precious.

What is so special about the shofar? The Rambam wrote that the purpose of the shofar is to wake us up. It is quite possible to fall asleep spiritually. Especially those of us who grew up in Indianapolis or some place similar. In those days a proper Jewish education was not available. Our spiritual life got off to a very weak start. Religion was considered old fashioned, good for grandparents. We had very little awareness of Hashem and our soul. All we knew was the physical world. Spiritually, we were pretty much asleep.

What woke me up? The Six Day War in 1967. The prophet Isaiah wrote (27:13) "And it shall be on that day, that a Great Shofar will be sounded, and those who

## Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

**Oct. 1, 2010, Bereisheet  
(Genesis 1:1-6:8), 23 Tishri 5771**

Now that the fall holy days and holidays have come to a conclusion, it is time to get back to living the rest of our Jewish lives. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Simchat Torah are uplifting, moving, insightful, joyous, contemplative, and spiritual, but they aren't the totality of Jewish living. As the month of Tishri ends, it is time to take stock in our Jewish souls and to think about what it means to live a Jewish life. That is part of our Jewish equation: living a Jewish life. We tell others that Judaism is more than a religion; it is a way of life. My challenge to all of us is to ask ourselves do we really mean it or is this just a catch phrase that sounds nice.

There is no better time to take this challenge than when we begin reading the first words of Torah. Some translate it as, "In the beginning God created...." I've always liked this translation better, "When God began to create...." I feel more connected to God in this statement, because I, too, can say, "When I begin to do or to create or to work on...." That is life after Simchat Torah as now it is my turn to work on creating my space in this world, community, family, and my innermost being. The world

were lost in the land of Ashur and those who were banished in the land of Egypt shall come and bow down to the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem." The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught us that this verse is referring to the final redemption, which is taking place now. Many of our people were "lost" or "banished" or sleeping spiritually. The sounding of the Great Shofar began with the Six Day War. It caused many of us to wake up spiritually and look for meaning in life. Since then the Great Shofar is sounding. It manifests itself in countless ways.

Millions all over the world have woken up and come to believe in Hashem. And each one has a very special unique and beautiful story to tell how it happened.

It is true that there are a few die-hard atheists still around. Maybe their ears are plugged up, and they can't hear the Great Shofar. If you happen to be one of these die-hards, don't worry. There is always hope. Go to the nearest Chabad House. The rabbi there will give you a prescription. Follow his instructions carefully and soon you, too, will hear the wondrous music of the Great Shofar. Then all of us will go together to bow down to the Lord in the holy Temple, which will soon be built on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

We want *Moshiach* now!

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doesn't stop when Jews celebrate the festivals of Tishri, but Jews do and now it is time to bring our creative Jewish juices to the forefront of our lives as we make Judaism our active way of life.

What role will Judaism play in our lives in the year to come? Will we make religious choices by enhancing how we celebrate Shabbat or how we make worship or prayer a part of our lives? Will we decide to think about our diet and consider *kashrut* in any of its contemporary forms? Will we pursue social justice and bring to life the words of Leviticus 19 by leaving the corners of our fields, not cursing the deaf or putting a stumbling block before the blind, paying the wages on time, and remembering that we are holy as God is holy?

We get so caught up in our lives, our work, our children, our parents, our hobbies, that we forget that being Jewish is something we are all the time. It doesn't go away, but sometimes we have a hard time finding it. It isn't just on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur that our Judaism is stirred and confronted, but each and every day. So how can we be Jewish each day? Think about the words you speak. It may be a condolence call, a thank you, or just a kind word spoken. These may sound human, but they are also Jewish. Think about your actions and consequences. Be kind and nice and helpful. Take someone some chicken soup. Reach out to a friend. Reach out to a stranger for we were all strangers in the land of Egypt. Recognize that doing these little (and not so little) things are acting according to our Jewish way of life. The opportunities to express our Jewish lives are boundless, but what we need to do is realize that when we do them, whatever they are, they come from our Jewish soul.

Judaism is not just the sound of a shofar, a round challah, or even a day of fasting. Judaism is living a good life, creating a meaningful life, and making the world a better place for all. Living a Jewish life is filled with the little things as well as the big. It is something we are all capable of doing. It is who we are and why we have flourished for so, so long.

When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light one for the possibilities of a Jewish life that we can create each and every day. Light the other candle to remind us of the things we already do to make this world better and our lives more meaningful.

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

### On this date in Jewish history

On October 13, 1870

Italy granted Jews equality and abolished the Rome ghetto.

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



## Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

### Build yourself ark: Meeting the challenges of Cheshwan

In the Jewish calendar, a new month begins at the time of the new moon. The Hebrew word for month is *chodesh*, which also means "newness." According to Kabbalah, each month offers new energies and offers new opportunities to realize one's personal potentials. Just like seasons vary and weather fluctuates, there are fluctuations in the spiritual energies available. Those who are attuned to these energies are very aware of such changes and know how to use this knowledge for their personal growth and success. Rather than promoting fatalism, this knowledge actually increases our capacity to make meaningful and effective choices for our highest good.

The Hebrew month of Cheshwan began on Fri., Oct. 8. In the preceding month of Tishrei, we spent more time celebrating holidays than we do in any other time in the calendar year. Tishrei is the month when we open up and fill ourselves with blessings for the entire year.

Now in the month of Cheshwan, the month following Tishrei, we begin to translate into reality the visions we received in Tishrei. In the month of Cheshwan, there are no Jewish holidays. This month is the time when we go back to work. It is the time to integrate and internalize what we received in Tishrei.

Cheshwan is a time of cleansing and purification as well. It is no coincidence that the Torah portion Noah is read to welcome in the month of Cheshwan. As you recall the story, Noah was instructed to build an ark to safeguard life from the destruction of the flood. So Cheshwan is when we must build an ark within ourselves to afford us safety and security for this month and coming year. There may be floods in the forms of challenges in the course of one's life and particularly during this month of Cheshwan. Our internal ark will serve us through these times.

The Hebrew word for ark is *teva*, which means "word." The arks we build in our lives are the positive words of love, prayer and blessing that we utter. Positive words provide a sanctuary for us, and we need to fortify ourselves with them during this month. We each need to make a conscious effort this month to speak positively, to express words of love and blessing more than we might do otherwise.

During this month of Cheshwan, it is helpful to know that it is natural that we

(see Ribner, page NAT 15)





## Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

### Age and indifference

As we get older, we start to think about yesterday and maybe yesterday's yesterday. In fact our thoughts always focus on what was and not what is. That is, until something happens that makes us realize that today is here, the today that we dreamed about yesterday and maybe even dreaded.

We all have dreams. Some of us dream about what was instead of what is. We do this because the present, in some respects, is very difficult to concentrate on. It contains illness and pain and disappointments. Years ago we never thought about all these things because we were immortal, impervious to unpleasant expectations.

Now we are at the ebb. The waters of our life are receding. The tide goes out and does not return. The richness of the flow has dried-up. We look in the mirror and we see a different person, a person we do not recognize. We see a person who has lost the glow, the spark that ignited a flame of desire and fulfillment.

I am reminded of something I received that was posted on a doctor's office wall:

*Said the little boy,  
"Sometimes I drop my spoon."  
Said the old man,  
"Sometimes I do that too."  
The little boy whispered,  
"I sometimes wet my pants."  
"I do that too," laughed the old man.  
Said the little boy, "I often cry."  
Sadly the old man nodded and said,  
"So do I."  
But worst of all said the little boy,  
"It seems that grown-ups  
don't pay attention to me."  
With that he felt the warmth  
of the wrinkled old hand,  
"I know what you mean,"  
said the old man.  
A tear and a smile were seen  
upon each other's face.*

How sad that when we get older, it really is as though we are back once more to our youth. The cycle is never-ending. We start in life being dependent and we somehow find ourselves again relying on others.

There is an old Yiddish folk saying: Parents once taught their children to talk; today children teach their parents to be quiet. Where is the patience we showed when our children required that of us and now as we age deserve the same consideration? No longer are we the wise ones. Now we are the inconvenient ones. No longer are we the givers. Now we are the takers. And therein lies the resentment.

Have you noticed that feeling resonates with caregivers as well? Have you noticed the impatience attendants show the infirmed of advanced age? It is as though they should not be there at all. Life is over for them. Why are they such a burden?

I read a poem written by an older person who died in a geriatric ward of a hospital. It was given to me by a good friend, a doctor, with whom I have had many discussions about faith and healing and pain. Dr. Jerrold Altman is a kind man, a feeling person who sincerely applies his craft to relieving the hurt and discomfort of those afflicted with the agony of illness. In his honor I repeat excerpts of that poem:

#### See Me

*What do you see, nurses, what do you see?  
Are you thinking, when you look at me –  
A crabby old woman, not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit, with far-away eyes,  
Who dribbles her food and makes no reply,  
When you say in a loud voice –  
"I do wish you'd try."*

*Is that what you're thinking,  
is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes, nurse,  
you're looking at ME...  
I'll tell you who I am, as I sit here so still;  
As I rise at your bidding,  
as I eat at your will.*

*I'm a small child of ten  
with a father and mother,  
Brothers and sisters,  
who love one another;  
A young girl of sixteen  
with wings on her feet,  
Dreaming that soon now  
a lover she'll meet;  
A bride soon at twenty –  
my heart gives a leap,  
Remembering the vows  
that I promised to keep;  
At twenty-five now  
I have young of my own,  
Who need me to build  
a secure, happy home;  
A woman of thirty,  
my young now grow fast,  
Bound to each other  
with ties that should last;  
At forty, my young sons  
have grown and are gone,  
But my man's beside me  
to see I don't mourn;  
At fifty once more  
babies play 'round my knee,  
Again we know children,  
my loved one and me.*

*Dark days are upon me,  
my husband is dead,  
I look at the future, I shudder with dread,  
For my young are all rearing  
young of their own,  
And I think of the years  
and the love that I've known;  
I'm an old woman now  
and nature is cruel –  
'Tis her jest to make old age  
look like a fool.*



## Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

### Faith can help us deal with failure

When asked what we can do as parents to bring up healthy, well-balanced children, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, a world-renown pediatrician and child developmental specialist, responded with a simple but profound answer: "We can teach them resilience."

"When a child is afraid to fail, she is also afraid to risk, and that greatly inhibits her ability to succeed. Our children need to be willing to try, and we have to be there to pick them up, dust them off and help them to try again when failure occurs."

Being resilient means having the ability to get back on the horse, to recover from the possibility of failure every time we try something new, difficult or unknown. Without it, not only do we fail to live our lives, but we fail to thrive as well.

Which is all well and good, but as a parent I wonder: Can I really teach my son fortitude and my daughter inner strength? Are these qualities something you learn like math or science or are you born with them?

I don't have Dr. Brazelton's credentials (although please don't tell my psychiatrist

*I remember the joys, I remember the pain,  
And I'm loving and living life over again,  
I think of the years,  
all too few – gone too fast,  
And accept the stark fact  
that nothing can last –  
So I open your eyes, nurses,  
open and see,  
Not a crabby old woman, look closer,  
nurses – see ME!*

Yes, age can be daunting and frightening. It can be all these things and more because we understand that life goes on and we are not going to be part of it anymore. But then we should always remember the Psalmist's admonition to say to God: "Do not forget me, God, until I have shouted of Your strength to the next generation."

This should be our concentration: To be grateful for the past, appreciative of the present, and ever thankful that we have had a part in determining the future. We have witnessed offense and forgiveness, loneliness and love, pain and compassion, defeat and victory. Who could ask for anything more? We certainly don't want anything less.

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

husband that, since I'm always dispensing medical advice!), but I think what he's talking about is very close to a concept that lies at the heart of Jewish thinking – a five letter word called faith.

The word "faith" in Hebrew, *emuna*, is also translated to mean *belief*. Having faith means that we believe and trust that there is a greater order to the world although we may not be able to perceive or understand it. It means that when bad things happen, when we try our best but don't succeed, when we have terrible disappointments and losses, we keep on going because we believe that somehow, in the end, it will all work out.

Faith gives us a sense of hope in a world that is not always fair, good or just. It helps us respond to the chaos in our lives and to events that make no sense, like the death of a child or acts of terrorism. It is the basis of an inner buoyancy that keeps us afloat when we are ready to sink. It is also at the heart of our will and determination to live, because we know deep within, that our life matters.

Yet many people struggle with the concept of faith because it is not based on what we know factually but on what we understand intuitively, emotionally and spiritually. Some view faith as overly simplistic and anti-intellectual because it requires us to accept things that cannot be seen or proven, like God. But having faith does not necessarily mean that we believe God exists the same way we believe a tree or a chair does. It does not mean that we know with certainty what God is or that we don't have doubts or struggle with the God-concept. In fact, to question is at the heart of the Jewish tradition. For it is in the questioning and challenging of our faith that we often find a deeper and more genuine way of thinking, believing and living out our lives.

The beauty of having faith is that it permits us to be in a relationship with the Divine without having to know with certainty what the Divine is. And in this way, even at the worst of times or in our darkest hours, we are never truly alone.

Resilience is key in countering life's failures and disappointments, and there is no better way to teach resilience than by modeling resilience ourselves. The way we respond to our own physical, emotional, social and financial failures and disappointments will set the stage for our children when they face challenges of their own.

A recipe of resilience and faith is a winning combination. It assures us that life goes on and that recovery is possible, regardless of how difficult things may seem at the time. And it give us a sense that even though there are some things we will never understand, there is a larger order to the world and we have the power to do what we need to in order to survive.

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



## Jews by Choice

BY MARY HOFMANN

### And now a word (or many) about *Midrash*

I wonder if many of you who were raised as Jews have ever given much thought to the miracle of *midrash*. It doesn't exist elsewhere, to my knowledge, and is one of the most charming, freeing, and amazing aspects of Judaism to someone who grew up without it.

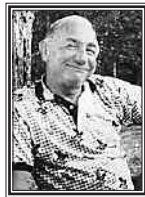
Webster defines *midrash* as "any of the rabbinical commentaries and explanatory notes on the Scriptures, written between the beginning of the Exile and 1200 c.e. Roget, not surprisingly, doesn't list the word in his index at all...there isn't really a synonym for it, though I suppose one could use the term "parable," but that really doesn't work.

Webster is a little off, it seems, in that *midrash* assumes a story... "commentary and explanatory notes" sounds more like Talmud. Parable doesn't work because it's a lesson in story form that may refer to the Bible, but not necessarily...and is granted a sort of cultural stature as specific, engraved in stone, and folkloric.

*Midrash*, on the other hand, is a concept that seems to me to be fluid and, while likely originating during the period specified by Webster, seems to continue to this day. It's a concept Jews understand perfectly...a story, a literature that illustrates and expands on something inexplicable in the Torah. Because "every word in the Torah is significant," when rabbis came upon a word or phrase that seemed superfluous or odd, they'd create an ingenious story to illustrate possibilities of what might have been meant.

When we're in a study group or a service or in any situation in which somebody says, "there's a midrash about that," everyone understands what that means. It's further explication, it's a great story, it's definitely been generated by a human being and is understood to be apocryphal. It's to be played with, bounced around, chuckled or oohed and awed over. It leaves one with clarification, an insight or an image, or a perspective never considered before, but we all know it's human-generated and up to us to ponder over, consider, and accept...or not.

Nobody shoves a *midrash* down your throat. They toss it into the conversation and bounce it around for reactions. It epitomizes, to me, so many elements of Judaism: It is playfulness with words and ideas, it's emphasis on the value of human thought, on the importance of questions over answers, on the idea that we might each have a different – yet still



## Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

### Saul's Halloween adventure

Me and my rabbi have the same argument every year. He's a toughie. If there were 713 mitzvot, he'd be 713 out of 713.

The topic in early October is the same every year. First, to soften him up, I tell him how much I enjoyed his Shabbos sermon. He smiles. He knows what's coming. Then I spring it on him. "Rabbi, can my kids go trick-or-treating on Halloween? Oh, I understand you couldn't accept a pork chop or a jar of pickled pig's feet, but a nice, kosher Hershey bar, that's okay, is it not?"

The smile disappears. Yeah, yeah, I know it's not a rabbinically sanctioned holiday and I know its ancient, pagan/Roman origins have – in recent centuries – added a churchy face, as well. Still, even on Shabbos, walking from door-to-door knocking gently and pocketing a Hershey bar is Halachically

valuable – perspective, and that a question has a wide range of valid responses or answers, rarely (if ever) just one.

Can you who knew only Judaism as a child really perceive of a religious discussion in which there is no such thing as *midrash*? Can you imagine a world where *midrash* would potentially, in fact, be dangerous and a sign of apostasy?

When I discovered I was really Jewish all those years ago, I also discovered *midrash*. It was like finding an answer to questions I'd never been able to formulate before. It WAS an answer. It was LOTS of answers. It was serendipity.

Consider for a moment how it would be to grow up with questions to which there was one absolute answer...an answer that never made much sense to you, even though the adults you love and respect assure you that it is, in fact, The Answer.

Then consider asking questions and getting the response, "There's a *midrash* about that..."

Brilliant! My kids – and grandkids – are lucky to be growing up as searchers, as questioners, as respecters of the context of life and will never, I hope, become merely followers. *Midrash* is a reason.

When we unrolled the Torah at Simhat Torah this year, my six-year-old Aidan found himself in the center. He looked over at me, gave me his crooked grin, and said "Momou, I feel like I'm in a story!" I think he gets it.

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

as kosher as saying "Mode Ani" every morning. No problem there. And you might even be in an *eruv* bound area. So, even if the holiday falls on Shabbos, you're okay carrying around a small bag of sweets. "Right, rabbi?"

He looks at me kinda funny. He knows my journalistic specialty is holidays, so he knows I'm always looking for hidden, unpublished festivals like Bathsheva's sister-in-law's birthday (the 6th day of Nissan) or the anniversary of Hosea's wedding. After all, no holiday, then no column for my hard-hearted editors who even rebel at Christmas. ("Well, he *was* Jewish.") To my credit, I never attempt Easter.

If they knew my credit card balance, my editors would allow me a column of praise for the Amalakites!!

But I must convince our rabbi. I checked already with my Orthodox brother-in-law, who pronounced Halloween as not exactly in the "spirit" of Judaism. To me, he's the ultimate authority. So, I practiced on him. I reminded him (with my speech to the rabbi in mind) of our dybbuks and golems and ancient astrological superstitions. No good. "Teddy, NOT in the spirit of Judaism."

Oh well, maybe the rabbi had met a golem on the way to work. I tried again and being a courteous man, he didn't remind me of my belated dues; and being soft-hearted, he did not mention my snooze during his Rosh Hashanah speech. A good sign. Then he made a mistake as bad as Esau, when he let his hunger for lentil stew triumph over his ambitions for the inheritance of Isaac. "Ted, Halloween is all about witches and spooks, which we don't believe in."

I had him. I reminded him of the story in I Samuel, Chapter 28 – the story of the Witch of Endor – wherein Saul consults a soothsayer out on the highway – a witch – about the next day's battle. It is a violation of the Chumash, you know, as well as the king's own rule that we should throw rocks at such shady ladies. But still the king demands that the shady lady call up the spirit of Samuel.

Some skeptical, secular bible critics – many of them anti-Semitic, I'd suspect – claim that Saul's visit was the first trick-or-treat confrontation in history. Or even worse, that the lady from Endor wasn't a witch but practiced an even older profession. Rashi is silent on the topic.

My rabbi disagrees. "Ted, she was a witch," he shouts. "Thereby making my point that witches exist in our history."

I'm not going to ruin the ending. Read I Samuel, Chapter 28 yourself on Halloween and then decide if in our biblical past we did business with witches. And notice I got a column out on Halloween. You're reading it.

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, (see Roberts, page NAT 15)



## The Roads from Babel

BY SETH BEN-MORDECAI

### Huh?

The contrast between Englishmen and Jews provides fodder for comic sketches. English are known for deference and subtlety, although Jews are known for questioning and directness. Ignoring danger, a proper Oxford gentleman on the *Titanic* asks bejeweled Lady Astor, "If you will perhaps excuse me, madam, might I trouble you to inquire whether you would be so kind as to direct me to the life boats, please?" Ignoring status, the simple Jew asks the horror-stricken socialite, "Hey lady, vere's de life boats?"

Consistent with these stereotypes, English questions are grammatically complex while Biblical Hebrew questions are elegantly simple. English forms yes/no questions by (1) inverting a statement's subject and verb [*The lady is a tiger* → *Is the lady a tiger?*] or (2) by adding a "helping verb" to the front of a statement and deleting tense from the main verb [*He shot an elephant in his pajamas* → *Did he shoot an elephant in his pajamas?*]. Informal English forms questions merely by (1) changing inflection [*That's your house* → *That's your house?*] or (2) adding the interrogative "huh" at the end of a statement [*You shot an elephant in your pajamas* → *You shot an elephant in your pajamas, huh?*].

Biblical Hebrew forms yes/no questions like informal English by changing inflection or by prefixing the particle [ *הֲ* ] ("huh") to the first word of the sentence. Thus, [ *שָׁמֶר אֶחִי אֲנִי!* ] means *I am my brother's keeper!*, but [ *הֲשָׁמֶר אֶחִי אֲנִי?* ] means *Am I my brother's keeper?* (Genesis 4:9). The sentence [ *יִתְפַּךְ כּוֹשֵׁי עוֹר.* ] means *An Ethiopian changes his skin*, but [ *הֲיִתְפַּךְ כּוֹשֵׁי עוֹר וְנִמְרָר חֲבֵרָתָיו?* ] means *Does an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard his spots?* (Jeremiah 13:23). And [ *בֶּן יִקְרִי לִי אֶפְרַיִם.* ] means *Ephraim is a dear son to me*, while [ *הֲבֶן יִקְרִי לִי אֶפְרַיִם?* ] means *Is Ephraim my dear son?*

On the surface, the interrogative prefix [ *הֲ* ] looks like the Hebrew definite article "the," which is spelled [ *הֶ* ] or [ *הָ* ]. But the interrogative prefix and the definite article do not sound exactly alike. The vowel of the interrogative prefix is a *hataf patach* [ *ְ* ], an ultra-short "a" vowel (like the first "a" in "whatchamacallit"). By contrast, the vowel of the definite article is a *patach* or *kamatz*, which are pronounced "a" as in "what" or "a" as in "father," respectively. Further, the definite article adds a *dagesh* (a dot) to the following consonant. (An earlier column noted that a consonant with a *dagesh* is generally pronounced twice as long as a (see Ben Mordecai, page NAT 15)





## Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

### Netanyahu, Abbas, Obama, Clinton, et al

What if they really did it? What if this most unlikely group pulled off the improbable and made peace?

Everything about the State of Israel has always defied rationality, and why not? All of the parties want peace. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians are tired of the conflict, and while they have been arch enemies during the entire history of Israel, there is something about their enmity that defies description. When you are in Israel, and I have been there many times, it doesn't feel like the way you might imagine it. You cannot go anywhere in Israel without Arabs being part of the picture. From the moment you land until you leave, you walk with them on the street, sit on the same bus, eat in the same high-end restaurants, breathe the same air – well you see what I mean.

It would be unlikely, but many other things in history are unlikely. It was unlikely that a small and fragile nation could repel its bigger enemies, and yet they did, over and over again. Peace with Egypt was unlikely when it began and even now. There is a friendly accommodation with Jordan. And it does not seem that any of the supporters of the Palestinian cause really care about the Palestinians, it is more their hatred of Israel.

Peace would have its challenges. With peace, all of the issues of Israelis that are only submerged because of the danger of the Palestinians would be gone. There is no experience in Israel of the population being able to accommodate each other.

Have you ever seen Mother Courage, the marvelous Bertold Brecht play about a woman who peddles wares to the combatants in the 30 Year War, and when it finally comes to an end, just as she has restocked her inventory, she is heard to say, "Oh G-d, not peace."

I have children and grandchildren in Israel. Like all of you, I want them to live in peace, but it would take time to change all of our belief structures. Would the country be prepared to move to a peace-time economy? War, while odious, creates vibrant areas of opportunity. What would all of the country's young people do, if suddenly the armed services were reduced?

It is something we all pray for, but could we trust the process? The majority of Israelis are not sure that Abbas can secure the peace if they make it. They don't trust President Obama. They are uncertain about the future of Hamas and Lebanon and the Arab world.



## Jerusalem Peacemakers

BY ELIYAHU MCLEAN

### Recent peace events

#### One Peace Jerusalem, September 26

We organized a special gathering, "One Peace Jerusalem" of Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders praying together as the sun rose in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem on Sept. 26. Visit the website for this initiative: [www.onepeacejerusalem.org](http://www.onepeacejerusalem.org). For pictures of the Sheikh Bukhari memorial event and the Fourth Jerusalem Hug, visit: [www.flickr.com/photos/jerusalem\\_peacemakers/sets](http://www.flickr.com/photos/jerusalem_peacemakers/sets).



*Eliyahu McLean and Ibrahim Abuelhawa address the crowd (also below) gathered for the Fourth "One Peace Jerusalem" event at Damascus Gate.*



#### Peace Week Global Telesummit Session, September 16

"Peace Week: A Global Summit for Building a Culture of Peace" through Sept. 21. Free live sessions or taped sessions by top peacebuilders from around the world. Ibrahim Abuelhawa,

And what would we have to give to get peace. When we have given back in the past, the promise was never met. In the minds of the world the "West Bank" includes 50,000 people who live in Ramat Shlomo, which abuts Yerushalayim. And what about Ma'ale Adumim?

The Arabs say that there can be no peace without the settlements ending, and the Israelis seemed determined to maintain Israel as a Jewish State.

If it happens, it will be a miracle, but we are a people of miracles. If it happens, then we can really come to believe that the Messianic Period, which we pray for, is in the offing.

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

Jiries Mansour and I were featured in the session: "Stories of Hope from the Holy Land." For more info <http://peaceweek.info/>.

#### Abrahamic Reunion Ramadan Iftar in Nazareth, August 30

The Islamic Cultural Center and the Abrahamic Reunion group of Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Druze religious leaders hosted a successful Ramadan Iftar meal on the grounds of the St. Gabriel hotel in Nazareth. Three hundred fifty Arabs and Jews came together for an evening dedicated to "Repentance and Forgiveness Within Ourselves and Between Our Peoples." This event was supported by the Center for Religious Tolerance and the Global Hope Fund.

#### Memorial gathering for Sheikh Bukhari, June 22

On the occasion marking the end of the 40 days of mourning in Islam, we gathered to honor the memory and legacy of the unique Muslim peacemaker and co-founder of Jerusalem Peacemakers, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari. Lutheran Reverend Uwe Grabe of the Redeemer Church in the Old City hosted, as we facilitated the sharing circle as people of all faiths shared memories and intention to continue the peace work in the spirit of the Sheikh. Sheikh Bukhari's wife and daughters received our blessings and support.

#### Fourth Jerusalem Hug, June 21

Over three hundred Israelis, Palestinians and internationals gathered together to pray for peace and celebrate together our shared love of Jerusalem. We started in two separate groups, at Jaffa Gate and above Damascus Gate, gathering in circles of dialogue and prayer. The group from Jaffa Gate then walked around the Old City walls, meeting up with the other group on the Damascus Gate steps. Palestinian partners from Hebron and Beit Omar joined us in offering the watching crowd a message of peace and cooperation, seeking to re-build trust between our peoples. We closed with a drum circle next to the Old City walls.

Your support helps us to continue our work for peace in the Holy Land. In the USA, in order to make a tax-deductible contribution, write a check to: Center for Religious Tolerance; make a note on the memo line: *For Jerusalem Peacemakers*, and send it to: The Center for Religious Tolerance, 520 Ralph St. Sarasota, FL 34242.

Donate by PayPal: [www.onepeacejerusalem.org/donate#nogo](http://www.onepeacejerusalem.org/donate#nogo).

In the UK, to make a charitable donation, write a check to Jerusalem Peacemakers UK, and send it to: Jerusalem Peacemakers UK, 35 The Dene, SEVENOAKS, Kent TN13 1P.

*Shalom, Salaam, Eliyahu McLean, Jerusalem Peacemakers, director. ✨*

## Jerusalem

BY AZZIZA AHDOOT

Your skies tangle sand-struck with time; they cling low to the arcs of your domes whose colossal intensity rival only the sun's.

Your surface tension is as undisturbed as your people's faith whose left prayers are pushed in cracks of dusty tears and pleas.

Jerusalem—

Your streets submit to insane demands emptying like a spill to observe a dusk and your nights stay quiet as obedience

while a faint holiness creaks slow over restless beds filled with children who will never know your peace.

Jerusalem—

Your name is trapped in mouths of cats scattering the whispers of your Delphian walls.

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## Good people of America, it's time to tone it down



BY RABBI  
DENNIS C.  
AND SANDY  
EISENBERG SASSO

As the election season swings into full gear we are again barraged with political advertisements and news reports pitting one candidate against the other. The combative climate is marked by an atmosphere of confrontational and uncivil discourse.

Although there have always been political divisions, heated debates and disagreements on matters of policy, the polarization in our country seems greater than ever. There is little incentive to reach consensus. In fact, suggesting that the other side might actually have an idea worthy of consideration is tantamount to political suicide. The desire for personal advancement takes precedence over the critical needs of the public welfare, the civil good. Gaining power takes priority over solving problems.

Jim Leach, chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities and a former U.S. representative from Iowa, was recently in Indianapolis as part of a 50-state tour to promote the importance of civility in a fragmented society. He said, "Civilization requires civility. Words matter... Little is more important for the world's leading democracy in this change-intensive century than establishing an ethos of thoughtfulness and decency in the public square."

Such a conversation is urgent.

Not long ago a local television station asked us to comment on a controversial issue. The reporter had already interviewed one prominent individual, and now he wanted an opposing view. We indicated that we did not have an opposing position but would be happy to be interviewed to discuss the important matter further. The reporter wasn't interested. The newscast wasn't designed to offer an exchange of nuanced ideas, but rather to highlight divisiveness and discord.

This treatment of conflict is emblematic of our culture. We tend to approach disagreements as either/or debates that generate over-simplification, false dichotomies and invite hostility.

A colleague, who speaks nationally on the need for civility, once asked the people in his audience if they could go for 24 hours without saying unkind words about others. The vast majority admitted they could not pass the test. We have become addicted to incivility and, as with any addiction, the results are proving disastrous.

Technology has made the addiction worse. Anonymity and speed contribute

## Sign the pledge now: [www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org)

This year, the themes of Sukkot – both the fragility of human life and the communal strength of a truly open tent – have an especially painful resonance. I am sure you share my sadness and outrage that in the past month five teenage boys took their own lives due to homophobic bullying and harassment (and another in July). The loss of a single life is cause for heartbreak. Five teen suicides in just one month, however, is a crisis. This is a wake-up call that something must change and that the Jewish community must not remain silent.

Please see the pledge we are circulating below and sign on if you wish to make this public commitment. Let's send a message to everyone in our communities that we will not stand by in the face of suffering and injustice. Our goal is to gather 18,000 pledges by the end of the calendar year; we will publish the initial signatories on Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day. This is a pledge we are asking of all Jewish community members, youth and adults, so please forward widely.

*B'Shalom, Idit Klein, executive director, Keshet. ★*

### **Do Not Stand Idly By: A Jewish Community Pledge to Save Lives**

*As members of a tradition that sees each person as created in the divine image, we respond with anguish and outrage at the spate of suicides brought on by homophobic bullying and intolerance.*

*We hereby commit to ending homophobic bullying or harassment of any kind in our synagogues, schools, organizations, and communities. As a signatory, I pledge to speak out when I witness anyone being demeaned for their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. I commit myself to do whatever I can to ensure that each and every person in my community is treated with dignity and respect.*

to the intensity of acrimony. Faceless communication makes it easier to demonize others. The demand for instantaneous response does not allow for reflection or for tempering of anger. Civil society operates within the framework of cherished liberties. However, the right of free speech does not mean we should say everything we think; nor that everything we say should be written; nor that everything written be published or given a public forum. Yet that is what often happens on the Internet.

Words have power. Biblically, the divine act of creation is verbal. Cosmos (order) is called into being out of chaos (disorder). The magical expression "abracadabra" comes from the Aramaic. It literally means *abra* – I will create, *kadabra* – as I speak. Words create worlds.



## Fun Coach

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

### Recover the fun

*Dear Mr. Funcoach,*

*I like your idea about Fun coaching, actually. I was wondering how I can be one, too.*

*Yours, interestingly,  
D.M.S.*

Dear D.M.S.,

So glad you asked. Thrilled, even.

First of all, and luckily for you, I've already written some inadequate answers to just that question.

**Q:** What do I have to do to become a Fun Coach?

**A:** Find someone who needs more fun. Help them find it.

**Q:** I mean, how do I learn to be a Fun Coach?

**A:** See answer above.

**Q:** Okay, so what I'm saying is "how do I get to be a certified Fun Coach?"

**A:** Everyone you help certifies you.

**Q:** All right, let me try it another way. How do I get better at it?

**A:** Find someone else who needs to have more fun. Help them have it.

Second, also of all, I recently received the following email from someone I've been coaching for a couple months. Maybe it might give you some insights about the whole practice, and maybe move you to be doing something similar:

*When did all this start? Man, I have no idea. When will it end? Ditto. But now, I no longer care.*

*On, of all days, St. Patrick's Day 2010, I found myself in a hospital, faced with a hematologist who said, you HAVE to be admitted! It could be LEUKEMIA! I felt it a grand joke on a green day. What? Are you kidding me?*

*Prior to this I had been a pretty "happy" gal. After all, married 37 years, two kids, two grandsons, house, two cars, business, a few good friends, and I woke up most every day smiling. I was always open for whatever would come. My favorite word*

The words we chose will determine the kind of world we create. Unfortunately, our words are generating chaos rather than cosmos, tearing us apart rather than bringing us together.

We need fewer split screens of pro/con debates that seek to entertain us and more in-depth and thoughtful analyses that seek to educate us. We need to refrain from character assassination and engage in issues illumination. We need our politicians and legislators to do less for the sake of partisanship and more for the sake of our republic.

(see Sassos, page NAT 15)

was YES. My favorite food was artichoke. Okay, I know, I got off track there...but suffice to say, I THOUGHT I was doing pretty good.

But this woman threw me for a loop. Huh?

Heck, I'm 58 and you are telling me NOW that I could have some kind of major disease? Well, she wasn't the only one. I went to blood doctors and specialists. I went to alternative doctors and specialists, and by the time I started reaching out for help, my whole mood was depressed. I no longer woke up happy, I woke up scared. It was a feeling I was used to from my childhood (alcoholism and abuse), and I felt, like I had in those early years...lost and alone.

What the heck is going on and what do I do with it? Who do I go to for help? How do I lose this fear? Because I can't live like this...literally. The fear will kill me before the blood will. But, in general, I was toast if I didn't find help. And no butter on this toast. I do love my butter.

That began my search for folks who healed folks. Maybe they had different types of tools for healing, but I needed help. I found Bernie's site. On a very deep and timely basis, I needed FUN. Maybe he could help? Of course, he said. He would give me whatever he could to get me back to laughing, acting silly, letting go of all of this heavy stuff. At least for moments at a time. Which is all I needed...just a break from the craziness...to allow joy back in.

Gooooo! Gooooo! I can use this! So we began, only by email, to talk about fun. About the different kinds of fun, about how to generate it, how to allow it, how to encourage it, how to be it. Oh yes, this is what I remember, this is the goof-offiness that I truly am. And Bernie could bring it. We would write to each other only when we felt like it (I was in bed most of the time), he would bring me thoughts that were new about fun, and I would let them sink in to this body, as I was letting platelets sink into my veins two times a week, for months.

I truly believe the fun thoughts were more healing. Actually I know they were.

Before long, I had found an alternative doc who would help me get better, and I would emerge from the depths of blackness, having a new friend to lead me back to the light. I had others too, to let me know that there was more to do on this plane than I had once imagined...but my Fun Coach, he came through with the peace and levity that I needed to focus on...from a perfect stranger...without feeling sorry for me, but by supporting in me what I always had, but had forgotten. Deep Fun. I thank him for that each and every day, and I look forward to what Fun I can cook up with each and every face I meet.

Hope this helps. Let me know of your progress.

Yours, for fun,

Bernie DeKoven is a Fun Coach. He works with individuals and groups, institutions, organizations, by phone, email, chat, Skype and in person to help them recover the fun of life. Online at <http://deepfun.com>. ★





## Seen on the Israel Scene

By SYBIL KAPLAN

### Another Righteous Gentile Deserves Recognition

In 1997, Richmond freelance journalist, Nancy Wright Beasley, was asked to write an article about the Virginia Holocaust Museum by an editor at the *Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star*. Initially, she refused because she found the subject of the Holocaust so disturbing. Subsequently, she attended the local ceremony about Kristalnacht (the night of broken glass), commemorating the November 1938 event in Germany and Austria when Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues were ransacked, and Jews were killed and sent to concentration camps. This event is regarded by historians as the beginning of the Final Solution.

"I suddenly saw the Holocaust as a family issue and wondered what I might do if someone came to my church and told me they were going to kill us because we were Christians," said Beasley, when we met recently at the Jerusalem YMCA. Beasley, a Rotarian from the Brandermill Rotary, had been asked to be a speaker for the Jerusalem Rotary Club.



Nancy Wright Beasley and Jerusalem Rotary Club President Nikolaus Kircher exchanged Rotary Club flags.

Attending that Kristalnacht ceremony led Beasley to begin a journey that included five years of research and two years writing, resulting in a book, *Izzy's Fire: Finding Humanity in the Holocaust*. The book tells the story of nine adults and four children who were hidden in a potato cellar in Lithuania by a Christian farmer's family. Seven members of the group had escaped from the Kovno ghetto, which became a concentration camp near the end of the war.

The Ipp family of three eventually ended up in Richmond, Va., and changed their name to Ipson. Jay Ipson, the son of Izzy and Edna Ipson, became director of the Richmond Holocaust Museum. Also Edna changed her name to Eta.

Through the generosity of Neil November, who financed her trip,

Beasley was in Israel for ten days. "He has been my patron saint," she declares.

In a word, the visit has been "overwhelming." Beasley's Israel host was Gadi Shalom, the son of one of the rescued children, Emmanuel Shalom, who died in November 2005, after *Izzy's Fire* was published.

"Gadi has taken me places I would never have seen as a tourist," said Beasley. Shalom is a performing artist in video art and created a project based on a trip he made to Lithuania with his father just prior to his death.

"Nancy and I met in Virginia," said Shalom. "I was a guest of the Virginia Holocaust Museum, where my video project was presented."

While in Israel, Nancy went to see the grave of Gadi's father, Emmanuel, and placed a stone she had brought from her Virginia garden on it. "When he and his wife were in Richmond, he invited me to come to visit him," Beasley said.

Some of Beasley's impressions of Israel are that there is "a lot of beauty, a lot of sadness, a lot of cultural diversity, a lot of friendly people."

One of the highlights of the trip was seeing Jacob and David Kalamitskas who were children when the group was hidden. They now live in Israel. Of the 13 hidden, seven are still living.

Beasley was named Virginia Press Women's Communicator of Achievement in 2005 and one of Ten Outstanding Women in Central Virginia by the Richmond YMCA in 2006.

*Izzy's Fire* has been used in middle school language arts classes since 2005 and has been used in universities and college and in young adult literature courses.

Following her trip in Israel, Beasley went to Lithuania to speak about the book in conjunction with the U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, Anna Derse. Beasley will also participate in programs held in conjunction with Lithuania's Jewish Genocide Days, and she will also do some research while there.

Beasley has just finished a second book, the thesis from her second graduate degree. This is a historical novel for young adults centered on the escape from the Kovno ghetto.

#### Summary of the Book

Eta Ipp and her husband, Izzy, are living in Lithuania in 1938 and then are relocated to the Kovno ghetto. With the help of Itzhak Kalamitsky, Eta's uncle, they escape. A poor Catholic farmer, friend of the uncle, and his family, befriend them and hide them, along with ten others, in an underground potato bin.

From beginning to end, the book is absorbing and engaging without being morbid or

depressing. Izzy and Eta have a special attitude of optimism and trust in each other for the sake of their young son.

#### A wake-up call on radical Islam

Ten months ago, Hadar-Israel was founded to mobilize English-speaking Jerusalem citizens to be informed and strengthen Israel. They have sponsored a series of outstanding programs and the New Year was begun recently with Daniel Pipes, in a question-and-answer dialogue, with journalist, Ruthie Blum Leibowitz at the Konrad Adenauer Conference Center of Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Yemin Moshe (below the windmill).

An overflowing crowd filled the auditorium, and young people sat on the steps and in the aisles as Pipes addressed the topic, of which he is an authority: "Radical Islam and the Real Obstacles to Middle East Peace." Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum and Taube distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. His biweekly column appears in newspapers around the world; his website is a source of Middle East Islam information, and he is the author of 12 books.

In response to questions posed by Mrs. Leibowitz, he began by saying "I see Islam as the third of three radical utopian movements – Fascism, Marxism, and Islamism."

Turkey: "Now Turkey is being made an Islamist country."

Turkey and Iran: "Turkey and Iran are the two most Islamist states.... Turkey is a democracy; Iran is an autocracy and the only place on Earth where Islamism is in a decline."

Obama's foreign policies: "The main issue is nuclear arms build-up with no criticizing."

Iraq and Afghanistan: "I thought we should have overthrown the rulers. My prediction is both are doomed; the regimes are kept regimes."

Abbas: "I see Abbas as a kept politician not a real political leader."

Chances to resolve the Arab-Israel conflict in current talks: "Zero percent chance, but there is a high chance we'll see a signing ceremony and a possible deal.... Israel's priority is Iran; the American priority is the Palestinians. I see a possible deal where Israel makes concessions in order to get some promises on Iran...I don't think the Palestinians are ready for democracy. Things have to be done slowly. You don't start with elections for a top figure."

Democracy and the Koran: "There is nothing antithetical to democracy in Islam.... Islamism is a radical utopian ideology."

Europe: "More Islam, more Islamization.... Islamism is a doctrine developed in the 1920s and 30s that sees Muslims giving power and wealth by going back to their traditions through stringent application of the Shariya."

Radical Islam on campuses: "Presence is substantial among students and

growing, much stronger Islamist elements than in society."

#### Jerusalem Lone Soldiers have support group

Tziki Aud spent 27 years with the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency including serving as its information director.

In 2009 he started a new project. We were recently invited to his "dress rehearsal" for a U.S. speaking tour on behalf of the Michael Levin Memorial Center for Lone Soldiers.

A lone soldier is one serving in the Israel Defense Forces whose parents live in France, England, the United States, South Africa, Argentina, Mexico, Australia, the former Soviet Union, Brazil or other countries. There are 500 lone soldiers in Jerusalem; 5,000 nationwide.

The Michael Levin Memorial Center for Lone Soldiers is the first and only organization dedicated to taking care of these young people. With branches in Tel Aviv and Haifa, it offers educational seminars for new immigrant soldiers and other volunteers; Shabbat dinners; guidance and monitoring; holiday and culture events; furniture for their apartments; advocacy work and post-army guidance.



Tziki Aud speaks about his project the Michael Levin Memorial Center for Lone Soldiers. Both photos by Barry A. Kaplan.

A few years ago, Tziki happened to meet a fellow from Philadelphia named Michael Levin. They became friends. Michael became a paratrooper. "In his uniform he walked, smiling, and gained another 20 centimeters because he was so proud."

In 2006 he went to the States for a vacation. While there, the Lebanon War started and he returned early. Fifteen hours later, he was killed.

"I thought that the army serves the good of all the soldiers. I thought our army is the only one in which there are no problems. I learned the biggest problem in the army is a lack of understanding. The commanders do not understand the situation with lone soldiers. His death became part of my unwritten contract with soldiers."

In 2009, Tziki was asked to continue to give service to lone soldiers and the Michael Levin Memorial Center for Lone Soldiers was founded. "I am the only old person in our organization! The agenda is being built by lone soldiers."

(see Kaplan/Israel, page NAT 15)







## Jewish Theater

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

### The Jews of Belfast and Anne Frank

The setting is a synagogue – the Synagogue of the Arts in lower Manhattan, to be exact – and the time is Yom Kippur. What better locale, what perfect timing, what awesome setting, for a play about atonement! *This Is What We Sang* is one of those rare experiences in theater – when the spiritual, the aesthetic, the human are welded together into one reality.

It is the story of the Belfast Jews and takes on the fortunes and misfortunes, yearnings and regrets, of one family – fictionalized and in dramatic form. This deeply moving drama covers three generations – from the 1850s, when eastern European Jewish emigrants first arrived in Belfast – to current descendants now in America.

Lev leaves Latvia and arrives on English shores, the dupe of the ship's captain. He believes he has landed in America as planned. But soon, while making the best of his circumstances, he learns that work there is nonexistent and opportunities are better in Belfast. Thus he heads to Northern Ireland and begins a new dynasty. Ultimately the Jewish community will reach its peak in 1964 with over 1,500 inhabitants and a new synagogue (but dwindling to less than 100 today).

So much for Belfast Jewish history. But what about the play's history? For that, we turn to the playwright, director and five superb performers. For starters, Paula McFetridge is artistic director of Kabosh, a Belfast-based company that focuses on site-specific productions (hence the synagogue location for *This Is What We*

*Sang*). Secondly, Kabosh commissioned Dublin playwright Gavin Kostick to come to Belfast to develop the project, which resulted in this remarkable play.

As to the players themselves, memorable performances are offered by Lalor Roddy as Lev; Ali White as his wife, Hannah; Jo Donnelly as the daughter, Sissy; and Paul Kennedy as the American grandson, Bill. Alan Burke is Lev's brother, Saul. Unlike the others, Burke is a noted musician who sings his every line. Music, not words, is his contribution. Yet that liturgical music is enormously important in creating the right ambience. We are in a holy place, sharing a holy – yet wholly human – experience.

At the same time, we learn that it is not an easy history. Each family member recounts his own regrets, justifications, and repentances. Though it is a series of monologues (no interaction or dialogue on stage), the impact on each other, the strong conflicts, come through amazingly.

*This Is What We Sang* is one of 16 plays offered in New York's month-long Festival of Irish Theatre, wherein 13 theaters and arts-related venues played host. The Festival is a joyous cultural offering, to which *This Is What We Sang* adds its own memorable voice.

#### The Diary of Anne Frank

Though many of us have seen the play – or the film – or the musical – umpteen times, it still remains unique – and uniquely moving. Now at the Westport (Conn.) Country Playhouse, it brings to life the Holocaust era as played out by one Jewish family. The play, based on a true story culled from a teen-age girl's diary, has gone on to considerable recognition. And Anne Frank herself has become a symbol of hope and strength in a horrific period of history.

To reiterate, for any one who has somehow missed this tale: It began after the Nazis invaded Holland. In 1942, Otto Frank, a factory owner in Amsterdam, hid his family and several other Jews in the factory's "secret annex." Eventually there would be eight



Molly Ephraim as Anne Frank in *The Diary of Anne Frank* at Westport Country Playhouse. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.

occupants in the tight quarters. With the support of Miep Gies, a non-Jewish friend, they would survive two years, until someone betrayed them to the Nazis.

After the war, the family's lone survivor, Otto Frank, returned to Amsterdam, where he found his daughter's diary. Thus began the "Diary" saga, with its struggles and eventual success. After its publication, the diary would move on to the Broadway stage (the 1956 original by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, then the Wendy Kesselman adaptation in 1997). Beyond that were two Hollywood films and 30 million copies of the book sold worldwide.

And now the Kesselman adaptation surfaces at the Playhouse, in a thoughtful, well-crafted production. In contrast to its predecessor, this Kesselman version cuts closer to the truth, with emphasis on the Franks' Jewishness and their sense of inevitability.

Director Gerald Freedman's vision for the play is brooding, powerful, and enormously empathetic. And he manages to create a claustrophobic interior, a "hidden annex," despite the breadth of the Playhouse stage. That problem is resolved by set designer John Ezell's marvelously cluttered set. Separate tiny rooms for its eight occupants have been carved out of the clutter of daily living – and scenes move quickly from one tiny space to another (although, alas, the story does drag in the second act). Indeed, there is a strong foreboding and gritty reality to the staging, costuming (Willa Kim), lighting (Travis McHale), sound effects (Rusty Wandall), and the performance itself. Eight people strive for normalcy, as they fear the inevitable knock at the door and hear the transport trains rumbling to the East.

Freedman has in fact gathered an excellent cast, topped by the radiant Molly Ephraim as Anne. Ephraim brings a vibrant quality to the scene, as she

interacts with her fellow tenants. She creates an Anne who is impulsive, outspoken, and always in command of the stage. At the same time, she gives depth to the character, ranging through Anne's gamut of emotions. Supporting her are players who create unique individuals, even as they work well in ensemble.

This *Diary* is an absorbing piece that proves, once again, to be a valuable history lesson. Don't bring the kiddies, but teenagers – and adults – will profit from it.

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



Front row, from left, Monica West (Miep Gies), Lou Liberatore (Mr. Dussel), Lauren Culpepper (Margot Frank), Steve Vinovich (Mr. Van Daan), Molly Ephraim (Anne Frank); back row, standing from left, Felicity Jones (Edith Frank), Mitch Greenberg (Otto Frank), Mimi Lieber (Mrs. Van Daan) and Ari Brand (Peter Van Daan) in *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.



Paul Kennedy as the American grandson, Bill, in *This Is What We Sang*. Photo courtesy: Kabosh Theatre Co.

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# Letter to the Editor

**Freedom of the Press** – The Post & Opinion encourages readers to send letters. All letters to the editor should be addressed to The Jewish Post & Opinion, 1111 East 54th Street, Suite 119, Indianapolis, IN 46220, or by e-mail: [jpostopinion@gmail.com](mailto:jpostopinion@gmail.com).

## Jewish “relief” ship headed for Gaza

You gotta love the Jewish peaceniks. They play the media like a finely tuned Stradivarius. It doesn't matter that they never actually accomplish anything. I guess just feeling good about themselves is all that matters. They seem to be good people, but they are clueless, except when it comes to how to grandstand for a sound-bite hungry media.

There are two important aspects to this situation: First, when Israel sees a security threat, it doesn't act symbolically. It uses force – sometimes lots of force. Do these good folks really believe that Israel can be shamed or embarrassed into lifting the Gaza blockade? Ridiculous. Israel will back off the blockade when she sees that it is no longer necessary as a security precaution. Further, if these people were genuinely interested in aiding the people of Gaza, I'm not sure, but they probably could have bought many times the goods they are sending for the cost of sailing that ship. They could have sent goods in by conventional means, via Israel or Egypt. But the media wouldn't have paid any attention to that.

Second, the fundamental dispute with the Palestinians and the Arab/Muslim world isn't about a Gaza blockade, or settlements, or an antiterrorist wall, or water rights or a right (or lack thereof) of return, or Jerusalem. And it is certainly not about a meaningless abstraction like “justice for Palestinians.” But the Jewish peace movement revels in that abstraction like it owns it.

What our peace loving friends fail to comprehend is that until there is a final and universally recognized border between Israel and Arab Palestine, there can never be peace between those two states. That border, wherever it is finally established is the sine qua non of a peace settlement. The cause of peace would be better served if the “peace” movement would concentrate its efforts on something that has a chance of bringing about what is really necessary for peace. One could simply laugh off a boatload of harmless stuff heading for Gaza, but I believe what they are doing is foolish, counterproductive and ultimately harmful to the cause of peace. They are giving “aid and comfort” to the Arab rejectionists who will use them in propaganda efforts to slander, defame and delegitimize Israel. They are simply adding another weapon to the rejectionist's arsenal.

Irwin J. Prince, Indianapolis, Ind.

## Islamic Mosque

It was ironic, to put it politely, that Rabbis Dennis and Sandy Sasso, titled their Sept. 8 editorial “Take hint from history and let the mosque be built.” Because I am a paid historian, I've taken a look at history – past, present and especially recent – to come to the conclusion that the “Park 51” mosque cannot be built.

In the Sassos' article, they relied upon an obscure incident from temple and a completely irrelevant story from history 400 years ago; otherwise, the rabbis essentially called mosque opponents “bigots” or accused them of “hatred no reasonable citizen would condone.” What they suggest in the spirit of pluralism is, in reality, code speak for radical politics. Following that lead, calling your opponents names is easier.

This was troubling, since the Sassos are unfortunately notorious in Indianapolis for their less than friendly views toward evangelical Christians: the staunchest American supporters of Israel and the only allies we Jews have had in 5771 years. It appears that the Sassos and others would sacrifice the support of millions of good-hearted Christians because they want to discuss Jesus with them. That is antithetical and converse to fundamental tenets of Judaism. Sadly, I cannot tell you how many times I have had to reassure my well-meaning, philo-Semitic Christian friends and colleagues that Mr. and Mrs. Sasso's views do not represent most Jews I know.

I've personally yet to read actual facts or background quotes by gullible columnists, smug professors, and other supporters of this Victory Mosque, because few of them seem to have any interest in deeper thought. Park 51's most insolent supporters totally ignore the commonsense objections of ordinary Americans, and instead cut off debate by spouting platitudes, and more often, deeming opponents racists and “Islamophobes.” That is completely anti-free speech, but an age-old strategy implemented by those who cannot debate the facts. It's akin to what's happened recently when Jewish speakers attempt to discuss Israel on college campuses, and are shouted down by Muslim students and left-wing academics.

Contrary to the ad hominem tactics of its proponents, I've been impressed by the total absence of bigotry or intolerance from the mosque's detractors. For example, Rabbi Ben Sendrow, new rabbi at Congregation Shaarey Tefilla in Indianapolis, opposes the mosque simply because “this is where Islamic extremists killed thousands of Americans, innocent people who were targeted for death.” The ADL – which rightly seeks more information on funding – calls Park 51 “counterproductive to the healing process.”

The mainstream media, in typical disingenuous fashion, has completely refused to investigate Park 51's leaders' ties to militant Islamic and Wahhabist groups at home and abroad. Thankfully, in 2010, our “new media” has conducted

probing investigations by reporters, bloggers and watchdog organizations, allowing perspicacious citizens to learn the facts about the proposed mosque's anti-American leadership.

But there are basic and serious objections, namely:

1. *What are the core beliefs of Feisal Abdul Rauf on crucial issues, especially Israel?*

2. *Isn't the erection of this Islamic Mosque so close to where thousands of Americans were incinerated in the name of Islam distasteful?*

1. Rauf is a vocal supporter of sharia (Muslim) law, saying governments that do not employ brutal sharia law are “unjust.” Despite what the Sassos penned, this intolerant cleric stated as recently as March that he opposes interfaith dialogue. He also has refused to label Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations numerous times.

In a 60 Minutes interview that aired a fortnight after the 9/11 terror attacks, Rauf said, “I wouldn't say that the United States deserved what happened, but U.S. policies were an accessory to the crime that happened.” Rauf's elaborated on another occasion, “We tend to forget, in the West, that the United States has more Muslim blood on its hands than al Qaida has on non-Muslims.”

This is astonishingly false, yet similar to President Obama's infamous Cairo speech just after taking office. In fact, the opposite is true: America bled for Muslim freedom the past few decades, engaging in five military campaigns that resulted in the liberation of Muslim people – in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Those with any common sense won't be shocked to learn Imam Rauf supports the destruction of Israel. The media hails this Western-educated radical as a moderate – the Sassos focus on “a swimming pool and gym, classrooms, a restaurant” in his Mosque – but Rauf has repeatedly spoken out in favor of a *one-state solution* to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The phrase “one-state solution” is used by Islamic extremists to advocate the destruction of Israel. Rauf has never admitted Israel has a right to exist. In essence, his one-state solution has the same general aims as Hitler's final solution: eradication of world Jewry.

Feisal Rauf also stated that there will not be peace until Israel ceases to exist. The Imam claims Israel is destined to collapse. “In a true peace, Israel will, in our lifetimes, become one more Arab country,” he claims. Lastly, Rauf is the single biggest donor to the viciously anti-Semitic Free Gaza Movement.

As they've refused to permit rational discussion, our imperious media has yet to ascertain the vast majority of those opposed to the project support Rauf's *legal* right to build his monstrosity. Unlike the Islamic Mideast, we have freedom here thanks to our military and American values. It's the geography and the sources of funding to which most

object or have questions.

2. Needless to add, families of 9/11 victims deem this “a gross insult to the memory of those killed on that terrible day.” Moderate Muslim leaders call this “the worst form of misjudgment.” They add, “Ground Zero shouldn't be about promoting Islam. It's the place where war was declared on Americans.” If moderate Muslims oppose the project, is Rauf really a moderate Muslim?

Not surprisingly in these Orwellian times, Jewish clergy like the Sassos have been at the forefront of *supporting* a magnanimous building for the religion whose prime target of attack for 1,500 years has been Jews. Meanwhile, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, a tiny building destroyed by the terrorist attacks, recently learned their building will not be rebuilt after eight years of attempts. Will the Sassos fight for these good-hearted Christians? No group should be more opposed to Cordoba House than Jews, yet the opposite is true. We are often our own worst enemy.

On Yom Hashoah, if we'd truly never forget and concern ourselves with the *modern* Nazi movement throughout the Middle East and Europe, we'd be better off. If as Americans, we'd never forgotten what happened nine short years ago, we'd avoid having this insane “debate” about a “Victory” Mosque on conquered land. And yes, that's exactly how Muslims view it.

Historically, Islam has plundered thousands of synagogues, plus other religions' temples. Then, in the name of jihad, Islam claims these religious places around the globe as their own mosques forever. The original Cordoba mosque was built on the ruins of a Christian church in the Spanish city of Cordoba after the Muslim conquest of Spain in the 8th century.

Time to drop the multiculturalist balderdash and be serious: Allowing a mosque at a place Muslims practitioners destroyed would be a decisive victory for Islam and misogynistic sharia law over the U.S. Constitution and America's time-honored democracy.

But the ruling class has trampled our First Amendment rights and decided debating life and death matters is “racist.” And we are all in more danger because of their arrogance. Thankfully, they're the same 30 percent who argue against sensible American opinion on other current matters like immigration, health care, the economy, and Israel. They have little credibility.

And supporters of Imam Rauf's mosque like the Sassos wonder why 70 percent of Americans are suspicious and upset? They're angry over condescending elitism and insidious political correctness that's destroying our country. The Islamists know PC is our weakness, and therefore laugh at us. Will they have the last laugh? Groundbreaking for Park 51 will purposely take place on the ten-year anniversary of the terrorist 9/11 attacks.

Ari J. Kaufman, Camby, Ind.



## The Fourth Shrine

Dear Dennis and Sandy Sasso:

This is in response to your column titled: "Take hint from history and let the mosque be built" that appeared in the Sept. 8 issue of the newspaper. As a former congregant, I was not surprised to learn that you have stepped into the fray and publicly expressed your views on the question of the planned Ground Zero Islamic community center or, as some have tagged it, the Manhattan Mosque. I am writing to offer a response. A response that I hope will provide some balance to the views you articulated.

Given the limited number of Hungarian Holocaust survivors among the members of Beth-El Zedeck, I am likely able to guess the identity of the "kind gentleman" who spoke up at the Sabbath discussion you cited. As you know, my family was also, for the most part, wiped out during the monumental genocide of Hungary's Jews at the hands of the Nazi regime. It is in their name, and in the name of my late parents who miraculously survived the carnage, that I speak. While the "gentleman" may be kind, he is, sadly, misguided and misinformed.

To compare the Hungarian Jewish population, caught in the lethal grip of the "Final Solution," to the American Islamic community is ludicrous beyond expression. Likewise, to equate the brutality of Naziism – that often engaged in "reprisals," punishing entire villages for the acts of a single brave individual – with the sentiments and sensitivities of the 9/11 victim's family members, goes beyond the pale of common decency!

What I find most stunning about this egregious analogy, is that the "kind gentleman" seems to feel that the solitary action of the perpetrator who committed an act of violence against the Nazis, was, in fact, a misdeed worthy of punishment, rather than the courageous act of defiance and heroic self-defense that it actually was. He points out that it is wrong to "... blame everyone for the acts of a few," as if resistance against the evil of the Third Reich is blameworthy, rather than commendable.

While the subjects of "guilt by association" and "collective guilt" have been discussed for decades, there is an inconvenient truth that lurks beneath the surface of this story. My family was also mercilessly murdered, just like the family of the "kind gentleman." But in my family's case, there was no resistance fighter in whose name they were being punished. They were killed for the same reason as the gentleman's family and the rest of the six million. They were guilty. Guilty of being weak. The "kind gentleman's" family would have perished anyway, as did mine, even if there had been no punishable action by a single brave individual.

Throughout European history, the anti-Semite has targeted Jews because of our weakness. And the affirmation of that weakness only provided more justification for the hatred. In the quasi-social Darwinism that characterized the

Nazi mentality, a people who allowed themselves to be passively murdered by the millions, with only nominal resistance, do not deserve to live. Nazis ideologues saw themselves as harbingers of social husbandry, pruning away the weak and defective branches of humanity so the golden Aryan race could flourish.

In addition to weakness, my family – and the "kind gentleman's" family – were also guilty of denial. They, along with millions of other Jews and non-Jews, refused to accept the fact that Hitler meant what he said, and was not speaking figuratively, when he called for an end to "International Jewry." Instead of militant resistance, those who were not able to flee, deluded themselves in the shelter of tolerance and false hope that "things will get better, if we just wait this out."

Today, those who blind themselves to the similar anti-Zionist diatribes emanating from current Islamic fascist regimes are, sadly, guilty of the same sort of self-delusion as the Jews of Hungary in 1944. Figures such as Michael Bloomberg, Thomas Friedman and President Obama are simply not "taking a hint from history."

As I have pointed out in the past, the building of the Manhattan Mosque is not without precedent. What comes to mind most readily was the Carmelite nunnery built next to the Auschwitz death camp in the late 1980s. The outrage expressed by that particular act of insensitivity finally resulted in the closing of the order by Pope John Paul II in 1993 (although a large wooden cross remains behind). Likewise, there are Shinto shrines within walking distance of Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, and Protestant churches all through Hiroshima (the pilot of the Enola Gay and Harry S. Truman were both Baptists). What's different about putting up a center celebrating the faith of the perpetrators of our nation's bloodiest terrorist attacks adjacent to the site of their heinous crime? A lot.

One need only to look to the Western Wall in Jerusalem and note the proximity of the Al Aqsa Mosque and the so-called Dome of the Rock, to understand how Islam regards sites of vanquish and victory. While Jerusalem is never mentioned in the Koran (Moslems say that it is "alluded to" 70 times, however), it does have some meaning in traditional Islam (for a while Moslems prayed facing Jerusalem before Mohammed directed them to turn toward Mecca). Jerusalem did not begin to gain in true importance until after it was wrested away from the Christians in 638 BCE by the Umayyads. The Christians had been using the Temple Mount as a dumpsite in compliance with the directive from the Book of Matthew "that not one stone will be left here upon another." Caliph Umar cleaned up the site, exposed the rock from which Mohammed supposedly ascended to heaven after the "night journey" – and erected the first Al Aqsa mosque as a permanent reminder of Islam's triumph over both Christian and

Jewish sovereignty in Jerusalem. Today the Al Aqsa mosque is regarded by all Muslims as the third holiest site in Islam. There are many who fear that the Manhattan Mosque may become the fourth.

Are members of the so-called moderate Muslim majority being blamed for the terrorist acts of a few extremists, as the "kind gentleman" would have us believe? Or does their unwillingness to step forward and condemn the terrorism perpetrated by their co-religionists earn them sufficient guilt without having to be painted by anyone else's brush?

While guilt by association is wrong, what about guilt due to crimes of omission? I'm speaking specifically of the heinous attacks committed last week against four innocent Israeli motorists near Ramallah by Hamas butchers in an effort to de-rail the peace conference underway in Washington. Where was the imam you mentioned, Feisal Abdul Rauf, then? Did he or any other major Muslim leader speak out in condemnation?

Another example: Three weeks ago religious leaders of all three major faiths were asked to attend a conference sponsored by an upscale Russian Jewish group (Limmud FSU) in the Hamptons (<http://tinyurl.com/2wmbjllj>). Rabbis, priests and ministers all attended. But not a single Moslem cleric could be found who would be willing to set foot inside this Jewish sponsored event.

Proponents argue that the Islamic community center will serve as a bridge to understanding among America's various religious subcultures. Really? Has the Al Aqsa mosque performed that function in Israel? If building bridges of understanding is the goal, why not begin by opening a Jewish Community Center that contains a small synagogue in downtown Riyadh, Saudi Arabia? The reason that's never going to happen is that those who are urging us to be tolerant happen to be the most intolerant people on the planet. There are no churches or synagogues to be found in any part of Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of most of the 9/11 terrorists. The spectacle of a Saudi-financed Muslim cleric arguing that the GZ Mosque should be built in the name of interfaith understanding is the height of holy hypocrisy!

The question boils down to this: By pointing out that the perpetrators of the crimes of Sept. 11 were all devout Moslems, are we punishing the many on account of the few as the "kind gentleman" would have us believe? I would contend that the answer is "No." No more so than pointing out that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were mostly baptized as Lutherans, Calvinists and Roman Catholics. And I'm not just speaking about Germans. The Holocaust was fueled and facilitated by a millennia-old artesian well-spring of anti-Jewish hatred. Hatred that was promoted by the Church over the centuries for its own purposes of power. Hitler was savvy enough to realize that by tapping into

this motherlode of hate, he could mobilize Europe to do his bidding and exterminate the Jew once and for all. Ahmadinejad, Hamas, Al Quda and the Arab Brotherhood all realize the value of inciting the powerful forces of anti-Semitism. The connection between Auschwitz and Christianity is every bit as valid as the connection between 9/11 and Islam.

Would the "kind gentleman" object to "punishing" the Carmelite order, representing "the many" good Christians, by forbidding them to build a facility on the ground where his family members were cruelly put to death by "the few" evil Christians? My guess is that despite his objections to "collective guilt," the gentleman did not condone such a thing when it came to his own family members.

Putting up a Christian convent next to the site of the largest Nazi death factory was a stick in the eye to those of us who remain to tell the tale. Isn't it the same for those who mourn the loss of loved ones on 9/11 to witness the erection of a Moslem mosque in the shadow of where their loved ones were vaporized at the hands of Islamic extremists? If the "kind gentleman" objected to the placement of the Carmelite order next to Auschwitz, he cannot now claim to be so tolerant when it's someone else's innocent family members who are being viciously murdered.

Did the nunnery have a legal right to build a convent next to Auschwitz? Is it legal to construct a Shinto shrine near Pearl Harbor? A church in Hiroshima? Of course it is. No one questions the legal right of any religious group to construct a facility that is in keeping with the prevailing zoning regulations. This is not a question of religious freedom at all. It is a question of sensitivity and good judgment. Sadly, these remain in pitifully short supply these days.

The memory of the victims of 9/11 will not be honored, as some would have us believe, by the magnanimous religious tolerance in evidence once the Manhattan Mosque opens its doors. If I and the "kind gentleman" could somehow invoke the ghosts of our family members who were murdered by Christians during the Holocaust and ask them: "They want to build a Christian church next to where you were killed. Should they do it?" I believe that the answer would be delivered in two words: Never Again! The ghosts of 9/11's victims would no doubt say the same thing.

*Peter Weisz, West Palm Beach, Fla.*

## Support for Sassos' Op-Ed

I am delighted there are the Sassos of the world and others like them.

*G.P.T., Indianapolis*

I enjoyed reading the editorial in the last issue by Rabbis Dennis and Sandy Sasso. It was sensitive, compassionate, and a good example of "The American Way."

*Elizabeth (Liz) Goldsmith, Indianapolis* ★





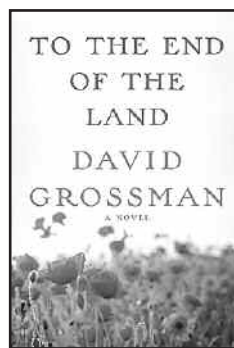
## Book Review

By Rabbi Israel Zoberman

### A Woman Fleeing from Notification

*To the End of the Land.* By David Grossman. Translated by Jessica Cohen. Alfred A. Knopf. 2010. 582pp. \$27.95.

Israeli poet Hamutal Bar-Yosef offers the keen observation that Israeli literature is, "a very brilliant and to my mind the most reliable achievement of Zionism." This proud reflection and accolade is supported by the remarkable accom-



plishments of author David Grossman, a first-rate representative of the most fertile Israeli literary scene birthed indeed by Zionism's renewal of the Hebrew language and Jewish life on the ancestral soil where they first flourished.

Grossman's tome, heavy in size and theme, is the crown creation of one who is also known as a peace activist, long calling for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. One wonders though about the given English title to his well-translated book, *To the End of the Land*, whereas the original Hebrew title, *Ishah Borachat Mibsoerah (A Woman Fleeing from Notification)*, more accurately describes the book's major theme. As the Hebrew title conveys, Ora, the novel's leading protagonist, who was fearing for the life of her soldier son [Ofer] following a dark premonition, decided to flee from the team that comes knocking on the door to notify an Israeli family of a military loss.

She regards herself as the first woman refusing to be notified, reminding us of those refusing to serve in the occupied territories as soldiers. Obviously, both Ora's refusal to accept an excruciatingly painful notice, which is a product of her motherly intuition, and running away from it, even when substantiated, hoping to avert it, are responses fraught with unreasonable behavior. Perhaps the author's intent is to impress us with the element of absurdity in Israel's complex scenario, challenging the psychological well-being of those caught up in its daily tensions and uncertain existence, and who are in need of emotional escape routes.

Ora's journey of flight (hence the English title) is a tour-de-force of both characters discovering on foot the captivating landscape of Eretz Yisrael, along with the heart-wrenching dotted memorials for fallen Israeli soldiers

throughout Israel's bloodied existence. (I was jolted coming upon one of the mentioned heroic victims, Captain Nadav Klein, with whom I grew up on Mt. Carmel, and who was killed in action on 1969.) Ironically, even as Ora attempts to deny her son's contemplated death, she keeps running into constant reminders of death's stubborn presence in a land that seemingly refuses or is unable to let go of its young sacrifices.

Ora's husband, Ilan, and eldest son, Adam, from whom she is a bit estranged, happened to be traveling in South America as many Israelis do, yearning for Ilan's Army buddy and her own past lover, Avram, who is Ofer's biological father, with whom to share her dilemma. Avram got stuck in the Sinai and at war when betting with Ilan who would go on leave to be with Ora. Quite a plot that is not unlikely in Israel's colorful and complex reality and which is unlike any other.

Avram, who begrudgingly accompanies Ora, still suffers mental and physical wounds following capture by the Egyptians during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. As long as Ora engages Avram in conversation with the progression of Ofer's life, which he knows little about, she feels that their son is protected along with her own being.

When Ofer was six years old, he was curious about the number of both Israelis and Arabs, and with Ora's sharing the disparity between the two, he panicked, yelling that the Arabs would kill them. Consequently Ofer got sick and recovered only when his mother wisely took him to the Latrun Armored Corps Memorial Center, near Jerusalem, showing Ofer the many exhibited tanks and thus calming Ofer through Israel's military might.

When Ofer grew up, and was serving in the territories, Ora warned him not to shoot the rubber-coated bullets at the stone-throwing Palestinian youth. She was primarily concerned that it would adversely affect her son psychologically, though later, Ora feared that her motherly advice might endanger him in actual battle. Chilling is also Ofer's insistence that his duty at the check posts was to block a terrorist at the cost of his own life if necessary.

Faithful to the author's center-left political orientation is Ora's lashing out at past Israeli prime ministers, surprisingly including Rabin despite the 1993 Oslo Accords, and his assassination, for doing little for the sake of peace. Eerily, Grossman wrote the book while his own son Uri served in the armored corps, mostly in the territories, discussing with his father the unfolding book's drama when on leave.

Grossman hoped that its writing would protect his son just as Ora regarded her flight as a way to safeguard Ofer. On Aug. 12, 2006, during the Second Lebanon War's waning hours Uri's tank was hit and all its four staff members, including Uri, were killed.



## As I Heard It

By Morton Gold

### Avishai Cohen CD; music/money and religion

In the first half of this column, I will briefly discuss the CD featuring Avishai Cohen/Aurora released by EMI (no number). While there is a booklet with the CD, it contains no translations of the texts and contains some photos of Mr. Cohen along with some credits and thank yous.

When this reviewer listens to a CD, he listens for different things simultaneously. First of all, there is the music. In this regard, there is the tune itself and then is the arrangement of the tune. Then the featured artist and lastly the other performers are considered. Sometimes the audio quality of the CD is a consideration as well.



With regard to this CD, Mr. Cohen is a gifted performer on the acoustic bass as well as the electric bass. Somewhere, sometime, someone suggested that he should also sing. To be sure, he does sing musically, and he surely can carry a tune. In spite of what one can hear in the average synagogue, the ability to sing (or carry a tune) is not a particularly significant achievement. His voice is small, breathy and perhaps acceptable in small measure, but not really as worthy of being featured in a full CD. To paraphrase a 16th-century diplomat's remark, he does sing well, for an instrumentalist that is!

Mr. Cohen is responsible for arranging all the songs on the CD. I would (respectfully) observe that repeating a phrase indefinitely, an ostinato bass line



Rabbi Dr. Israel Zoberman, spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach, Va., was born in 1945 in Chu, Kazakhstan, to Polish survivors. From 1947 to 1949 he lived in Germany's Wetzlar Displaced Persons Camp. ★

consisting of four chords and some peculiar resolutions, often leads to a state bordering somewhere between sleep and consciousness. On the plus side, two tracks have limited or absent "singing," and these are the best and even the most distinguished tracks on the CD. The instrumental performers all play very well and do what they were asked to do, especially Shai Maestro at the keyboard.

While it may be a stretch to state that Mr. Cohen was at times inspired by Bach, it is not a stretch at all to state that many passages were "inspired" by Chick Corea and perhaps Stevie Wonder. I suspect that in time Mr. Cohen may find his own style as well as refining his own (instrumental) voice.

The performers featured on this disc include the following: Avishai Cohen on vocals, double bass, electric bass, (Steinway) Piano; Shai Maestro on Steinway and Wurlitzer piano; Itamar Doari on percussion; Amos Hoffman on oud; Karen Malka, vocals (Her part is modest as is her voice, but she does compliment and blend very well with Mr. Cohen); Stephanie Belmondo on trumpet, flugelhorn; Lionel Belmondo on flute.

The disc was recorded in December of 2009.

In the promotional flyer that came with the CD (P.O. 1788, Bloomington, IN 47402-1788), no author was identified. I would take issue with two phrases used. (1) He can take the Sephardic melodies....and make them "groove." (2) He loves drawing on Latin "grooves." One suspects that one more or less understands what is meant here. However, since this is English rather than Yiddish for example, the word (grooves) cannot or should not be used as a noun as well as an adverb. In the latter phrase, does "grooves" mean a melody, rhythm, genre, style or what? In the former does the word mean "make them (the melodies) lively, contemporary or what have you"? Beats me! You figure it out.

#### Music/money and religion

One composer observed that when bankers met, they frequently discussed musical matters. However when composers met, money was the topic of conversation! Music and money, jointed at the hip to be sure. Please add to this mixture the ingredient of religion.

In a recent article by Lisa Miller, she went on to *kvetch* about the high cost of things like kosher meat, temple memberships and so on. In a different context, I recall a phrase from President Kennedy's inaugural address, to wit: "We will bear any cost, bear any burden"...and add the phrase "to insure Jewish survival." One can only conjecture how many of "our people" would subscribe to that idea.

Orthodox couples normally have large families by today's standards. Their thinking as I understand it is to make up for those

(see Gold, page NAT 15)



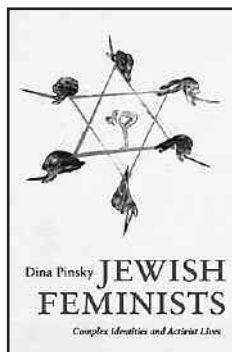
# Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

## Jewish identity among feminist women and men

*Jewish Feminists.* By Dina Pinsky. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010. 168 Pages. \$20.

The author of this interesting book, Dina Pinsky, is an assistant professor of sociology at Arcadia University in Glenside, Penn. She specializes in research methods, gender studies, and social identities. Pinsky is especially interested in Jewish identity among feminist women and men, having developed this focus as an Orthodox Jewish woman who felt that Judaism and feminism were contradictory. When she studied for her doctorate, she simultaneously worked for a certificate in women's studies and learned that many Jewish feminists attributed their being feminists to their Jewish identity. Since this contradicted her own experience, she decided to learn more about these Jewish feminists and this led to the present book.



Pinsky interviewed 25 Jewish women and five Jewish men, all of whom were what she calls "second-wave feminists," people who participated in the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as distinguished from early feminists who were preoccupied with the battle for women's suffrage. The interviewees constituted what is called by researchers a "convenience sample." They volunteered by responding to postings on e-mail lists or they agreed to participate after Pinsky obtained their names from others she interviewed. Thus, as she clearly indicates, this group cannot be considered representative of all Jewish feminists and, therefore, generalizations cannot be drawn. Her more modest objective is "to examine multiple discourses of Jewishness as they intersect with discourses of feminism."

The findings from the research are presented in four chapters. First, Pinsky describes those feminists who achieved reconciliation with their Jewish identity by working to change Jewish religious practices by becoming rabbis, rewriting liturgy, and becoming synagogue leaders. She calls them "Torah Warriors." Others, described in the second chapter, were secular or cultural Jews, identified "with the Jewish people, culture, ethics, and history" but not with the Jewish religion. They do not belong to synagogues and

many of them are hostile toward religion. However, they value the Jewish emphasis on social justice, which they see as being echoed in the Jewish feminist movement.

The third chapter describes the experiences of some participants in the study who encountered anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in the feminist movement. Hostile attitudes were especially expressed in international women's conferences, starting with first one in 1975 when Zionism was linked with apartheid and with other expressions of racism and oppression. Five years later, this hostility was formalized when the conference adopted by a wide margin (94-4) the infamous "Zionism-equals-racism" resolution. The experiences of Pinsky's interviewees "reveal a dance between being an insider and an outsider in feminist communities."

Finally, Pinsky devotes a chapter to the five male feminists she interviewed men who referred to themselves as "profeminist men." This somewhat problematic discussion considers "Jewish masculinity and its relationship to feminism." She concludes "that Jewish norms of masculinity are in line with feminist critiques of masculinity." This muddy generalization violates Pinsky's early assertion that her limited sample precludes the possibility of making overarching statements. Since she interviewed just five men, this is by far the weakest link in Pinsky's presentation.

In a brief concluding statement, Pinsky asserts that her study turned out to focus on "narratives of identity" since many of her informants claimed that "Jewishness and feminism are both congruent and dissonant" with attitudes that vary through time. Perhaps her most important finding is that "Just as gender matters for understanding Jewish identity, Jewishness matters for understanding gender." She has made good use of the information she collected through her interviews to add to our understanding of American Jews and the relationship between Jewishness and feminism. As these identities cross each other, they can produce a drive for equal treatment of women in Judaism or they can lead to a rejection of Jewishness. In either case, there are changes as the women grow older, reflecting the complicated nature of Jewish identity through the various stages of the aging process. Pinsky has contributed significantly to our understanding the intricacies of this convoluted issue.

## Thought-provoking story takes place in Israel

*Wherever You Go.* By Joan Leegant. New York: W.W.Norton, 2010. 253 Pages. \$23.95.

In 2004, Joan Leegant published a collection of short stories, *An Hour in Paradise*, that earned well-merited

plaudits for her. Now, she has written her first novel and it should embellish her reputation. The scene for the new book is Israel, which is well known to Leegant since she studied there. Also, beginning in 2007, she has been spending half the year teaching writing at Bar Ilan University near Tel Aviv. Making good use of her knowledge about Israel and especially about Americans who spend time there, she has fashioned a thought-provoking and credible story.

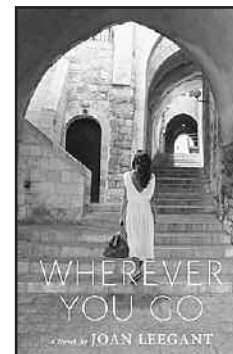
To her credit, Leegant does not deal with the Jerusalem Syndrome, which has attracted considerable attention by impacting individuals who are so overwhelmed by the encounter with Jerusalem that they psychotically see themselves as biblical personalities or as emissaries from God. Instead, she features three different characters who are profoundly affected by being in Israel but certainly not to the point of becoming mentally ill.

Yona Stern is a 30-year-old woman who is returning to Israel after a ten-year lapse to visit her estranged sister. Mark Greenglass is a teacher who attributes his salvation from drug addiction to his embrace of Orthodoxy and his settling in Jerusalem. Aaron Blinder, son of a famous Jewish writer, has dropped out of the semester-abroad program that brought him to Jerusalem and is now involved with a right-wing group that is determined to expand Israeli settlements on the West Bank. These people are unknown to each other and have nothing to do with each other until a violent explosion unexpectedly and dramatically brings them together.

The lives and experiences of the characters are set forth episodically and fitfully as Leegant suddenly shifts from one to the other, requiring her readers to remember where she left off. Those who are patient will be rewarded by well-rounded portraits of complicated individuals, each of whom is unique but with some features that typify young Americans in Israel.

Yona's sister, Dena, lives in a militant West Bank settlement, near Hebron, with her second husband and her five children. Their community is named Givat Baruch, ostensibly for a young member of the Irgun who was hanged by the British in 1947 but really for Baruch Goldstein, the Israeli-American physician who killed 30 Muslims praying in the Cave of the Patriarchs before being killed himself. The troubled relationship between Yona and Dena is a story by itself, just as is the case with the experiences of the other two protagonists.

Mark Greenglass's ambivalence about his spirituality is painstakingly and painfully explored as he visits his parents in New



York and seeks out his one-time friend, Regina, with whom he shared an addiction to drugs. Failing to find her, he returns to Jerusalem where he is eventually affected by the explosion that altered his life.

Aaron wants to impress the leader of his group and his foolish effort to do so results in the fiery event that tragically brings Leegant's three protagonists side by side. She twists the strands of their experiences together, examining the profound impact of life in Israel on these individuals. Her inconclusive ending may irritate some readers while others will recognize the authenticity of her depicting life as failing to dot every "i" and cross every "t." The uncertainty she describe is enigmatic but ultimately realistic, lending the special power of validity to her story.

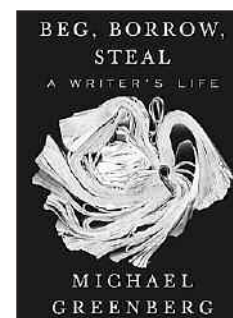
## Series of short autobiographical essays

*Beg, Borrow, Steal.* By Michael Greenberg. New York: Other Press, 2010. 217 Pages. \$19.95.

New Yorker Michael Greenberg has a long-standing determination to be a writer. To achieve this objective, he earned a living through a variety of jobs – bookstore clerk, cab driver, street peddler, furniture mover, interpreter, postal worker, and waiter, among others. These activities enabled him to write articles and essays that appear in a number of magazines and papers, including the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books*. He has also written scripts for movies and TV. In 2008, he published *Hurry Down Sunshine*, in which he told the story of his daughter's mental illness. The book was well received, being named by *Time* magazine as a best book for 2008. His new book, *Beg, Borrow, Steal*, will deservedly add to his reputation.

A series of 46 short autobiographical essays tells about Greenberg's experiences starting with the difficulties he had with his father and ending with his reminiscences about his maternal grandfather, a Russian-Jewish immigrant to America, who died before Greenberg was born. Greenberg's own father ran a scrap metal business, having inherited it from his father, a Jewish immigrant from the Ukraine. Greenberg's two brothers worked in the family business, but Greenberg rejected his father's offer to join them, much to the irritation of his father who predicted that his son's writing would get him nowhere. After his father died, his brothers sold the business and Greenberg describes his last visit to its site in the South Bronx.

(see Teicher, page NAT 15)







## My Kosher Kitchen

By SYBIL KAPLAN

### Sweet potatoes for fall

I'm not quite sure why, but I associate sweet potatoes with fall cooking. They were so cheap and so plentiful just before Sukkot, I brought home a bag of them, and then I started looking for recipes. Here are some dishes to try.

#### Sweet Potato Kugel (4-6 servings)

- 1 1/2 pounds peeled sweet potatoes
- 1 small onion
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 2 Tbsp. olive or canola oil
- 2 tsp. white sugar
- 1 tsp. brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. nutmeg

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a casserole with vegetable spray. Coarsely grate or process sweet potatoes and onion. Scrap into a mixing bowl. Add eggs, flour, baking powder, oil, sugars, cinnamon and nutmeg and blend. Spoon into casserole. Bake 45 minutes.

#### My Sabra Sweet Potatoes (6 servings)

- 6 oranges
- 1/4 cup Sabra
- 6 Tbsp. margarine
- 2 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. nutmeg
- 4 cooked, mashed sweet potatoes

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a baking dish. Cut oranges in half, scoop out pulp. In a saucepan, combine Sabra, margarine, sugar, salt and nutmeg. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 3 minutes. Add to mashed sweet potatoes. Place orange halves in baking dish. Spoon mixture into orange halves. Bake 30 minutes.

#### Glazed Apples and Sweet Potatoes (8 servings)

- 1/4 cup no-salt pareve margarine
- 3 Tbsp. brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/8 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp. cloves
- 2 Tbsp. sweet sherry or vermouth
- 3 large apples, cut into wedges
- 2 pounds parboiled sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a baking dish. Melt margarine and pour into a mixing bowl. Add brown sugar, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, sherry or



## Media Watch

By RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

### Sex and the City 2

Thrown together for fans to catch up with their favorite sisterhood of conspicuous consumers, *Sex and the City 2* took a long detour to the Middle East to cash in on culture clash and to genie-bottle culture war as a salve for personal conflicts.

Narrator Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker) is worried that her storybook marriage is becoming stale enough for straying. Miranda (Cynthia Nixon) wonders how to prevent a nasty boss from destroying her self-esteem and her home life. Charlotte (Kirsten Davis) can't decide whether her children, her nanny or her husband have caused her self-doubt and suspicions. Samantha (Kim Cattrall) wants to return to being an in-heat prowling tigress after settling for being a post-menstrual lap cat for a famous client.

Through her public relations work, Samantha is invited by a sheik to visit the United Arab Emirates to find ways to boost tourism there. She wheedles invitations for her three friends on this all-expenses-paid trip in a \$22,000 a night Abu Dhabi hotel suite. Hence the focus in this film on a Muslim country.

Anyone who knows the *Sex and the City* drill could guess immediately that the four girlfriends will offend patriarchal sensibilities and be proud of their defiance of their Arab hosts. Michael Patrick King's meandering screenplay gives the not-quite-ladies many opportunities for in-your-face self-righteousness, though he never tells us outright to what extent he applauds such behavior, or condemns it, or merely provides it for shallow entertainment purposes.

Suffice it to say that the four-crusaders-for-sexual-liberation do not

vermouth and blend. Layer apples and potatoes in casserole. Sprinkle nuts on top. Pour sauce on top. Bake for one hour.

#### Matchstick Sweet Potatoes (8 servings)

- 1 1/2 pounds peeled sweet potatoes
- 1/2 cup oil

Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut sweet potatoes into matchstick-thin strips. Heat oil in a nonstick frying pan. Cook potatoes in batches until lightly brown. Drain onto paper towels. Place on cookie sheet and keep warm in preheated oven until ready to serve.

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



make good ambassadors to the Muslim world, both in the film's (flimsy) "plot" and "themes," and in noncelluloid real world. Some critics have already expressed the fear of backlash against the "Great Satan" of ugly Americans, and have described this movie as a "terrorist recruitment video." But the fundamental truth depicted here is economic and not religious, and may also have not been intended – namely, that Arab oil-rich culture may pay lip service to Islam, but it offers decadence to those decadent enough to want to take advantage of such vacations while paying lip service to feminist and cosmopolitan values.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, *Sex and the City 2* is a self-help video regaling its own lead characters with the 1990s mantra, "You are treated the way you teach other people to treat you." It advises its own characters (and viewers?) to act up and to act out rather than fretting or whining or complaining. So passing the bottle with one's gal pal becomes the best manual for mothering. Over-priced designer shoes are touted as the best tracking device when one is in possible trouble with Muslim vigilantes. Expensive gifts appear to save a marriage mired in materialism, cliché, and old temptations. Defiant display of sexuality becomes the suggested way to protest against patriarchal society.

Yet for all its "noble" suggestions as to how to advance its "cause" or causes, *Sex and the City 2* imputes more dignity to the Muslim society than to its own main characters. The film's implication is that Abu Dhabi's society, however decadence-oriented, self-corrects its own excesses and those of its guests because of its strict morality. After all, as soon as the sheik gets wind of the "girls'" behavior, particularly of Samantha's, he cuts off the funding for their free jaunt. They have no self-control. A controlling society actually has workable moral standards. They need outside help, even from a society deemed oppressive, to maintain their moral standards.

In this film, the "ugly American" tourist operates in a moral vacuum and relies upon "committed relationships" (friends, lovers) to remain decent and even reliable. While the first *Sex and the City* film may have confused "love" and "wanting," it valued people over things and affirmed traditional values like compassion and forgiveness over selfishness. This second big screen

offering does just the opposite.

The Arab women in Abu Dhabi are depicted as wearing expensive designer clothes under their burkas. But the film suggests that their materialism is controlled by society, inspiring a kind of self-control that our "girls" do not have. Could Michael Patrick King be paying a tribute to Muslim society without realizing it?

Judaism and Jewish culture certainly do not receive much respect here. At the very beginning of the film, Carrie seeks a "nosh," suggesting both that the lead character "talks Yiddish" even if she isn't Jewish, and utilizes Jewish expressions when she wants to satisfy physical needs but not when she seeks moral direction. In the first *Sex and the City* film, Jewish expressions were treated as a source of morality and wisdom.

The beginning of this film devotes much time to a vulgar, over-the-top gay wedding between a Jewish man and his non-Jewish partner. This gay (partly "Jewish") wedding features a *chuppah*, a male chorus singing "Sunrise, Sunset" from *Fiddler on the Roof*, and Liza Minnelli officiating. In this obvious stereotype of gays and of Jewish weddings, King sees fit to include a stereotype of Jewish women (and mothers?). The Jewish "groom" ruminates early on that he always thought he'd marry some indulgent, chubby Jewish girl.

It almost seems that Michael Patrick King is acting out the reason that Western society, in his film at least, puts acting out above moral standards. After all, when Jewish tradition and morality are reduced to smirks and stereotypes and thereby neutralized at the very start of the picture, what underpinnings are left for Western morality?

Charlotte, perhaps pop culture's most famous convert to Judaism, avoids using her last name, Goldenblatt, while in Abu Dhabi because "It's the Middle East." When corrected, "It's the new Middle East," she responds: "It's the Middle East." It is interesting that this film's only (but in this case accurate) direct put-down of the Middle East comes from a reticent Jew-by-choice. Clearly, after displacing Jews and Judaism as a moral force in Western culture, the filmmaker uses his Jews to voice his skepticism about Muslim culture.

Rabbi Gertel has been media critic for The National Jewish P & O since 1979. ★









## Musings from Shiloh

BY BATYA MEDAD

### Hiking the Land of Israel

Today was the annual Avihu Keinan (HaYa"D) Chai Memorial March through the Land of Israel. I'll start off admitting that for family reasons, I could only be on the very beginning of the hike, and the pictures I took were from that, just the first kilometer or so. For a number of local Shiloh families, the annual hike through the Land is the highlight of their year. They come year after year with children of all ages.



Living here in a time when people travel in bulletproof vehicles, or at least plastic windows to reduce shattering, it's inspiring and invigorating to walk, doing our traveling the natural way. The more we walk the stronger we feel, both physically and spiritually. The Land keeps us going.

Remember that the Jewish People had been exiled many years and returned. During that time, the Land was desolate, like a depressed person without energy. That was the Land of Israel before Zionism encouraged Jews to return.

Today not only have Jews returned home from all over the world, but descendants of Jews who had been lost to our heritage and religion have also found their way to Judaism, the Land of Israel and Shiloh.



Avihu's bereaved family isn't broken. They've found new strength in themselves, the community and the Land.

### Passive Solar Heating

I have no exact memory of when/how/where I first heard about passive solar heating, but that's how I wanted our home to be designed and built. I may have heard of it when we lived in England for two years, and I read articles about using wind for electricity.

Soon after we moved to Shiloh, we chose a building plot and hired an architect. I told him what I wanted him to design. He hadn't heard of it, and this predated the internet making it very difficult to research the revolutionary concept of passive solar heating.

One thing I did know was that we had to live on the eastern slope of the mountain. That's where we were, by chance, in Bayit V'Gan, Jerusalem. Friends who lived on the western slope in a very similar apartment, and exposures suffered from terrible winds, and we didn't. I found the perfect spot. It was one of the lots prepared for a prefab, which had been detoured to another community, so it was on the water, sewer and electricity lines.

My mother found us a couple of books about passive solar heating, which I avidly read. She also contacted her brother's close friend from the PalYam, Israel's pre-state navy, which brought in Jewish survivors of the Nazi Holocaust against the British blockade. Gidon Rozen was one of Israel's earliest building engineers, and he visited us and gave the architect advice.

In the end, the house wasn't built with any special materials. Our contractor had even less experience than the architect, but he meticulously researched to provide the best insulation and construction possible. And, thank G-d, we've needed fewer repairs than any other homeowner.

Our house was designed to absorb the sunlight through well-placed double windows. And the guy who did the second set of windows, top-quality aluminum, had even less experience than the builder. You could say that the house was built with very good intentions by highly intelligent inexperienced people. Only the architect had any professional training and qualifications in his field.

One surprise, which wasn't mentioned at all in the books and articles I had read, was that in the winter strong winds come from the south here in Shiloh. And winds heralding seasonal changes come from the east. And our large windows are on the south and on the east.

All in all, the house is relatively comfortable in the winter with minimal heating, and it's much too hot in the summer. If the fruit trees I planted by the eastern windows had thrived instead of dying, we'd be shaded in the summer. I guess the guys who planted them didn't dig deep enough holes.

Most people don't have the opportunity to plan, design and build their own home. There are things about the house I wouldn't change and there are mistakes, too. But I'm not moving!

### Strollers...at Tel Shiloh

One thing for sure, maybe it's just the crowd that shows up at Tel Shiloh for the family-friendly Bible themed festivities, but pushing the babies and toddlers in their strollers seems to be a "daddy's job." Israeli fathers are very into

parenting from what I can see. Maybe it's also a generation thing. My father was always at work and didn't get involved in our day to day lives. Also, I didn't grow up in a religious family, so there wasn't that one day of the week, Shabbat, when daddy couldn't go to work.

While I was with my two older granddaughters in the crafts workshops, I noticed this new-fangled way of taking two on a walk. Yes, that sure looks like a father wheeling it.



And here's a twin stroller for two siblings of different ages being wheeled by... that bearded guy sure doesn't look like the mother!



I guess I had my kids a generation too early!

### Creating, having fun!

My granddaughters can spend the whole day on arts & crafts. My own kids were the same. After we came back from Tel Shiloh's activities, they did more cutting, pasting and drawing in my house.



There's lots for the whole family to do at Tel Shiloh. We've been having Succot and Passover activities for a few years already, and it's very popular. Today it was packed and there was room for more. Everyone seemed to be having a good time. Some people brought their own food, but most bought. A few succot were up for eating in.

We didn't even do the touring and other activities. My granddaughters were happy creating all sorts of fun things.



### New improved Succah decorations

I was very proud of how I had decorated our succah, but the younger generation thought it awfully dull. They made us a whole bunch of gorgeous new decorations, which I finally put up yesterday afternoon. And, thank G-d, the grandkids approved of how it now looks!



I added a chain to our succah/merpeset (terrace/balcony) door.

There were even enough to add some to the front door!



That's a bonus to being grandparents, having grandchildren to make succah decorations! Hint, always keep a ready supply of arts and crafts equipment/supplies.

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