

*The National Jewish*

# Post&Opinion

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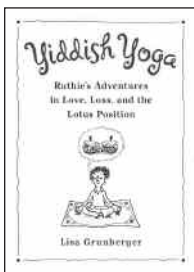
Cover Art  
by Irene Konig



# Editorial

As part of the 11th annual Ann Katz Festival of Books held at the Arthur M. Glick JCC, author Lisa Grunberger spoke and read from her first book *Yiddish Yoga: Ruthie's Adventures in Love, Loss, and the Lotus Position*. What a performer she is! She has a diverse background in many different areas and has many talents. She taught some Yoga chair exercises, and also explained her personal experiences that led to writing the book.

Her book is about a Jewish grandmother named Ruthie whose husband dies after a 50-year marriage. Hoping it will help her heal from the loss, her granddaughter gives her a gift of one year of Yoga lessons.



This book elevated my mood while I was reading it and for some time afterward. Grunberger captures the essence of what is important in life using very few words, in three languages – English, Sanskrit and Yiddish. In the world in which we live today, it can be challenging to understand and process all of the new and different ideas that one can be introduced to.

The author manages to blend the wisdom of the East (Yoga) and the West (Yiddish) and do it all in good humor. Leaving no stone unturned, she includes a recipe for a matzo ball/mulligatawny soup. The matzo balls we know about. The other is an Indian soup with such spices as tumeric, cayenne pepper, cumin and coriander.

In *Yiddish Yoga* one can learn about grieving a loss, but then after a period of mourning, letting go of the past to move forward to enjoy every minute of life that is still to come. It is about the joy of learning new things and living life to the fullest even in old age. It is about love, forgiveness, relationships, courage, control, intention, *kvetching*, chanting, meditation and miracles. To find out more go to: [www.yiddishyoga.com](http://www.yiddishyoga.com).

The following is one of the excerpts that the author read during the lecture. It is told in the voice of the grandmother.

## Om and Amen

*Sammy (Yoga teacher) pointed out that the Sanskrit Om and Hebrew Amen bear a remarkable resemblance. When you chant Om and press your lips together at the end, you can feel the vibrations reverberate through your heart.*

*Something's changing inside me. We chanted an extra long time today in honor of the spring solstice.*

*Ommmmmmmmmm. Ommmmmmmmmm. Ommmmmmmmmm.*

*It was as though Harry (Ruthie's deceased husband) were giving me his blessing.*

*"It's time Ruthie. What did we always say? That life is for the living. Where there*

(see Editorial, page NAT 4)

# About the Cover

## The Shema

"This work still amazes me, even though I created it several years ago. I was thinking about the Shema, how it calls us, and how its first word is "listen" or "hear." It is calling out to all of us, all of



Irene Konig.

the people of Israel, wherever we are in the world. The words are "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

"I began with a shell, an ocean shell. I know all of us, at one point or another have held a shell up to our ears to "hear the ocean." The shell represented the hearing, and it symbolized the depths of the ocean.

"Next I began with some interesting paper that I had found, and started cutting out shapes from it. It was a marbelized type of rich paper and I began by cutting out rounded boulder shaped pieces, reflecting that eons ago that was what existed, among other natural shaped objects. When I placed them together, it was a pleasing sight to me, representing a primordial time, a time before man came to be. There was a suggestion of a vastness of space, time and space beyond human comprehension.

"When I placed the shell on the paper with the boulder-shaped pieces, and began to make the first print, I saw that the thickness of the shell actually caused shadows to become part of the print, and this in turn made the boulders look three dimensional. All of this really excited me, because it added to the look of time, space, and a realm that we can only guess at, before our time.

"The Shema, the central prayer of Judaism, is recited not only in synagogues, but often in homes as well."

Konig has created many works with Jewish themes, including works that have a tallit image as a background. The Jewish-themed works range from calligraphy and design prints for weddings to comforting works for those in mourning, inspirational quotes, excerpts from the Song of Songs, other Psalms, quotations from some of the greats in Jewish history, home and personal blessings, and many, many more.

In addition to this large collection of Jewish inspired art, Konig has also created many other art pieces, which encompass a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and experiences, all heartfelt. All master prints are made up by hand, and then prints are made from this master print. All in all, there are close to 300 prints, all available in modest prices, all made on request, and all matted for gifting, or for the individual, and enclosed in a crystal-clear envelope. Categories on the website, [www.artoflife.us](http://www.artoflife.us), serve to help in the search for the perfect piece. Konig will be glad to work with you to find what would be the best print, and

# Shabbat Shalom

By RABBI JON ADLAND

November 6, 2009, Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24), 18 Cheshvan 5770

Tonight I will be celebrating Shabbat with 3,000 other Reform Jews who have traveled from the United States, around the world, and across Canada to join together in Toronto for the 70th Biennial Convention of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). This is my 11th Biennial Convention.

I have been to Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Orlando, San Francisco, Chicago, New Orleans, San Diego, Boston, Houston and now Toronto to learn about the direction of Reform Judaism, to revive my own Jewish



gift certificates are available, if needed, in case you can't decide.

Konig likes to use interesting materials and incorporate them into the master print. She has used leaves and berries, ribbons, fabric, flowers of all kinds, jewelry, masks and other assorted objects. Often she puts into calligraphy her own words, expressing a sentiment that she could not find elsewhere as a quotation. Her works adorn many homes in the central Texas area and in other parts of the country. In addition, she has donated some of her artwork to the Jewish Community Center in Havana, Cuba, and to a hospital in Israel, Shaare Zedek.

Konig holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the City College of New York, as well as a master's degree in psychology from the New School for Social Research in New York. Just a little over half of her life has been spent in Austin, Texas, where she currently resides. Her other years were spent in New York. She is the mother of two young adult daughters.

*Irene Konig may be contacted at pleasure-to-behold@Juno.com or at 512-835-2165. ☆*

energies, to network with colleagues, and to find systems to overcome some of the problems and struggles every congregation faces. I have to say that this year's workshops are some of the best ever, and the efficiency of the convention's mechanics the smoothest it has ever been.

At the same time, the number of people attending the convention is significantly less than in past years. The cost of getting to Toronto and the economic hardships our congregations face have downsized the event. Yet, nearly 500 congregations sent or helped their temple presidents, clergy, professional staff or board members get to Toronto, because they know the importance of learning from other Reform Jews facing similar issues and problems.

I have attended several workshops. The first was on the inclusion of special needs children at our URJ camps, but you can extract from that the importance of inclusion of special needs children in our religious education and making our congregation accessible for all people who have challenges. We do okay, but we can always take a harder look at Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation (IHC) to see what more we can do.

The second workshop was on Jewish-Muslim dialogue. Our recent interfaith Iftar dinner was a huge step in the right direction, and Marcia Goldstein, director of Lifelong Learning, is working on establishing a more formal dialogue experience with our Muslim brothers and sisters. We have done more than many congregations, but again, we can still go further.

The third workshop was about creating a welcoming environment for singles, people who are divorced and those who are widowed. There were little things they mentioned that we already do, but IHC needs to take a hard look at this demographic and make sure we are being inclusive. I am not talking about young singles, but the entire spectrum. If you want to help me look at ways of being inclusive, please let me know.

(see Adland, page NAT 3)

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# Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

This past Wednesday was the third birthday of our grandson Yosef, Levi Yitzchak's son. We drove north three hours to Meron, where Rabbi Shimon is buried, to celebrate Yosef's first haircut. Baruch Hashem, most of the family came and we had a beautiful celebration.

I have great news. Moshiach is coming. All we have to do is open our eyes, and we will see. All the time I see more and more evidence. Here is a good example.

This week I walked into a room in our local hospital. There was a new patient. I gave him a smile and a blessing for a speedy recovery. He thanked me. I asked him if he would like to put on tefillin. His face lit up. He said that he tries to put on tefillin every day. Yesterday he wasn't feeling well. His doctor sent him for a checkup in the emergency room. They decided to hospitalize him. Now he was stuck here in the hospital without tefillin, and didn't know what he would do. After he prayed he said that he wanted to tell me his story.

"My name is Roni. I was born here in 1959, and grew up in Bnai Brack (a religious city in Israel). My parents sent me to religious Zionist schools. When I was 18 I joined the Israeli Army. It was hard for me to be religious in the army. Hardly anyone in my unit was religious. I was swimming against the current. Gradually my religious feelings got weaker and weaker. After a while I stopped putting on tefillin. Then I stopped keeping Shabbos, and so forth.

"Eleven years ago I was sitting in my house. I heard a loud crash outside. I ran outside to see what had happened. I was shocked. My 11 year old daughter was lying motionless under the wheels of a car. I called an ambulance. After a minute she opened her eyes and started to breath, but on the way to the hospital she went unconscious. Baruch Hashem, she recovered pretty much. She was in the hospital for a week, and then came home. She told us an amazing story.

A second before the accident, she saw that a car was going to hit her. Then time stopped. She saw her whole life passing in front of her, different scenes from growing up. The car hit her, and she left her body. In the distance she saw a powerful white light, and started to move toward the light. She came closer and closer. Then she saw her grandmother, my mother, who had passed away years ago. Her grandmother came up to her, gave her a slap, and told her to go back. Suddenly she found herself back in her body.

"That was a turning point in my life. When I was growing up they taught me that we have a soul, and that Hashem sent our soul down to this world, in order that we should make the world better and holy by learning Torah and doing Mitzvahs. When my daughter told me

ADLAND

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The final workshop I attended was about websites. I won't bore you with the details, but it was good to know we are doing some things right but can improve and upgrade in other areas.

Tonight and tomorrow is Shabbat and if you have ever attended a URJ Biennial you know that this is a highlight. The power of worshipping with so many other Jews and studying with them on Shabbat afternoon lifts the soul and stirs the heart. It reminds me about why I do what I do. I am here with Sisterhood President Beth Lande, Charlene Pfenninger, serving the Central District Executive Committee of the Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), and my wife Sandy who is being installed onto the National Board of the Women for Reform Judaism. They are attending the WRJ Biennial.

At Shabbat, we will sit together and be part of this overwhelming experience. We will share notes, programs, and possibilities. When it is over on Sunday, we will begin our journey back to Indianapolis enthused about what we can do to make IHC a better congregation. Hopefully, in two years when the Biennial is in Washington, D.C., more IHC members will make the journey to the convention and recognize the many possibilities for creating and enhancing Reform Jewish life at home.

When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light one for the power of community. Light the other for the power and possibilities that can exist within our Reform Jewish community.

*Rabbi Adland is senior rabbi of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation. ✨*



her experience, I realized that this is the absolute truth. Since then I'm trying my best to live a life of Torah and Mitzvahs. It isn't always easy.

"I have to leave my house every morning at 6:00. So I have to wake up at 5:00, to put on my tefillin and say the morning prayers. There are a lot of temptations out there. A lot of our neighbors don't keep Shabbos. But Hashem has shown me many miracles, and I'm very grateful that my daughter is alive. Sometimes I slack off, and Hashem sends me painful reminders. That is why you see me here in the hospital today."

The Torah tells us that in the end of days we will return to Hashem, and then Hashem will redeem us. This is Moshiach, and this is what is happening now. Roni is one example of many, many people, including hopefully myself, who are returning to Hashem, and His Torah. It's up to all of us to return to Hashem, to learn more Torah and do more Mitzvahs, to bring Moshiach now!

*Rabbi Cohen lives in K'far Chabad, Israel. He can be reached by email at bzcohen1@neto.bezeqint.net. ✨*



# Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

## Chaya Sarah

How many times have you read the story of the sacrifice of Isaac by the hand of Abraham and not considered the impact that this act would have on Sarah? Everyone praises Abraham and Isaac for their powerful demonstration of faith, but what about Sarah?

The Torah portion (Chaya Sarah) begins with an account of the death of Sarah. The Torah tells us how old Sarah was when she died, but avoids telling us directly how she dies. The Torah however shows us that when Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and cry for her, the word to eulogize her (*ve'luvosh* 23:2) is written with a small "kaf." This is to indicate that Abraham did not eulogize her publicly as would be expected from a man of his stature for his wife, who was so loved and esteemed by the world.

...Abraham did not eulogize her publicly as would be expected from a man of his stature for his wife, who was so loved and esteemed by the world. Some sages say [this is] because she committed suicide.

Some sages say that Abraham did not eulogize Sarah publicly because she committed suicide. Was it suicide? Did Sarah actually take her own life? Could a woman like Sarah, a great prophetess who had borne such hardship with faith and strength in her life commit suicide? Or did Abraham not eulogize his wife publicly for another reason?

Several rabbis of note actually have addressed this matter of Sarah's suicide. Surprisingly, a difference of opinion exists regarding the manner and reasons for her death. Some say she died happy, fulfilled that her son was going to be sacrificed. It has even been said that she died of shock when it was revealed to her that he was not going to be sacrificed. She received a vision that Isaac was not harmed and the shock and/or grief that he was saved and not worthy of being sacrificed killed her.

The Baal Turim, a great Biblical commentator said that Sarah committed a kind of suicide when she said to Abraham "Let God should judge between

you and me." With these words, she invited judgment into her life and that is why she died before Abraham. The Zohar says however that it was grief and anguish that killed Sarah.

When Sarah saw in a vision what was happening on Mount Moriah, it was more than she could bear. If her son had been harmed in a natural way, that would have been devastating, she would have been heartbroken for the rest of her life, she would have sought consolation in God, trusted God's will, but by the hand of her husband, this was too much.

"Take me and not my son" were probably her last words to God as her soul left the hold of the confines of the physical world. It was as she proclaimed. Sarah demonstrated the love of a Jewish mother. Sarah had control of the angelic forces. Her words held the creative power to change reality as she had demonstrated several times previously. If Abraham needed a sacrifice to demonstrate his perfect faith, Sarah would be it. She was Abraham's sacrifice. Sarah has been reported to give a few piercing cries as she died. She died, and her son lived. When we hear the shofar blowing each Yom Kippur, we are told to remember the cries of Sarah.

Sarah, the first mother of the Jewish people, died alone in Hebron, abandoned by her husband, her son, and even by her community. Abraham had sent her away to Hebron prior to carrying out his plan. Perhaps he did not want to deal with her reactions, tears, or her protests that might interfere with his resolve to demonstrate his faith in God and do what he had been commanded. This act was between him and God. Abraham could not however hide what was happening from Sarah, for Sarah was a prophetess.

When I first really understood that Sarah had died from grief and anguish one Shabbat afternoon several years ago, I was overwhelmed and grief stricken myself. Her pain was my pain. How does a person literally die of grief? What was Sarah communicating to us in her death? Why did Abraham not consult Sarah about this prophecy when he was previously instructed to listen to Sarah's voice? Was it because he knew that Sarah would not have given her approval?

When I returned home from synagogue that evening, I began in my imagination to commune with the soul of Sarah, and started writing what would be the beginning of my upcoming book and theater piece, *Conversations with Biblical Women: Reclaiming the Path of the Feminine*. I did not realize at the time when I first connected to Sarah that my tears and pain were much deeper than the death of Sarah herself. My tears touched upon the tears of all women and men whose love of life have been betrayed, discounted and undermined.

Sarah's death marked a significant diminishment of the path and wisdom of the Feminine. Matriarchal societies that were prevalent around Sarah's time were replaced by the emergence of patriarchy.

(see Ribner, page NAT 8)





## Jewish Educator

By AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

### Gratitude: A pathway to happiness

It is early in the morning, traffic is terrible, and I race across town to make it to my 7:30 yoga class on time. As I run panting into the room, I smile at the irony of entering a space where mindfulness of breath is at the heart of the practice. I sit on my mat, close my eyes and chant the OM with the others in my class. My breathing becomes noticeably slower although my mind is still bouncing around, wondering if I locked my car and turned off my cell phone.

My teacher reads a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson and asks us to dedicate our yoga practice today to something that is important to us. I drink in a long breath, feeling the air circulate up through my nose, spreading deep into my lungs. I release a long, slow exhale, aware that less than a year ago I was unable to do this. The sinus surgery I had dreaded made it possible for me to now breathe fully. The word GRATITUDE enters my mind.

Gratitude is appreciation for what we have that is good in our lives. From the moment we wake up in the morning, we have things to be grateful for. A good night's rest in a warm bed, waking up in a safe place, a job to go to or a family to feed. Simple things that we often overlook and take for granted.

In Hebrew, the word for gratitude is *hakarat ha tov*, which means "recognition of the good," especially of the good things that others have done for us. *Hakarat ha tov* is meant to make us feel good about ourselves. It requires us to stop, look around and remember the times in our life when others were there for us because they cared about or appreciated us. When we recognize that a busy friend set aside time to help us or that a supervisor has promoted us because he values our work, we feel worthy, valued and loved. When we cultivate gratitude, we move closer to becoming a happier person.

I love the word gratitude because it contains another word within it (although slightly misspelled), which is at the heart of gratitude itself: Attitude. So much of whether we feel grateful for things lies in our attitude about life. Everyone experiences difficult times: poor health, financial problems or family strife can make it very hard to feel upbeat and grateful. While we can't always choose what happens to us, we can choose how we feel about it and how we respond. As my father says: "When things are tough, you can have a good attitude or a bad one for the same nickel."

Gratitude requires us to make the choice to be conscious of what we have, rather than what we lack. It asks us to see



## Wiener's Wisdom

By RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

### Thanksgiving

In Midrash Rabbah it is written that Rabbi Aibo said: "When the Angels objected to the creation of man, God replied: 'And of what use are all of the good things I have created unless people are there to enjoy them?'"

Perhaps that is what Thanksgiving is all about. It is not only the good things that we realize for ourselves through the efforts of our labor, but also to understand that God gave us the ability to discover these treasures.

Thanksgiving enables us to comprehend the true meaning of life, to be thankful for all the harvests of our days. God is where God should be – in our hearts and minds, in our deeds and actions, in our relationships and understanding of each other.

Thanksgiving should help us realize that we are responsible for one another



the glass as half full rather than half empty. One way to develop gratitude is to take time each day to acknowledge what we have that is good in our life at that very moment. Then, and this is the hard part, to say it aloud – to ourselves and to others to whom we are grateful. It may be as simple as acknowledging that we have just read a good book or thanking a teacher for a wonderful class or telling a friend how happy we are to have lunch with her. It is this conscious and articulated awareness of what we have that can bring us joy for the daily blessings in our lives.

The Jewish tradition tells us that we should say 100 blessings every day. Some are traditional blessings that we say upon waking, eating and praying. Others are spontaneous and require us to stay open to the good around us that deserves our praise. Articulating what we are grateful for is a mitzvah because it is tantamount to saying a blessing.

My teacher ends class with the chanting of the OM and I sit, head bowed, grateful that I chose to start my day with yoga. As I roll up my mat and head back to the car, the words of the poem she read to us come back to me.

"The best things are nearest you: breath in your nostrils, light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand and the path of God just before you."

Five blessings right there. I feel happier already!

Amy Hirshberg Lederman ([www.amyhirshberglederman.com](http://www.amyhirshberglederman.com)) is an award-winning, nationally syndicated columnist, author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney. Her new book *One God, Many Paths: Finding Meaning and Inspiration in Jewish Teachings* won the 2009 Arizona Book Publishing Association's Best Book Award on religion. ★

and that there can be no true jubilation without this moral standard. We are responsible to others for our actions and the consequences of those actions. We are responsible to God for those things that relate to our spiritual well-being. We are responsible to ourselves for purpose and meaning in our lives.

Our lives are so tenuous, our existence indeed fragile, and the gift of life so temporary that we should take the time to celebrate, rejoice, and give thanks. "And of what use are all of the good things I have created unless people are there to enjoy them." God tells us to marvel in His creation, to take advantage of the very essence of life's wonderment. The very act of creation was and is the gift of a lifetime.

We have so much to be grateful for. We get up each morning and see all that is before us. We watch a bird fly and are astounded that it can soar into the unknown. We walk on the grass and are amazed that as seasons change so does nature. Children teach us about the cycle of time: They crawl, they walk, they make sounds, they talk, they grow and eventually wither and then we witness birth all over again. We lose a loved one but are comforted with the wonder of eternalness.

Thanksgiving is also a time to be thankful for our country and all that it represents to us and the world around us. America represents all that is good in the human spirit. We are a people devoted to the exploration of the imagination. We treasure benevolence and practice it every waking moment. But we also know that we have failings because we are human, created in the image of God to be Godlike, but with fallibilities. We can offend, but we can also forgive; we at times are lonely but understand that love can erase that feeling of emptiness; we can be foolish but blend it with a modicum of discretion; we experience grief but temper it with understanding. We can be all these things and also realize that the journey of life is filled with all this and more because God invited us to participate in His gift of life – not the Angels, but us.

And Thanksgiving gives us the ability to be grateful for the men and women who serve this country with the same zeal of generations past. They serve on distant shores and here at home because they know that the price of liberty is vigilance and preparedness.

Families will gather together on this American holiday to feast on turkey, enjoy stories of yesterday's celebrations and make wishes for the dreams of tomorrow. We will reflect and finally come to the realization that the insignificant things that drag us down are not important if we are to survive as a nation. And we should never forget how fortunate we are as Americans.

This is what Thanksgiving is all about: God gave us the wonderfulness of life, the magic of day and night, the capacity to hope for a brighter tomorrow. And He did all this, not for the Angels, but for us.

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

## EDITORIAL

(continued from page NAT 2)

*is breath, there is life. You are still a vital woman, meine liebe – my love – so beautiful and lithe. Go. Ruthie. Go find a man. Go live, my love. Amen."*

Another example of one enjoying life and living fully for as long as one has came from a long-time subscriber who began to read this newspaper in September of 1963. Irving Fine is 87 now, but moved to Indianapolis back then to teach at Butler University.

He recently told me he had not been to a movie theater in more than ten years. When two new movies with Jewish themes came out, he wanted to see them, but he lives in a senior retirement community and he doesn't drive. So he called a taxi and went by himself. One was *Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg* and the other was *A Serious Man*.

I don't know about the first movie, but the second one was playing at a theater inside a shopping mall. When it was over he called a taxi to take him home and then went outside to wait for it. Forty minutes went by and because it was a rainy day, he was getting soggy. Two women who noticed him when they entered to shop saw that he was still there when they came out. They offered him a ride home, and he accepted.

He told me it was *bashert* (destiny) that they were there to notice him and to give him a ride home. I asked him, how so? He said they were school teachers and they were having a two-day vacation. Otherwise they would not have been at the mall in the afternoon.

Mr. Fine is a widower who lost his wife, Serene, about a week after my father passed away in April 2007. They had been married for probably about 60 years. His two children do not live within driving distance of Indianapolis and he has no relatives in town.

I am always amazed how people in his situation, similar to the grandmother in *Yiddish Yoga* continue to move forward with their lives reading, learning, having conversations, writing letters, making new friends, going to movies, plays, ballets and other performing arts and entertainment. They make the effort to enjoy their lives the best they can with the limitations they have.

Jennie Cohen 11-18-09. ★

## On this date in Jewish history

On November 18, 1489

The first printed edition of *Hovot ha-Levavot*, by Bahya ibn Paquda, was published in Naples, Italy.

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



## Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

### President Obama, the black messiah?

The brightest, best paid professional political journalists were up late on Nov. 3, 2009 as the voters in Virginia and New Jersey gave them a national pause. Republicans, which they had collectively given up for dead and buried, resurrected themselves and joined by the great wash of "Independents" acted out their disappointment with what is happening in the United States of America; and since President Obama has chosen to take full responsibility for the course of our country, it was a bad day for the president.

Part of his shock in the interpretation of the election, is that when he looks in the mirror, he sees himself, the first African American president of the United States of America, struggling – even with all of his energy, and a very impressive collection of the best minds he could find, to right the American ship on a very rocky sea.

The problem is, that for a majority of Americans, those who voted him into office and many who came to believe in him, that they thought he was a Black Messiah who had rode into Washington, D.C., on a white horse of hope and promise. We simply felt that somehow this fine looking young man, so well spoken and so positive, would find the answers to all these mind-blowing problems and convince the rowdies who vote in the Senate and House to behave and act like he was the president, and they were obliged to aid and assist them.

He has asked for patience. He isn't getting it. And worst of all, all those Independents who turned out in Iowa to launch his run for the president, have begun to pull back. The gay community that saw him as securely in their "pocket," is now engaged in a "national whine." They don't want to wait, at least for an end to "Don't Ask and Don't Tell" in the military. After all, he doesn't need a congressional vote to do that, all he needs to issue is a Presidential Directive, and sign it, and that is it.

President Harry S. Truman, the haberdasher from Missouri, who came with no expectations, desegregated the military in one bold move in 1948. If he had done nothing else, by that one signature, he wrote his name in history.

President Obama went national telling the gay community that it would happen, but it hasn't happened, and he hasn't taken the time to tell them that there are consequences to every single act of being the president of the United States. Apparently, no one told that to Harry S. Truman. How would he have known? According to historians of that period, President Truman came to the vice-presidency with no expectations. He was

a part of a great Democratic machine in Missouri. They needed a safe non-entity, and Harry S. Truman was their man.

The president and everyone else left him uninformed and unprepared for his president's death, and his ascension to the most important position in the world in the midst of a war.

In short order, the same Harry Truman took his place at the table, made the decision to drop the atomic bomb and bring the war to an end. He backed away from nothing. Against the advice of the U.S. State Department, he voted for Israel's statehood, and his vote probably assured that victory.

And then, recognizing what everyone had seen, that "Negroes" willingly wanted the opportunity to be Americans and fight for their country, that if the only way they could do it was in segregated forces with White officers, then they would do it, because of their own beliefs. At the cessation of the World War II, we acknowledged their efforts and valiant defense of their country, but as a country, we expected them to return to the life they had before the war, segregated and unequal.

### The problem is...many... thought he was a Black Messiah who had rode in...on a white horse of hope and promise.

In one fell swoop, Harry S. Truman changed the policy of the military forces, with as much opposition as our young president is getting now. It must be so, or President Obama would have signed the directive. The difference is that Truman didn't ask or care what anybody thought, once he, the little man that could and did, decided it was right.

The military survived, just as it would today. No great generals resigned their commissions. One day it was the policy, and the next day, it wasn't. It was not an easy transition. There were people who were resistant, and individuals who never gave in, but it is not a Democratic organization, the U.S. Military, and so from that date, it was going to get better day by day. And it has.

If President Truman had come to believe the same about the rightful giving of equality to all Americans, it would have happened earlier and with less struggle. But, we are all people of our time, and we cannot hold Truman or Lincoln or other American presidents responsible for being ahead of their time. We can only hope they have the courage to move ahead.

It is important to know that Americans, like myself, who would energetically vote against gay marriage, and oppose their aggressive assault on long-held values, believe as vigorously in job equality, health equality and opportunity equality. Sometimes movements tend



## An Observant Eye

BY RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

### The Atheists' unintended gift

The tone of the recent spate of books by proponents of Atheism (capitalized, correctly, like any faith) says much. The writers don't suffice with presenting their cases; they insist on berating all who dare disagree, belittling religious believers as intellectual defectives. Their confident public personae notwithstanding, the New Atheists' cynicism and name-calling telegraph insecurity. They seem to realize, at least subconsciously, that the very same universe that inspires them to worship chance and venerate "nature's laws" moves others to recognize a Creator.

The Disbelievers may have come to realize the unintended psychological message sent by all their sound and fury. Or maybe they are just spent from all their howling. Whichever, they – or at least some of them – have morphed their evangelical zeal into a kinder, gentler effort to reach the believing public. A coalition of Atheist organizations has placed advertisements in Manhattan subway stations asserting that "a million New Yorkers are good without G-d" (the respectful hyphen, of course, is this dissident New Yorker's emendation), and then posing the question "Are you?"

Those of us who would respond in the negative, who affirm both the existence and exaltedness of a Supreme Being, might be expected to bristle at the ad campaign. But there is something heartening in the thought that average people rushing to and from jobs and errands might have their thoughts about bosses and holiday sales interrupted by some mention of the Creator – that the input of iPods and television reruns playing in heads might be forced to yield, even momentarily, to consideration of whether or not life contains a greater purpose than just living.

Because most people, even those who readily profess belief in G-d if asked, don't often dwell on that belief's implications. It sits in their heads, a checked-off box filed away for posterity.

to take opposition to one plank as opposition to everything.

People are not that simple. The voters in Iowa, Virginia and New Jersey are voting in their "hurt and doubt" about their lives. The results are valid as long as the "hurt and doubt" continues, and no longer than that.

Did you ever notice that when your toe is aching, it is hard to take on the responsibilities of anything more important than stopping the pain?

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And yet, belief in G-d is not like sports or politics. It is – or should be – the most basic issue any thinking human being seriously engages. When we awaken from childhood and begin to think serious thoughts, when we first confront consciousness and self and others and our place in the universe, what more pressing question could there be than whether we are mere randomly generated organisms (highly evolved but mere all the same) or subjects of Something larger?

It is told how a doubter once asked to meet with the founder of the Novardhok yeshiva system, Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz (1849–1919), known as the "Der Alter" – "the Elder" – of Novardhok, and was welcomed into the revered rabbi's home. The two began to discuss the meaning of life and the goals toward which human beings are meant to strive. After some hours of deep discussion, the freethinker politely asked his host's pardon for a moment, turned to his servant and ordered him to prepare his carriage for the journey home. The Alter abruptly ended the conversation.

Puzzled at the sudden interruption of what had seemed to be a productive back-and-forth, the guest asked his host if he had done anything wrong. The Alter calmly explained that, for him, a conversation like the one they had been having was no mere philosophical sparring, not an intellectual exercise and certainly not a social pleasantry. It was a means of ascertaining deep truths, with the determined goal of acting on them. Had the freethinker seen their conversation the same way, said the Alter, he would have been fixed to the spot, anchored by the implications of what they had discussed – and incapable of leaving before reaching all the necessary conclusions and making whatever personal decisions were indicated.

By deciding instead that their "time was up" and it was time to go, said the Alter, his guest had demonstrated that, in his own eyes, the interaction had all been of a theoretical nature, an intellectual discussion, a game. For such things, the rabbi demurred, he simply had no time. There were important things to do.

For too many of us, even many of us who live seemingly religious lives, serious thoughts of G-d and our relationship to Him – if we think them at all – are often overwhelmed by the muddle of daily life. A major function, in fact, of prayer in Judaism is to shake off our tangle of quotidian concerns and focus on the Divine. If we are successful, we take away a keener awareness of our places in the world, and it accompanies us as we wade back into the mundane.

The Atheist ad campaign is far, to be sure, from a prayer. And it might be hard to imagine subway riders spurred by the posters to think thoughts of G-d. But, well, you never know. One of nature's laws, after all, is about unintended consequences.

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





## Funsmith

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

### SmartFun

*Hello Mr. Funsmith!*

*So, here's my question. Wait, am I being too abrupt? I should ask "how are you" or something? So excuse me already. My question: Does having fun make you smarter? Which I could also ask: Do smart people have more fun? Or something?*

*Your friend and mine, Chaim Chochom*

Hello, Chiam.

I'm fine, thank you. You?

So, smart-wise, funnishly speaking: You know how they talk about all these "intelligences" – like the "creative intelligence" and the "emotional intelligence" and the "mathematical..."?

Well, today I've been wondering if maybe "fun" is one of those "intelligences." Maybe our whole ability to perceive fun and create fun, the whole complex of rational and emotional and physical processes is part of an intelligence.

You know how you sense something is possibly fun or you sense the fun possibilities...you know how we talk about the spirit of fun or the feeling of fun...

So I'm thinking maybe there is this fun intelligence, and that those of us in particular who are particularly gifted with this intelligence have in fact found it to be central to our survival: socially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, spatially, mathematically...

Which also leads me to think that this is an intelligence we can foster, nurture, exercise, develop, teach.

As with any Intelligence, I guess the first question in determining its value and relevance is to ask if it has any contribution to make to our survival.

Good question.

On a social level, the fun intelligence is frequently all that stands between you and getting beaten to death by a gang of bullies. If your FI (fun intelligence) isn't high enough, you tend to make fun OF just when you think you're making fun WITH. In the locker room or sports field, failure to perceive the fun intention of a slap on the ass becomes a slap in the face, which frequently leads to a punch in the nose.

On the inner playground your FI is often all that stands between you and catatonic schizophrenia. Your ability to laugh at yourself, to decide not to take things so seriously, to make light out of your darker suspicions...

Intellectually, your FI helps you toy with problems that are simply too big to grasp, to keep yourself alive to the possibility of unanticipated solutions and resolutions. And when it comes to your body, your FI leads you to new sensations,

new levels of engagement, new ways to experience the world. It takes you into the deserts and the mountains and beside the still waters. It restoreth the freakin' soul.

Which makes you think of course about FI and your spiritual development: how it strengthens your ability to perceive the play and interplay of the planetary consciousness; how it brings you into communion with dogs and cats, porpoises and pelicans; how it allows you to share in the play of the infinite wind on the eternal water...

For the fun of it, let's pretend that we have conclusively concluded that the fun intelligence plays a vital role in personal growth and the evolution of the species. And let us further pretend that we have similarly concluded that there is a high correlation between the fun intelligence and adaptability, creativity, spirituality, physical, mental, and social health.

Now we are free to address the all-important question: How can we foster the development of the fun intelligence? How, we ask further, can we take people whose fun intelligence is in danger of atrophy from prolonged misuse? How do we cure the chronically somber?

Can the fun intelligence be exercised, restored, expanded upon?

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**So I'm thinking  
maybe there is [a]  
fun intelligence...[that]  
we can foster, nurture,  
exercise, develop, teach.**

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As a matter of fact, yes. It's through a practice I call "DeepFUN™." You could call it "Mindful Fun" if you don't want to use my trademarked trademark. The DeepFUN practice has three parts:

The first is playing a lot of what I like to call "pointless" games – like college drinking games without the drinking. These are games that are played not for score or trophy or world rank, but for the sheer fun of it all. I call these games "pointless" because no one keeps score. Nor do these games make any particular point. We're not playing them to prove how profoundly we trust each other or to demonstrate our bravery or reveal our inner depths. Pointless games are purposeless, pointless practices, not a few of which have their origins in college drinking games.

The second component of this DeepFUN practice is the conversations we have between the games. These conversations are devoted entirely to the experience of fun. We talk about what it was like when the game was most fun, about how we might make the next game even more fun. We don't focus on individual performance. We don't try to find out who had the most fun or played the best. We focus only on the experience



## Teen Outlook

BY SIGAL TAVEL

### The soybean dilemma

As a young Jewish girl living in America, I'm confused about the meaning of Thanksgiving. Just a few short weeks ago, I celebrated Sukkot: a.k.a the Holiday of Gathering, or the Festival of Harvest, thanking G-d for providing us with a sukkah (a temporary three-walled dwelling with a partially open roof) as we escaped Egypt and for the end of the yearly harvest. Now, as an American, I celebrate Thanksgiving, yet another festival of harvest. As a Jew, I wonder what's the point of the repetition? I feel like a stuffed turkey with all this food!

Sukkot has been celebrated by Jews since ancient times. As a matter of fact, all world cultures have some sort of harvest festival, including the American Indians who call it the Green Corn festival. But Thanksgiving? Most people think the first harvest festival for the Americans took

of fun, and how it can be deepened. As the practice continues, each game becomes like a laboratory for evoking, exploring and refining the experience of fun.

And the third is all about the conversations we have on our inner playgrounds where we contemplate the "inner we," invite our deepest selves to play, free ourselves to meet ourselves in joy. Maybe I'll write about these in my next column if anybody actually expresses interest.

For most of us, the last time we exercised our capacity for generating fun was around the end of the first week of first grade. This is why when we do experience something really, deeply fun, we attribute it to the "inner child." It takes time to rebuild the fun intelligence to full, adult capacity. We could play for five or six days solid, and still not long enough to help people fully recover from years of fun deprivation. And yet, it is my experience and conviction that by introducing the practice of DeepFUN, we can reach even the terminally dour.

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

place in 1621, but actually, after the victory at Gettysburg in 1863, Abraham Lincoln established Thanksgiving as a national holiday. He used the idea of a magazine editor named Sarah Hale, who thought that having an annual national holiday of "thanksgiving" would help unite a nation that was heading toward civil war.

American Thanksgiving conjures up a great deal of imagery: turkey, pilgrims, corn, pumpkin pie, and football games. In reality, turkey was probably not one of the things feasted on in 1621 – most likely it was wild geese, crayfish, lobsters, and corn. Thank goodness for the variety because I am a vegetarian who eats fish. Unfortunately, crayfish and lobster aren't kosher so I'd be stuck again. The reason for the football games and parades was to advertise and gain publicity and power over a captive audience.

So I return to my original question: As an American Jew, why am I doing this? The answer is different for every person, which is probably what makes it a holiday for unity, the way Lincoln intended. For me, one answer is that both Sukkot and Thanksgiving came about due to religious persecution. Europeans fled in order to live out their beliefs in a free land without religious persecution, just as the Jews left Egypt, received the Torah, became Jewish, and escaped from slavery. Most people consider the American Thanksgiving to be a secular holiday, but, in actuality, people have been celebrating harvest festivals as spiritual holidays since the beginning of time. While the celebrations may not have all been religious, they all clearly expressed thanks for food to a power or powers greater than themselves. In the end, I don't need to make Thanksgiving religious or secular – I can have my turkey and eat it, too – or at least opt for soy beans instead!

*Tavel is an eighth grader at Hasten Hebrew Academy in Indianapolis. She can be reached at: [sigalmt@gmail.com](mailto:sigalmt@gmail.com). ✨*

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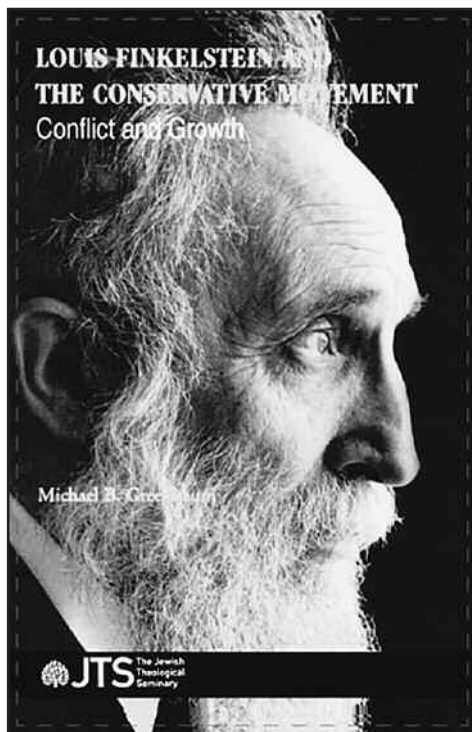


## Book Review

REVIEWED BY JACOB NEUSNER

# How Finkelstein transformed JTSA

*Louis Finkelstein and the Conservative Movement: Conflict and Growth.* By Michael B. Greenbaum. Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2001.



Louis Finkelstein was chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and titular head of Conservative Judaism from 1940 to 1972. This highly illuminating doctoral dissertation focuses on how Finkelstein transformed JTSA from a backwater in 1940 to a center of Judaism in the USA in 1955 and turned himself from a third-rate Talmudic historian of no importance into a major religious leader on the American scene. When in 1940 he became chancellor of JTSA, the annual budget was less than a million dollars and was raised with difficulty. Five years later the budget exceeded four million dollars a year and was raised with sufficient alacrity that far larger budgets were contemplated for the near future. Clearly JTSA changed on his watch. And Finkelstein accomplished the change.

He saw the flaw in the JTSA structure. If JTSA was merely a rabbinical school for a sect of Judaism, its constituency was limited. A great center of Jewish learning would not arise on the foundation of religious politics. Not enough people cared, and then it was the wrong ones. The structural problem of JTSA resulted from its institutional sponsorship: rich Reform Jews paying for the education of middle of the road Conservative rabbis for Orthodox Jewish immigrants and their Americanized children in the second

area of immigrant settlement (in the view of Marshall Sklare, Conservative Judaism). JTSA had to redefine itself to appeal to a vast audience and to free itself from the parochial limits imposed by Judaism.

Finkelstein resolved the tension by redefining JTSA into a universal center of religious toleration and reason, a place where people discussed democratic values of tolerance and brotherhood and the harmony of religion and science. At the same time Finkelstein aimed at preserving the nonsectarian character of JTSA by downplaying the particular issues of Judaism that led to the formation of Conservative Judaism in the middle between Reform and Orthodoxy. In his day Conservative Judaism was organized to raise funds for JTSA but not given a public role, with "traditional Judaism" the language of preference. JTSA was an Orthodox seminary turning out members of the Rabbinical Assembly – Conservative rabbis – for Reform Jews. Conservative congregations davened from a traditional prayer book in synagogues where men and women sat together and permitted driving to services, contrary to the law that forbade doing either.

Finkelstein brought in Saul Lieberman, a Talmudic scholar, to serve as the authoritative rabbi of JTSA and used him as a bulwark against any liberalization of the law of Judaism as set forth by JTSA. Until Finkelstein and Lieberman lost power, JTSA remained closed to Conservative Judaism but open to traditional Judaism – and Finkelstein would define the difference by appeal to Lieberman. The negative definition of JTSA – traditional Judaism yes, Conservative Judaism no – confirmed the heritage of JTSA's prior leadership, which treated JTSA as a footnote on the text of Judaism in America.

Finkelstein's predecessor, Cyrus Adler, had been in addition to JTSA chancellor, the head of Dropsie College, a graduate school of Jewish studies in Philadelphia, and took a primary role in the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Publication Society and other cultural and political institutions of American Judaism. Under Cyrus Adler (1915–1940) JTSA was a hobby. It represented a failed experiment in immigrant acculturation. It was supposed to train traditional rabbis for the immigrant community. No one contemplated starting a new Judaic religious movement. There was Reform Judaism, and the rabbis who came from JTSA were supposed to speak unaccented American English and to practice normative Judaism. Now when Finkelstein assumed the chancellorship, the earlier graduating classes of JTSA had begun to see their task as not mainly traditional and acculturated rabbis but as representatives of a new Judaic movement, Conservative Judaism.

The conflict that Greenbaum traces was between Finkelstein's conception of JTSA and the institutions created to raise

money to support it and the conception of the rabbis produced by the seminary, who had in mind a differentiated religious movement able to reform Judaism without adhering to the new Reform movement. The growth that he traces resulted from the policies of Finkelstein and his insistence that JTSA stood for undifferentiated traditional Judaism: Halakhically and theologically no different from Yeshiva University (with which Finkelstein even contemplated an Anschluss in the early years of his chancellorship). He saw no gain in identifying JTSA with a new Judaism.

The most astute JTSA professor by far, Mordecai M. Kaplan, conceived of a new Judaism that matched the intellectual aspirations of American Jews for a Judaism of culture and not of supernaturalism. Finkelstein tolerated his presence but offered no sponsorship, even though Reconstructionist Judaism enjoyed the intellectual support of many Conservative (and Reform) rabbis and provided the foundations for a secular Judaism that many sought.

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**Finkelstein resolved the tension by redefining JTSA into a universal center of religious toleration and reason, a place where people discussed democratic values of tolerance and brotherhood and the harmony of religion and science.**

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What Finkelstein offered instead was a universalizing center of religious discourse, where science and religion met, where democracy and good will thrived, where Christians met with Jews and affirmed one another's integrity, and he raised money on the basis of an appeal to social and religious values shared by all religions and persons of good will. He spoke in terms of saving the world and founded an institute for social and religious studies, which sponsored conferences that would discuss religious toleration. At JTSA, he brought together leaders of Catholic and Protestant Christianity and he sought the unity of science and religion. JTSA became a prominent institution in American Jewish affairs and Finkelstein a principal figure in public discourse. JTSA saw its vision as a source of universal peace and justice, not as the fountainhead of a religious sect. The appeal to Reform and secular Jews lay in the repudiation of narrow-mindedness and the vision of a universal theology of tolerance.

The direct relationship between the universal vision of world peace and justice that JTSA was supposed (like the United Nations) to bring about and the expansion of JTSA and its success in fund raising should not be missed. The principal donors to JTSA in the beginning were not Orthodox or Conservative Jews but Reform Jews, members of Temple Emanu-El in New York City for example. They had no interest in Conservative Judaism. But they did find appealing the universal mission defined for them by Louis Finkelstein.

Greenbaum tells this story of conflict and growth through massive citations of interviews and correspondence. He does not promise a biography of Finkelstein or a history of JTSA, but what he promises – an account of the Conservative movement in conflict and growth – he delivers in abundance. It is a fine dissertation and an important one. In the pages of this book is concealed the secret of the collapse of Conservative Judaism in the generation that succeeded Finkelstein's regime. Finkelstein's resolution of the structural flaws of JTSA – the subordination of a religious movement to the appeal of a universal vision of toleration and good will – undermined the foundations of support that Finkelstein sought to set down.

In the generation that followed the advent of Finkelstein, the intellectual challenges were met but not by the chancellor. Rather, Abraham J. Heschel took over the tasks of speaking a universal message to and through American Judaism – attaining public influence and realizing scholarly achievement of which Finkelstein could scarcely imagine and to the rigor of which he did not aspire. Mordecai M. Kaplan set forth the theology of secular Jewishness in deeply Judaic terms that the Reform Jews hoped to define through JTSA. Both men at the height of their scholarly and communal careers were marginalized at JTSA by Finkelstein and Lieberman – the latter of whom dismissed Heschel's finest work as Purim Torah. But the future belonged to Kaplan (whose continuators gave up on JTSA and founded their own rabbinical school) and even more to Heschel – and through the two of them to Conservative Judaism.

The Conservative day schools were named for Heschel or Schechter but not for Finkelstein or Lieberman. Louis Finkelstein did not define Conservative Judaism, he paralyzed it by limiting its purpose to the support of JTSA. By the time the authentic voices of a religious movement were heard, Conservative Judaism and with it JTSA had entered the long slow process of decline that the intellectual giants of JTSA, Kaplan and Heschel, if accorded institutional support, could have forestalled. Finkelstein's successors in the JTSA chancellorship struggled with his legacy but could not overcome its mendacious heritage – Orthodox rabbis serving Conservative congregations of Reform Jews indeed.

(see Neusner, page NAT 15)



# Parsha Perspective



BY MAGIDAH  
KHULDA BAT  
SARAH AND  
RABBI MOSHE  
BEN ASHER, PH.D.

## On the Wings of Eagles

In *parasha* (weekly Torah reading) *Vayishlach*, we encounter a familiar scene. After 20 years of residing with his Uncle Lavan, Yaakov is coming home. And his brother Eisav is coming out to greet him...with an army!

Yaakov manages to get his family and all their stuff over to the other side of the stream Jabbok. And then he comes back for one last look around. If you've recently moved, you know this feeling: Did we get everything? Did we forget anything? Our rabbis tell us that the righteous see something holy in even the smallest thing that they have acquired honestly, which they may neither squander nor allow to be wasted.

And then Yaakov is left alone. And he begins to think. He thinks about how little help he can count on against the force of 400 men that Eisav is bringing against him. Oy! The very thought of it causes him to cry out in anguish to God. You know, an "emergency bailout communication to heaven." We've all made them.

But God's answer comes back to Yaakov – and to us – in a very strange form, in the form of a wrestling match. Our verse tells us, someone "...wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (Genesis 32:25)

But who is this someone? Eisav? An angel? God?

It's helpful to remember that the word *malach*, often translated as "angel," really means "messenger."

But if our mystery visitor really is a messenger, then what's the message?

We have our clue in the Hebrew for the English words "and he wrestled" – *vayeiaveik*. *Avak* is dust. It's the kind of dust that floats upward at the slightest cause. You know, the kind of dust you see in the theater in front of the projector. So the Hebrew *vayeiaveik* means that the wrestlers try to bring each other to a state of dust, that is, to make the other lose his footing. And our sages say the dust that floats up from these two wrestlers is a dust that rises to the very Throne of God. For this fight is a prototype of the fight that lasts through all of world history.

But why hold a wrestling match in the dark?

Again, our verse says that someone "...wrestled with him until the break of day" – *hashachar* in Hebrew. The root of *hashachar* is *shin-chet-reish*. And it means *to seek*. It's the time in the morning when we still have to seek for things. It's the time when we stub our toe because we're

feeling around in the dark for the light switch. But what it means here, our rabbis tell us, is that as long as the minds of humankind are confused, as long as we're still stumbling around in the moral darkness and don't recognize things clearly for what they really are, it will be one long night on earth. And as long as that night lasts, Yaakov and his opponent will do battle. And the opponent, they say, is the spirit of Eisav. It isn't Yaakov who is the aggressor. Yaakov only fights in self-defense.

So what does this spirit of Eisav want with this fight?

What Eisav and his descendants – who ultimately become Rome – really want, is to take the ground out from under Yaakov's feet, to give him no standing at all; that is, to have *no claim to exist at all* on earth. That, as we know from world history, he will not succeed in doing – but not for lack of trying. And when he sees that he will not succeed in throwing Yaakov down, Eisav grips Yaakov on his hip-joint, and as Yaakov resists him, the muscle is torn from its ligaments, so that it can no longer control the leg, and that Yaakov is left limping.

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What Eisav and his descendants...really want, is to take the ground out from under Yaakov's feet, to give him no standing at all; that is, to have no claim to exist at all on earth.

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But the spirit of Eisav can only fight as long as it is night. As soon as the day begins to dawn, the winner begins to lose. And the spirit of Eisav says to Yaakov: "Let me go, for the sun is coming up." But Yaakov says to him: "Throughout the whole long night, you have continuously attacked me. Now that daylight has come, you give up the fight, but I will not do so until you have acknowledged me – by blessing me."

Now, why would you ask for a blessing from the person who is least likely to give it to you?

You would if the point of the whole thing is to get the Eisavs of this world to recognize that those who behave like Yaakov deserve a blessing, and that in blessing such a person, the nations are only blessing themselves.

But while Yaakov wanted a blessing, all Eisav wanted was to win the wrestling match. And that is the relative position of Yaakov and Eisav for all time. In politics and religion, the Eisavs of this world get their noses out of joint with anyone or anything that doesn't acknowledge them. Yaakov, on the other hand, concedes to all

pure human beings the right to be left untouched. Moreover, he declares all pure human beings to have the highest meaning and destiny if they accept the basic principles for human life that he brings to them.

At this point, the messenger says to Yaakov: What is your name? Of course, he replies: Yaakov. And the messenger tells him: Your name shall no longer be Yaakov, meaning the one who comes at the heels of another. From now on, your name will be understood as Yisrael. From the root *sin-reish-hei*, this word literally means: God is the all-conquering one. In the womb you may have held on to the heel of your brother, but now you have become – with God – superior to an angel. And he did bless him.

Our sages note that 20 years previously, when Yaakov was leaving the land, the sun had set for him at the border. The whole time he had been away with Lavan had been a period of dark conditions for him, and now at his return, the sun rose again for him. He was not beaten, not broken, but limping.

And because of this limping, the children of Israel are not to eat the sinew that is on the joint of the thigh, *gid hanasheh*. But if the memory of this event is to be commemorated for all time, it surely does *not* mean that we should remember that as a result of a wrestling match, our ancestor limped. What it does mean is that the spirit of Eisav will not be able to conquer us. He will not be able to throw us down during the long fight against him, during the long ages of darkness on Earth. But he, or they, will be able to hamstring us, to prevent us from standing firmly on both feet. And that is how we go through history.

And this lack of stability is ultimately a necessary factor to open Eisav's eyes. If Yaakov had stood, like Eisav, at the head of his 400 warriors, the fact that we cannot be conquered would never show the Finger of God in history. And in not eating this tendon, we will be reminded not to feel less protected, less certain of enduring through the ages, because we do not go through this world like Eisav, armed with the sword, except, of course, in our own defense.

We have a modern version of this story. Our rebbe of many years ago once served a synagogue located in a residential neighborhood. The owner of the house directly across the street from the synagogue put up a huge swastika on his garage door. As it happened, the man would spend time in his garage every day, with the door up. One day our rebbe decided to go over and talk with the man as he worked in his workshop. Perhaps he stood in the driveway. Knowing our rebbe, he might even have stood out on the sidewalk. But he made it his business to talk with the man day after day, until finally, somehow, he convinced the man that our existence was not only not a threat, but also – we're imagining – a blessing. The man took the swastika down.

(see Parsha Perspective, page NAT 15)

## RIBNER

(continued from page NAT 3)

The voice of the Feminine became hidden. When Sarah died, there was such a weeping among the people, for they more fully realized what a source of blessing she was for the world. Whether we know it or not, we are still weeping for the Feminine, even today.

An ancient midrash in the Talmud explains the diminishment of the Feminine in the following way. The Bible tells us in Genesis that God made two great lights; the sun (masculine) and the moon (feminine). In the beginning the sun and the moon were equal, but the moon complained and her light was diminished. For thousands of years, the world has been dominated by masculine energy, which has made tremendous accomplishments in our external world, but at the cost of the diminishment of the feminine.

Kabbalah predicts however that it will be the feminine energy (not necessarily gender based) that will usher in the new order of redemption. When the light of the moon is once again equal to that of the sun, there will be peace; there will be revelation and great joy. We are living in these times. We stand on the shoulders of Biblical women in reclaiming the path of the feminine.

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## Addictions Counselor

BY RABBI STEVEN M. LEAPMAN

### Size, shape, and relationship – but not necessarily in that order!

“Ken” is a mathematician who attends the congregation where our family also worships. I remember a time when speaking with anyone who taught anything related to numbers was beyond my comfort zone. However, math-phobia, like most fears, is context-driven so what better setting is there for unexpected insight than musings that accompany a postworship oneg on a Shabbat morning? Ken is one of the most humble and immensely perceptive souls I’ve ever met. He is a compelling man for his intellect, dedication to family and faith, as well as a quiet certainty with which he goes about his life in an attention-prone age. It is Ken’s insights that prompt this essay.

I am a rabbi who has intentionally left congregational life, a rabbi who has made the settings of a therapist his “pulpit.” I have found blessing and refuge in clinical locations where the honesty of one’s insights can be healing regardless of the momentary discomfort they might cause. Ken’s discernment of how we think will make a difference in my life and hopefully in the lives of my clients and as this keyboard has become another “pulpit,” I hope you the reader find this piece helpful, hopeful, and healing.

While commenting on differences in how his students conceptualize not only mathematics, but being alive, Ken declared that some possess “algebraic” or linear thinking, while others possess “geometric” thought wherein the dynamic between “size, shape, and relationship” is determinative.

I’ve long felt that we Jews in America are victims of our success in this glorious democracy; our oppression is often in believing we are our ancestors, not that we are civically agile advocates of our welfare and the rights of so many others. When rare or few external antagonists arise, we must address our inner lives and inventory the sources of our uncertainties. One of our persecutors is how we align our thoughts, how we place-then-placate our priorities. As “successful” task-oriented citizens, the bottom line is less a means than an ends and over the long haul, our souls know this, and so spirits hunger and spawn the absence from service and sanctuary so many rabbis bemoan. I will be so bold as to state that linear, algebraic thinking is this era’s Pharaoh.

If we are ruled by the notion that all that matters is what comes next, or that what is produced or arises next, then we

are slaves to circumstance, not conviction or character. We are servants of our sequences. Is there more we can believe in than expediency and efficiency, productivity and blatantly announced craftily marketed mission statements? Why does the aura and ambience of marketing so frequently and freely frequent our houses of worship? This is a statement of how much we are “linear.”

Sometimes, when teaching non-Jews of our heritage I find myself speaking of connection, connectedness and community. Judaism is far less about rules and laws than associations. Thus, Ken’s “geometric thinking” invigorates me. We may find a counter to the Pharaoh I mentioned above, and that is to make a “Moses” out of a changed way of thinking. This is shift of consciousness and eventually, conscience, as we come to realign our days around other notions of enduring significance. This ability to readjust how one thinks is an acquired skill, yet it is available to us via “free will.” If nothing else, Jews and Judaism have been adaptive to History’s ebb and flow.

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Rather than move slavishly from A-B-C onward to “Z,” I suggest we examine the “size” of all we encounter. How big is the problem we face? The answer to this prompts us to consider the blessings that may emerge after we have faced, rather than avoided, “adversity.” This will be a hard task for denizens of a culture who so frequently pop prescriptions rather than endure the obvious of a conundrum. The timing of a tragedy may obscure anything easy or good, but what if we were to believe and behave as if “promise” juxtaposes “pain” and whatever seems enormous may hurt, but may also be educating us about something we are not yet able to perceive or someone we do not yet understand.

Yes, the divorce or death, the illness and upheaval of job or career is massive, consuming the horizon of our heart’s vision. But do we even permit “hope” or “faith” to hint at a new path, a clearer direction, give a glimpse of some vague clarity, which will surely abide with the resolution to a situation that dominates our gaze now, but will eventually fade as do all the embers of our discontent?

Mystery and mayhem may be much more about how we see an unpleasantness than what the challenge actually comes to teach us? Could we shrink the size of the difficulty if we could teach ourselves that troubles can be teachers and we must remain Life’s loyal students? As well, the smallest blessing overlooked confuses size with import and so we train ourselves to disregard gratitude each and every day.

Then, there is “shape.” Have you heard the jokes about a blind person grasping onto an elephant? What does your piece of the puzzle feel like? Doesn’t this answer relate to what we hold onto? Doesn’t this answer relate to who we hold onto? Any “elephant” is a festival of shapes and varying boundaries, so where shall we grasp them? Isn’t what we decide to hold onto a statement of how we assess our abilities? If I cling to this trait, or that talent, or the other trouble, don’t these traits, talents and troubles grab onto us? “Letting go” is not only for addictions’ treatment, but building a cohesively healed and ethically complete life.

Shape is also not just about what something looks like, but how it “once” looked.” Consider that South America and Africa were once a single continent. Consider that a divorced family once was whole. Consider that both Spanish and Eastern European Jewry were once thriving epic centers of Judaism. Consider that Moses kept the shards of one covenant in the Ark that enshrined a second covenant. Consider the disagreement that even Yom Kippur doesn’t alleviate? Rifts form from trembling in the earth and soul’s crust, if not deeper! How do we put our puzzles’ pieces together and who do we ask for assistance? Once the shapes are brought together, to whom are these whole pictures shown?

Perhaps that is a question about Ken’s third partner of “relationship.” How do we relate to one another? Obviously life in a predominantly secular democratic society affects relationships that form and then form marriages and intermarriages, friendships and business partnerships. As a Jewish man of the early 21st century, do I relate more to Eastern Europe’s Anatevka or Spanish Jewry’s Talmudic academies? If we cannot convey the awareness of the Holocaust that compels a grandparent to his grandchild or great-grandchild, then what curriculum must be found in the religious school, and as importantly, which curriculum must be recycled and removed from our children’s instruction?

What of how we relate to Jews still excluded from the Jewish fold? As a fellow Reform rabbi once asked, “If you don’t believe that the word of the Bible is literal, then how can reluctance toward Jewish lesbians and gays be anything other than bigotry?” How are we moved by the proximity of the Jewish woman battered by her spouse, or is this still a problem best left in the proximity of gentiles? Do you know where recovering Jews and recovering rabbis (yes, rabbis and cantors!) find proximity? Often in



## The Roads from Babel

BY SETH BEN-MORDECAI

### Ham and wry

Linguists formerly used the term “Hamitic languages” to refer to ancient Egyptian and the Berber, Chadic and Cushitic languages of North Africa. The Hamitic languages are closely related to each other and distantly related to the Semitic languages. The common ancestor of both groups, formerly called “Semitic-Hamitic,” is now called “Afro-Asiatic” to avoid naming a language group after Ham, the disgraced son of Noah.

Several interesting sound correspondences exist between ancient Egyptian and the Semitic languages. First, Egyptian never developed an “L” sound. Therefore, the “L” of Semitic words corresponds to “N,” “R,” or even “T” in Egyptian words. Second, the “H” sound in the Semito-Hamitic ancestor language became “Sh” in Semitic languages while remaining “H” in Egyptian. Finally, sounds made with the lips (labial sounds) such as “P,” “B,” and “M,” often seem to interchange across these related languages.

Knowing these sound correspondences, the relationships among Egyptian and Hebrew words become clear. The Biblical Hebrew word “hashmal” (a shiny metal) corresponds to Egyptian “hesmen” (bronze). Hebrew “qinah” and Egyptian “qenuwy,” both mean a lament. Hebrew “hisheb” and Egyptian “hesheb” both mean to count. Hebrew “yaqar” (precious) and Egyptian “yeqer” (excellent) are nearly identical in meaning and spelling. Finally, recalling that Hebrew “SH” interchanges with Egyptian “H,” Hebrew “T” interchanges with Egyptian “N,” and Hebrew “M” can interchange with Egyptian “P,” we see that Hebrew “shalom” corresponds to Egyptian “hotep,” with both words meaning “peace.”

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church basements! What of Jewish teens in this time and era writing poems and plays about Hitler, because though Nazism must never be forgotten, this horrid tale is the one told time and again by those with whom this child shares space. What is nearby, who is nearby, and “who and what” are permitted to become nearby, these matters shape the soul’s geography.

(see Leapman, page NAT 15)

# Muslim Alliance of Indiana Interfaith Luncheon, Oct. 23

BY SUE SWARTZ

About two-thirds of the way through their appearance at the Muslim Alliance of Indiana Interfaith Luncheon, I stopped keeping track of who was speaking: Was it Ron Kronish or Mohamad Zibdeh who said “one of the names of God is peace”? Was it Kronish or Zibdeh that quipped “smoke was coming out of those rooms” in describing interfaith dialogue in Israel?

I can’t tell you who said what just by looking at my notes – and perhaps that is the ultimate message of these two men, Reform rabbi and Muslim kadi (judge), both committed to knowing the other in a place deeply divided by religion and war.

Three decades ago, Ron Kronish made aliyah from the United States. Mohamad Zibdeh lives today in Jaffa, where he grew up before 1948 in an apartment building populated by Jews and Muslims. Kronish is a Zionist, steeped in Western values of pluralism and democracy, values he says are not inherent to the Middle East. Zibdeh is a Sharia court judge who handles marriage and divorce cases in Jerusalem, a citizen of Israel, fluent in both Hebrew and Arabic.

The men call each other *friend*. They have worked together closely since the inception of the Jerusalem-based Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, founded on the eve of the first Gulf War; they work in particular with the KEDEM project that brings together Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze religious leaders for study, dialogue, and action.

(In this way, their efforts mirror those of the annual Interfaith Luncheon held Oct. 23 at IUPUI, spearheaded by the Muslim Alliance of Indiana and co-sponsored by several Jewish and interfaith groups including the Jewish Community Relations Council and Congregation Beth-El Zedeck. A rabbi, bishop, and imam shared the invocation and my lunch table was filled with people from every faith.)



KEDEM uses a simple – but not simplistic – model to advance this interfaith model. Representing no one but themselves, individuals are brought together over an extended period of time so that they can get to know each

other, study each others’ religious texts, and eventually discuss the issues between them in order to take some small joint action out of a new – and shared – understanding.

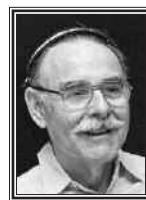
An interaction about the Western Wall/Al Aqsa mosque is an example of how this dialogue works. Kadi Zibdeh described how the Muslim clergy in KEDEM were adamant that they would never give up Al Aqsa as a holy site, but over time they came to see how the Western Wall was also critically important to the Jewish people. To deny either side access became a less tenable solution as group members got to see each as equals with deep religious faith.

...perhaps that is the ultimate message of these two men, Reform rabbi and Muslim kadi (judge), both committed to knowing the other in a place deeply divided by religion and war.

“There is a clear difference in our positions and beliefs,” Zibdeh concluded, “and we go in knowing that there is a difference. But the Koran says that an enemy might be a friend tomorrow.” Kronish built on his comments, relating how most Israeli rabbis – the overwhelming majority of whom are Orthodox – had never talked to an Arab religious leader before, “and the other way around too.” In Israel, a country segregated along religious and ethnic lines, it is easy to get caught up in the prevailing stereotypes. Even among educated people, Arabs are often assumed to be latent terrorists or disloyal to the state, while Jews are soldiers, occupiers and settlers.

“Are we prepared to live together?” asked Kronish. He said that they work on the assumption that there will eventually be a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The real difficulty is not the one taken up by the politicians, but rather the need to change the hearts and minds of people in Israel and in the region so that they can live together.

And to get to this place of coexistence, dialogue alone is not enough. There must be small gestures of reconciliation. The religious leaders issued an agreement denouncing the killing of innocent people on both sides. They jointly approached hospitals and universities to set aside public prayer for the Muslim minority as was the custom for the Jewish majority – and were pleased with the mostly positive response. Together, they travelled to Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Sarajevo, all former places of intense conflict, in order to see that fighting could come to an end.



## For Young People

BY RABBI MOSHE BEN ASHER, PH.D.

### Chayat Hashavua: Living with a snake in the same basket

Do you know the Hebrew word for “snake”?

It’s *nakhsh*, and the basic meaning of the word is to be able to tell what’s going to happen in the future. To be able to tell the future is a way of saying that the snake is very clever.

Do you remember how a snake was very clever with Eve, the first woman, in the Garden of Eden? It talked her into eating fruit from the tree that God had forbidden to her and Adam. And do you know how the snake talked her into doing the wrong thing?

He knew she was tempted to eat the fruit because it looked so delicious, so he told her that nothing bad would happen if she did it. Have you ever been tempted to do something you knew was wrong, and someone else told you that nothing bad would happen if you did it?

But it isn’t true – bad things do happen when we do the wrong thing.

Not only did bad things happen to Eve and Adam – they could no longer live in the Garden of Eden where life was beautiful – but also to the snake. That snake and every snake that came after it was to be punished. The punishment was that most people would not like them and make friends with them, as we do with other animals.



Kadi and Kronish are not naïve. Although they believe that there will eventually be peace, theirs is not an easy task. For most human beings, there is only one legitimate narrative – their own – and the very idea of acknowledging, let alone listening to, the “other side” entails psychological risk. “We live in an ongoing conflict,” said Kronish, “and in our heads there is still suspicion and war going back to 1948.” Most of us are in deep denial that there can be more than one story, more than one truth.

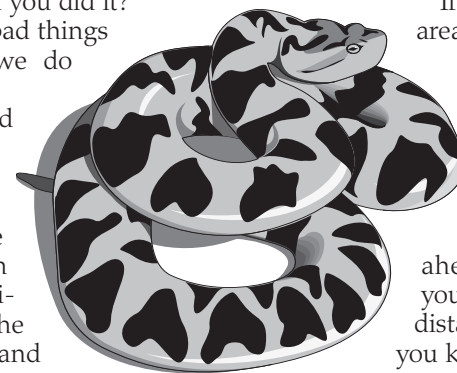
“Sometimes there is lack of trust in this way (of dialogue),” Zibdeh said through his Hebrew translator, but he still believes in it. Thousands of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Israel (and the West Bank) have begun to talk to each other without politicians or officials of any kind. Even as political solutions remain elusive, parents

(see Swartz, page NAT 15)

Do you like snakes or have you had a snake for a pet? What do you like or dislike about them? If you like snakes a lot, what do you think of the idea of worshipping them? There was a time, almost 3,000 years ago, when Jews were burning incense – a form of worship – to a copper snake that Moses had made. This was happening after the people had entered into the land of Israel but before they all began to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. At that time, people would go up on high places and make sacrifices, and sometimes they would worship idols. The king then, Hezekiah was his name, stopped the people from worshipping idols.

#### It’s time for the snake quiz!

1. “What kind of animal is a snake?”
2. What are some of its closest reptilian “cousins”?
3. What does it mean that snakes are cold-blooded?
4. What’s unusual about a snake’s eating habits?
5. How big an animal can a snake eat whole?
6. How many different kinds of snakes exist in the world?
7. How short are the shortest and long are the longest snakes?



If you’re going to be in an area where there are harmful snakes, what can you do to protect yourself? Wear high boots and heavy, long pants, like jeans. Carry and know how to use a snake-bite kit. Look ahead for snakes where you’re walking. Keep a safe distance from a snake unless you know for sure that it’s not poisonous.

There’s a proverb – a wise old saying – that teaches: “No one can live with a snake in the same basket.” What do you think that means? How might it apply to us? Maybe what it means is that when we find someone in our circle of friends who tries to trick us into doing things that are wrong, like the snake did in the Garden of Eden, we either have to change that person or leave that circle of friends.

**[ANSWERS TO QUIZ: (1) reptile; (2) lizards, turtles, and crocodiles; (3) they don’t rely on food for the energy to maintain their body heat; (4) they consume their prey whole instead of biting off small pieces; (5) the African rock python have been observed eating animals as large as an antelope or a small cow; (6) about 2,500 species; and (7) 5 inches and 33 feet.]**

Rabbi Moshe ben Asher is co-director of Gather the People ([www.gatherthepeople.org](http://www.gatherthepeople.org)), an Internet-based, nonprofit organization that provides resources for congregational community development and organizing. ★

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## As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

### An inspirational CD

The CD *Inspirations: Memories of Home, the Holocaust Museum of Houston Tribute to the Survivors* features the voice of David Propis, the Hazzan of Congregation Beth Yeshurun (also of Houston). The word "home" in the title refers to those areas of Eastern Europe that were home not only to most of the Jewish victims (as well as the few survivors) of the Shoah, but also home to the bulk of Jewish immigrants to this country that were able to enter legally before legislation curtailed and eventually cut off large-scale immigration of Jews to the United States. That large area included but was not limited to Russia, Poland, Hungary and Roumania.



There are 18 tracks in all on this disc, superbly sung and also interpreted musically as well as artistically by Hazzan Propis. Most of these songs were well known (almost too well known) up to the middle of the previous century. The fact is that they are not all that well known today. Those generations that knew these songs, regardless of their degree of religious observance, still knew and spoke Yiddish. The bulk of today's youth (and their parents) do not. We have succeeded in acculturation only too well. In spite of the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language in Israel, the majority of American Jews do not speak Hebrew either.

Even "real" Americans know and use words such as *gonif* and *shlimiel*, and one doesn't have to be Jewish to eat a bagel, with or without lox and cream cheese. (Incredible!) In the process of acculturation, we have lost a large part of our cultural heritage. That is one reason why this CD (released in 1997) is as significant as it is. It is not for the memory of the dead alone, rather it is very much for us, the living; those folk for whom these songs and the language that moves the music should once more become part of our cultural makeup.

Many of these songs originated in the Yiddish theater composed by names

such as Goldfaden, Ellstein, Olshanetsky, and others. Songs like Vilna and Belz (introduced by my father, z'l, Hazzan Leon Gold) were well-known Jewish centers. In a collection such as this, it must have been difficult to decide what to leave out as well as what to include. Propis could just as easily have included songs that paid tribute to Zlatapol or Yass (Mein Shetl Yass). Another song "Papirosin" (Cigarettes) is reflective of the America of the 1930s, while such songs as "Ani Ma'amin" and the "Partisan Song" grew out of the 2nd World War.

In my last column, I erroneously attributed the song "Vi Ahin Zol Ikh Geyn" to Haymie Jacobson. (It was written by Strok and Korn-Teur.) The reason I suspect is that I heard Mr. Jacobson sing the song so frequently that I (wrongly) assumed that he wrote it! I regret my error.

Regarding Hazzan Propis, his lyric tenor projects the feeling, spirit and pathos of these songs and does so ever so tastefully. I also applaud his appearing (on the cover) in traditional cantorial garb, which while the norm several generations ago has regrettably been out of favor with many of his colleagues recently.

Forgive me if I digress a bit here. Informality in dress as well as worship seems to be the rule more than the exception. And I maintain that we live in musically regressive times. In the 1960s I served as organist in a leading Conservative temple. I know that at least in Boston, most Conservative temples also had organists. Recently, several rabbis have said (with a straight face) that organs are not allowed in Conservative services. Of course, while this may be nonsense (at least to me), the very people who are not familiar with the music on this CD will also agree with that statement because they no longer see or hear one used in a Conservative temple. By the way, even in many Reform temples, the cantor or rabbi accompanies himself /herself on a guitar, just like many priests or ministers do in Christian churches.

And it is said that we do not want to have an organ played at our services because the goyim do. They also have indoor plumbing and that has not prevented us from doing the same! I believe that the songs on this disc are all tastefully arranged and add to the effectiveness of their respective performances. For the few who may be familiar with some or even all of the songs, this CD is a welcome treat. It is also a cultural reminder of the origin of our musical roots. For those who are not acquainted with these songs, now is the time to do just that.

Yiddish is a rich language and deserves better than to be remembered only for a few crude words that are now part of the English language. Credit for their work on this disc should to be acknowledged to Rob Zurawin for his fine piano accompaniments as well as orchestral timbres; to Cantor Propis for his guitar playing, orchestral instrumentation as well as his moving vocal interpretations;

(see Gold, page NAT 15)



## Jewish Cinema

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

### The Other Israeli Film Festival, now in Manhattan

As it does each year, the Other Israeli Film Festival comes to Manhattan, offering a clear view of Israeli's Palestinians. Sponsored once more by the The Israeli Film Center at the Manhattan JCC, the festival runs through most of November. The value of these fine films (both documentaries and fiction pieces) is that it gives this minority population a human face.



A scene from Jaffa.

As to the films themselves, outstanding among its peers is *Jaffa*, a modern Romeo-and-Juliet tale, directed by Keren Yedaya. Mali, an Israeli girl, falls in love with the Arab, Tauffik, a mechanic in her father's garage. The doomed love story, so familiar to us all, is totally absorbing in this setting. Our only criticism is that *Jaffa* portrays all the Arabs as noble, with a Jew as the villain of the piece. Yet one cannot but empathize with this young couple, victims of the time and place, and root for their survival.

The documentary *Telling Strings* offers a very different (and basically apolitical) experience. It is an unusual look at the Jubran family, a three-generation Palestinian family of musicians from northern Galilee. The father is both musician and instructor, but also a maker of traditional string instruments such as the ouds and bouzouqs. *Telling Strings* is a fine example of the playing out of the creative process, which exists here in very trying conditions.



A scene from Telling Strings.

Among the 17 films offered are comedies, satires, Cannes Film Festival favorites, travelogues, documentaries. Underlying all the films is the reality of official, governmental oppression – sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant, in its political message. And yet there is undeniable truth. Not only are Palestinians restricted in movement and opportunity, as the films indicate, but they are seen by Israelis as a despised minority and treated as such. Of course one could argue that such an impasse between peoples is the result of necessity, history, and ongoing perils – that the real villain is not the Israeli government, but the ever-threatening terrorists. But the films focus on effect rather than cause, on life as it exists for the Palestinians.

Clearly political in its essence is *Laila's Birthday*. The story of a judge-turned-taxi-driver, the film follows its Palestinian anti-hero through one day of work, as he struggles to get home in time for his seven-year-old daughter's birthday. His family life, idealized in the film, offers the only bulwark against the humiliations and frustrations of his daily life. Initially, *Laila's Birthday* promises to be a comedy but proves to be just the opposite.

Other films focus on a Bedouin village in the Negev that has the largest percentage of deaf people in the world, an Arab journalist who reaches across cultures, the fantasies of a detainee in an Israeli prison, Arab-Israeli interactions, and the unifying effects of hummus.



A scene from Laila's Birthday.

That a Palestinian population, with its own culture and values and sense of pride, continues to exist is exemplified in these films. Certainly this information is – or should be – part of our own education. As Festival founder Carole Zabar points out, the Festival's goal is to promote tolerance. "Film is a great vehicle for cultural understanding and social awareness, and we are excited to...shine a light on a segment of Israel's population that no one gets to see..." A worthy project indeed.

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



# Interview

BY ARI J. KAUFMAN

## Israel – more than bloodshed and politics

*Holy Land Hardball* is a documentary detailing the Israeli Baseball League, from its founding, through the first pitch of its inaugural season, on June 24, 2007. The film was screened during Indiana's Heartland Film Festival in late October, and I viewed it October 23.

Directed by Brett Rapkin and Erik Kesten, and produced by Hoosier Sami Mustaklem, it won the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the 2008 Boston Jewish Film Festival. The 90-minute documentary is indeed humorous, detailed and witty.

"The idea for the Israel Baseball League came from Larry Baras, a middle-aged Jewish guy from Boston who owns a bakery business," Co-Director Kesten explained. "He was suffering from a crisis of faith: his father had recently passed, his daughter was sick, and his business was struggling. And so he railed against God for moment."

But while listening to a Rosh Hashanah sermon, Baras realized that while you cannot change your problems, you can alter your response to those problems. Therefore, as penance, he decided to do something special for Israel: bring the culture of baseball to the Jewish State.

"As far as the genesis of the film, the set up makes for a great underdog sports film. You have a bagel-maker with no sports management experience deciding he's going to be the first person to bring professional to the Middle East," Kesten told me. "Of course, this was real life, so success was far from guaranteed. But we felt the genuine heart that Larry exhibited would carry the way for the film, regardless if the league made it to Opening Day or not. And what we ended up witnessing surpassed anything we could have hoped for."



Mr. Mustaklem, the film's producer, was born and raised in Indianapolis, and began doing work with video at North Central High School on their closed circuit television network. He attended Columbia College in Chicago, and then transferred to Indiana University to study media production, eventually leaving school to work for Apple Computer. In 2007 he began working on *Holy Land Hardball*.



Mr. Kesten, 32, grew up on Long Island and attended Syracuse University before landing a job at a small production company that specialized in sports documentaries. He was able to work on documentaries for HBO Sports, on topics ranging from Mickey Mantle to Margaret Lambert, a German-Jewish high jumper who was used by the Nazis to help secure the 1936 Olympics.

As for baseball in particular, Kesten sees it this way: "It's definitely a matter of pride. It's nice to see Jews performing at the highest levels in sports. That was one thing we enjoyed capturing in *Holy Land Hardball* – physically accomplished Jewish athletes."

"I've been a fan of baseball since I was a child, going to Indians' games with my grandparents at Indianapolis's Bush Stadium," Mustaklem recalled. "Another huge influence on me are the films that have come from baseball, which I believe do a better job promoting baseball than baseball does itself."

Mr. Rapkin, 31, hails from Los Angeles, relocating his home this past February after nearly six years in New York City. He attended the University of Arizona and studied film in Italy.

The idea was hatched in the summer of 2006 when Rapkin read about the man who had begun the process of starting a baseball league in Israel. When they spoke, Baras invited him to the first tryout in August to start shooting.

Mustaklem's role as associate producer was to act at the pleasure of Erik Kesten and Brett Rapkin, shooting, editing, sitting in on story meetings, and doing motion graphics.

"My goal was specifically to be a part of the support staff that made it possible for the film to be completed," the 27-year-old claimed. "The opportunity to work on this film was made even more special by being surrounded by two incredibly talented filmmakers. Erik and Brett were instrumental in my evolution as a filmmaker."

Financially, Mustaklem, Rapkin and Kesten lacked funding to fly to Israel, therefore they traded services with the league, whereby Rapkin would help direct the game for Israeli television, then all three prepared it for American television. There was only money to send Kesten and Rapkin to the Holy Land, so Mustaklem stayed in New York to piece together the documentary, while the two directors left a week before opening day and shot the entire time, except Saturday.

"It was interesting to say the least! There were so many loose ends the

league had to tie up before Opening Day that it made for a ton of drama," Kesten relayed. "Would the fields be ready on time? Would they get the equipment through customs? Would the players revolt? Would there even be an Opening Day?! There were a lot of nervous people that week."

Only 40% of the players were Jewish, with about 11% from Israel. And though the league hopes to be made up of at least 25% Israelis by its fifth year, in 2007, IBL's 128 players represented nine nations: the United States (77), the Dominican Republic (16), Israel (15), Canada (9), Australia (7), Colombia, Japan, New Zealand and Ukraine.

"The food at the games was kosher, and the league observed Shabbos, so there wasn't much to shoot on Saturday," Kesten noted. "And there was no way we were going to go to Israel for a week and not at least take one day to relax and enjoy ourselves."

Ultimately the league faced major financial woes after the summer of 2007.

"Right now it's fighting for its survival, trying to put together a second season as soon as possible," Kesten reports. "The future is uncertain, but the dream is very much alive."

"We trusted that they would make it to Opening Day and they trusted us that we'd find a way to be there to capture it on tape," Rapkin remembers.

A number of IBL players have signed professional contracts in leagues around the world since their summer in Israel, with two now playing minor league baseball in America. Others are playing in Argentina, Germany, the U.S. and in Israel with the American Maccabi softball team.

On the positive side, the directors report that Little League participation is way up since the IBL's first season, so baseball may indeed be taking root and creating a larger fan base in a nation where basketball and soccer still dominate popularity.

"What appealed to me most about this film was the autonomy that Brett and I would have. This was a story we wanted to tell and we wanted to tell it a particular way, and that was to let things unfold as much like a scripted narrative movie as possible," Kesten said. "We wanted people to forget they're watching a documentary. And we felt confident that we had a unique story – a mix of comedy and drama – that would allow us to do that."

"At the end of the day, I hope seeing the film can inspire people. I've often thought that the league and the film itself were running on parallel tracks built of pure faith," Rapkin said. "Each tryout and each meeting they had could have been the last, but we wanted to film it anyway."

Kesten said he was proud to make "the rare American film about Israel that doesn't include bloodshed or politics." He added that "Israel is a central character in the film and I think it's an Israel that many American Jews who visit Israel will recognize," he told me, which resonated with the audience at my screening.

"We've been fortunate to play the film



## Movie Review

REVIEWED BY CHARLIE EPSTEIN

## Peanuts, popcorn, knishes

I recently went to a movie at the Heartland Film Festival in Indianapolis. The title of this intriguing documentary was *Holy Land Hardball*. It had nothing to do with the Mideast peace talks. It was about the establishment of professional baseball in Israel.



When Boston bagel maker Larry Baras intended to create a professional baseball league in Israel, his idea was met with incredibility, ridicule, dismissal, and sometimes downright hostility, besides uproarious laughter. But on he went, holding tryouts in the U.S. and Dominican Republic. He got ball players who were just not good enough for American baseball. The tryouts were hilarious when players muffed balls and threw wildly. However in 2007 the Israel Baseball League was formed for one season in the Holy Land. Unfortunately at the end of this first season after many disastrous situations, checks bounced and the league disintegrated.

The film *Holy Land Hardball* was extremely interesting and full of humor. You rooted for the league to succeed in spite of its hardships like equipment, balls, mitts and uniforms being held up at customs until opening day. The biggest laugh for me was when one ball player was kidding another by telling him he "was going to be traded to Egypt." Other disasters were the living quarters and the rough field terrain.

Many players went to Jerusalem to sightsee, and we shared in their travels. This wonderful documentary will not be

(see Epstein, page NAT 15)



in front of thousands, and the audience response has been amazing. In fact, we're approached constantly by people wanting to set up group screenings of the film at their temples, JCCs and schools, which is very flattering."

A former California schoolteacher, Ari Kaufman is a historian for the Indiana War Memorials Commission and an Associate Fellow at the Sagamore Institute in Indianapolis. His newest fiction book is *Marble City*, which will be available by the end of 2009. ★

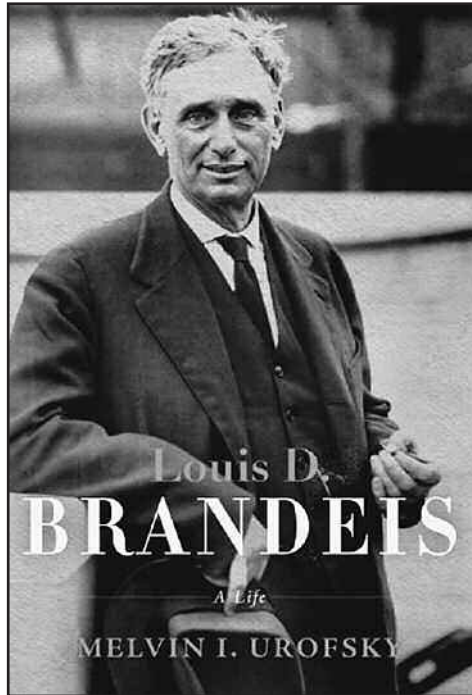


# Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY MORTON I. TEICHER

## Biography of Justice Brandeis

*Louis D. Brandeis: A Life.* By Melvin I. Urofsky. New York: Pantheon Books, 2009. 968 Pages. \$40.



This gigantic biography of Justice Brandeis deals extensively with his careers as a lawyer, reformer, jurist, Zionist, and patriarch. The author, Melvin I. Urofsky, is a historian with a special interest in law and public policy. Accordingly, he stresses Brandeis's work as a Supreme Court Justice, exploring in depth Brandeis's opinions and his important contributions to modern jurisprudence. The first Jew on the Supreme Court, Brandeis served from 1916 to 1939. For practically all of that time, the Court was dominated by conservative Justices so that Brandeis, who often found himself in the minority, became known as the Great Dissenter. In time, most of his views were accepted and adopted by the Court. Free speech and the right to privacy, among other principles, were notably advanced by his judgments.

Born in Louisville in 1856 to a family of well-to-do German Jews, Brandeis was close to his two older sisters and his older brother to whom he was especially devoted. He also enjoyed good relationships with his aunts, uncles, and cousins, especially his uncle Lewis, a successful lawyer. He was the only family member who pursued his Judaism. The others did not deny their Jewishness but they did not practice it. They celebrated Christmas but knew nothing of the Jewish holidays. Brandeis was 58 years old before he ever entered a synagogue. He was not involved in the Jewish community and he enjoyed a pork chop at breakfast. Nevertheless, he

became an American Zionist leader, visiting Palestine in 1919 and helping to raise money for the Jewish settlements. Urofsky raises the question of why Brandeis became a Zionist and offers a number of unsatisfactory answers, save for the great admiration that Brandeis had for his uncle Lewis, an observant Jew.

Brandeis graduated from Harvard Law School in 1878 when he was 21, and formed a partnership with his friend, Sam Warren. They soon became one of Boston's most successful law firms, earning a great deal of money. However, he and his wife, Alice, lived modestly, enabling Brandeis to devote time to pro bono work and to the causes he believed in. He fought against railroad monopolies; for minimum wages and maximum hours; for saving banks life insurance; and against the large insurance companies whose "industrial insurance" was "a legal racket to steal from the poor." These activities earned him the hatred of wealthy Bostonians who tinged their opposition with anti-Semitism. Later, when Woodrow Wilson became president and considered Brandeis for a cabinet appointment, there is some evidence that prejudice precluded such action. Afterward, when Wilson nominated Brandeis to the Supreme Court, there was a six-month long battle over confirmation. Largely a fight between progressives and their opponents, there were certainly elements of anti-Semitism among those opposed to the appointment. The final Senate vote was 47 to 22. Once on the Court, Brandeis experienced the hatred of Justice McReynolds, a notorious anti-Semite who detested Brandeis and, later, Cardozo.

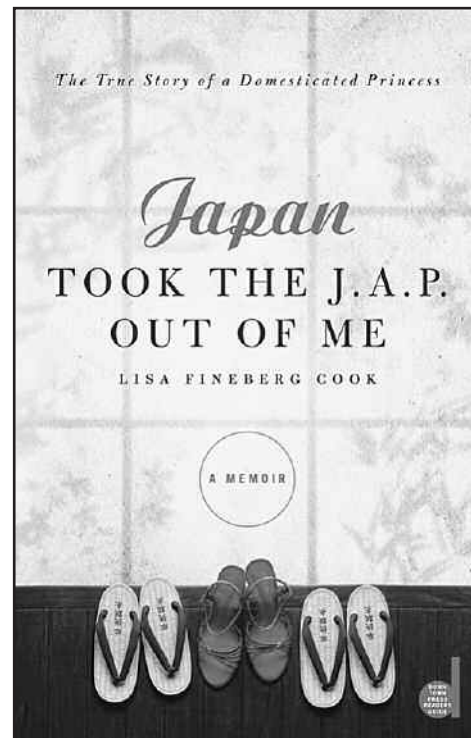
Urofsky discusses Brandeis's warm relationship to his two daughters and their non-Jewish spouses. He also explores Brandeis's friendship with Felix Frankfurter and Oliver Wendell Holmes as well as his experiences with his law clerks some of whom became famous in their own right. They included Dean Acheson (later Secretary of State), James Landis (later Dean of the Harvard Law School), and David Riesman (later author of *The Lonely Crowd* and Harvard professor).

This masterful biography is supported by 144 pages of acknowledgments and notes, testifying to Urofsky's impressive research. The book will stand as the definitive work on Louis Brandeis, a historic and influential American Jew.

## Frank, light-hearted account of living in Japan

*Japan Took the J.A.P. Out of Me.* By Lisa Fineberg Cook. New York: Downtown Press, 2009. 275 Pages. \$15.

Six days after a snazzy Beverly Hills wedding, 29-year-old Lisa Fineberg Cook, self-styled Jewish American Princess, was on her way to Nagoya, Japan with Peter, her new, non-Jewish husband. He has accepted a two-year contract to teach English in a Japanese high school. Lisa looks forward to this "exotic destination" without a clue as to



what she is letting herself in for. This light-hearted, honest account of her first year in Japan is filled with hilarity and joy but also with frustration and anger as her marriage is strained by the requirement for adaptation to difficult experiences. She and Peter eventually find their marriage strengthened as they work together to confront their problems. The clash of cultures experienced by Americans living abroad is candidly explored in plain and forthright language.

As often the case with Americans working overseas, their arrangements include housing provided by their employers. This is frequently a source of tension since the expectations of expatriates may well clash with the ideas of employers as to what constitutes acceptable housing. And so it was for the Cooks, as Lisa graphically describes. The walk-up flat assigned to them is dirty and poorly furnished. The small bed has "an ugly wooden frame and a dilapidated mattress." The stove, bathroom and washing machine are all inadequate. With great difficulty and at considerable expense, Lisa and Peter buy what they need to fix up the apartment. They adapt to the sketchy cooking facilities by eating out a lot.

Lisa starts teaching English conversation to several Japanese women and then gets a job as an English instructor at a school for girls. To get there, she has to cope with a bus and three subways. She is put off by the crowds and the men reading "porno comic books." Initially, she is also disheartened by her students. Gradually she adapts to the transportation problems and to the students. She becomes friendly with a few Japanese women and she learns to differentiate the girls in her class from each other. Her adjustment is facilitated by the short trips she makes with Peter. They go to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Hiroshima. By and large, she is fascinated by these places, especially Hiroshima, which reminds her of the Holocaust stories on which she was

raised. She feels a kinship to the Japanese who died at Hiroshima, forgetting that dropping atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war and spared the lives of many American soldiers who would have been killed had it been necessary to invade Japan.

Telephone calls to her mother and her close friend, Stacey, help to sustain Lisa but also are sometimes a source of irritation. She becomes less dependent on these opportunities as her adaptation to Japan is boosted. Her growing openness to Japanese culture helps her to respect and understand the cultural differences. However, she continues to disapprove of the unequal way in which Japanese women are treated and she is disturbed on learning that there is an underground anti-Semitic movement in Japan, despite the absence of Jews.

As globalization increases, more and more Americans will have opportunities for service in foreign countries. In preparation for these assignments, efforts are usually made to teach appreciation for cultural differences. This kind of formal instruction can be richly enhanced by such memoirs as this frank and light-hearted account of one couple's intensive experiences in Japan.

## Thrilling novel about efforts to retrieve a solid gold menorah

*The Last Ember.* By Daniel Levin. New York: Riverhead Books, 2009. 418 Pages. \$25.95.

The author of this thrilling debut novel, Daniel Levin, is a Harvard Law School graduate with an undergraduate degree in Roman and Greek civilizations from the University of Michigan. He clerked for the Chief Justice of Israel's Supreme Court and spent a year as a visiting scholar at the American Academy in Rome. He practiced international law in a prominent New York law firm, specializing in the museum trade of ancient artifacts.

Drawing on this impressive background, Levin has produced a thriller that ricochets between Israel and Italy. The plot turns on the determined search by rival antagonists for the gold menorah that disappeared when the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Much of what we know about this great tragedy that stained the pages of Jewish history is contained in "The Jewish War" written by Josephus, a contentious member of a priestly family who joined forces with the Romans and tried to persuade the besieged Jews to surrender to the Romans. Instead, they fought valiantly but were eventually crushed and the Temple was destroyed. According to Levin's fictional account of what happened subsequently is that Josephus really wasn't a traitor but rather became a spy who managed to get the solid gold menorah out of the Temple's inner sanctuary and hide it.

(see Teicher, page NAT 15)





## Kosher Kuisine

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

### Pumpkin not in pie

Pumpkin pie is one of my favorites, and over the years I developed a great pareve, sugar-free recipe. Then the other day it occurred to me that pumpkin is great in cakes. Here are some recipes to try in addition to or instead of pie.

Pumpkin is a member of the summer squash and gourd family. The word comes from Greek “pepon” meaning cooked in the sun; it was called poumpon in French and poupion in English and then they added kin to poupion.

For those on sugar-free diets, pumpkin has a natural sweetness. It is also a good source of Vitamin A, a fair source of iron and not high in calories. For fun, try using fresh pumpkin rather than canned. One pound of raw, peeled pumpkin equals 4 cups chunked or packed and grated; one pound raw, peeled equals 2 cups cooked, pureed, drained flesh.

#### Pareve Pumpkin Cake

- 1/2 cup unsalted margarine
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 cup pumpkin
- 2 cups flour
- 1 Tbsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
- 3/4 cup nondairy creamer or pareve whipping cream

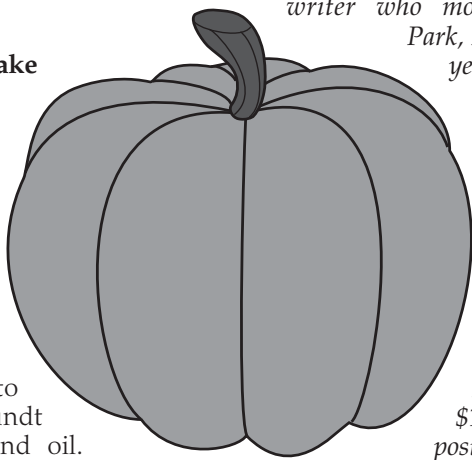
Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a rectangular baking pan. Cream margarine and sugars. Add eggs, vanilla and pumpkin. Add flour, baking powder, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, cloves and nondairy creamer or whipping cream. Blend. Spoon into prepared pan. Bake in 350° oven 30 minutes until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

For a nice variation, instead of nondairy creamer or whipping cream, use apple juice.

#### Spiced Pumpkin Cake

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups pumpkin
- 3 cups flour
- 1/2 tsp. cloves
- 1/2 tsp. ginger
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. baking soda

Preheat oven to 325°F. Grease a Bundt pan. Cream sugar and oil.



## Book Review

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

### Tackling the Israeli/Palestinian/Arab conflict

*La Maison Dajani* by Alon Hilu. Tel-Aviv: Miskal Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books. 2008. Pp 367. In Hebrew.

Thirty-seven year old Israeli author and playwright, Alon Hilu, has moved with his latest book according to the literary critics, with whom I enthusiastically concur, to the very forefront of Israel’s top writers.

This transforming as well as controversial literary accomplishment won the highly regarded 2009 Sapir Prize, only to be disqualified with all the other lesser

Add eggs and pumpkin. Add flour, cloves, ginger, cinnamon and baking soda. Blend well. Spoon into greased Bundt pan. Bake in 325° oven for one hour or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

#### Pumpkin-Apple Loaf

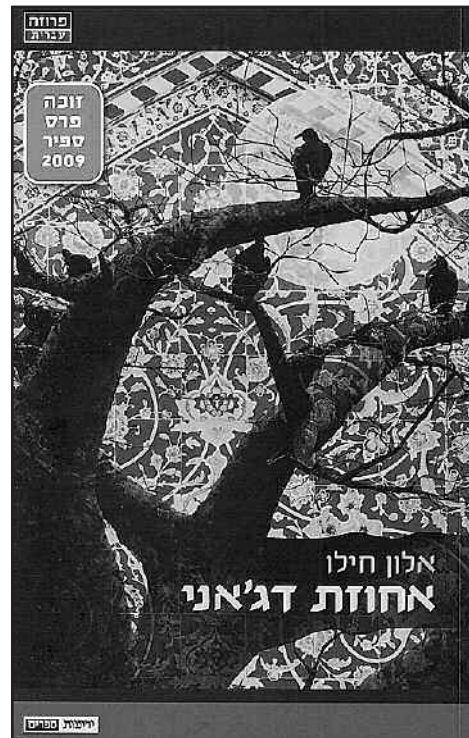
- 5/8 cup unsalted margarine
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup pumpkin
- 7/8 cup Granny Smith apple pieces
- 1/4 tsp. ginger
- 1/4 tsp. cloves
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 Tbsp. baking powder
- 2 cups flour

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a loaf pan. Cream sugar and eggs. Add pumpkin, apple, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Add baking soda, baking powder and flour. Blend well. Place batter in greased loaf pan. Bake in preheated 350° oven 55 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.

*Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, book reviewer, food columnist and feature writer who moved from Overland Park, Kan., to Jerusalem one year ago. She has just completed compiling her ninth kosher cookbook, this one for her synagogue, We're Cooking at Kehilat Moreshet Avraham. Copies are available at KMA, P.O. Box 2072, Jerusalem 91290. Each cookbook is an \$18 donation plus \$4 for postage and handling. ★*

winners given the family connection between the judge, the well-known center-left politician who is also an author and poet, Yossi Sarid, and the book’s editor, Rena Verbin.

Ironically, my purchased volume’s jacket comes with a winner’s sticker on its cover, now already in its sixth edition. I do not recall any other book tackling the Israeli–Palestinian–Arab conflict with the power to leave such a touching residue of sympathy for the Palestinian predicament, while casting a shadow on the early heroic Zionist enterprise.



The author also brilliantly manages to revive a 19th-century linguistic Hebrew style to go along with the account’s time frame of 1885–1886. The no-less-than-mesmerizing rendition is woven out of preserved material in Jerusalem’s Central Zionist Archive concerning Chaim Margaliyot-Kalworisky (1868–1947), an agronomist and member of the first aliya, along with the sharing (1885–1886) of young Arab Zalah, descendant of the distinguished Jaffa Dajani family.

The book contains alternating creative narrative from Jewish and Palestinian perspectives, reflecting not only clashing cultures and interest, but also self-deprecating and even harsh self-criticism particularly from Chaim. The energetic agronomist who, while committed to the Zionist goal of purchasing land from the wealthy feudal Effendies is engaged with his fellow “Hovevy Tzion” (Lovers of Zion) in ruthless practices, displacing so many poor Arab sharecroppers living on the land for hundreds of years.

Ironically and tragically, a love-hate relationship unfolds between the caring yet scheming Chaim who represents colonial superiority with benevolent support, and Zalah, a sickish and fantasizing young boy who is the son of the Dajani estate’s owner. As Zalah matures and learns of his friend’s intimate relations with his mother, along with the conspiracy to deprive his

## Hanukkah gift DVDs

BY CHARLIE EPSTEIN

A new movie version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* is just out on DVD. This recent color version premiered on the BBC, first as a miniseries and then as a feature film presentation.

The story of Anne Frank has been captivating readers for over 50 years. Her diary has been the world’s most widely read book of nonfiction after the Bible. This drama is the most historically correct of this famed memoir, sometime sacrificing entertainment for authenticity. The set is a detailed replica of the house where the Franks and others hid for two years from the Nazis. The script is from Anne’s view point. The film stars Ellie Kendrick as Anne and Iain Glen as her father, Otto Frank, with a very good supporting cast.

In other versions the Jews in hiding spent those two years in extremely cramped quarters and under very harsh conditions. The Nazi threat of discovery is ever lurking. In this DVD their hiding place seems spacious, and the Nazi terror is not ever present. Food runs short. Clothes wear out. Tempers flare within the sequestered group.

These Jews were discovered and captured only months before the war ended. If Anne Frank had not died of typhoid in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in March of 1945, she was destined to become an accomplished professional writer.

This adapted version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* chronicles the lives of the hiding Jews through Anne’s eyes. She is an obstinate, belligerent, sometimes selfish and demanding teenager while being extremely intelligent.

The other DVD of note is *The Golden Age of 2nd Avenue*, a delight of history about the Yiddish theater. This is a reminiscence, not a memorial, and I will be discussing this DVD in the next issue. ★

mother and him of the ancestral estate upon the father’s death, Chaim’s image changes for Zalah from that of the protective angel Gabriel to the “destroying angel.”

Feverish Zalah, in his “crazy” forecasts, predicts future wars between Arabs and Jews, the establishment of a Jewish state with Tel-Aviv’s Azrieli Center towers where his enchanting home and surroundings stand.

Uniquely confronting a complex and conflict-ridden theme, Hilu both educates and entertains us, sensitizing us to the issues involved on both sides to hopefully narrow the alienating and harrowing gap between the too-long warring parties.

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



**NEUSNER**

(continued from page NAT 7)

Greenbaum has defined a fine occasion for reflection on why Conservative Judaism is declining and supplied facts needed to answer the question. This is a fine dissertation.

It remains to note that in the years covered by this account of Finkelstein's leadership of JTSA and Conservative Judaism, six million Jews were murdered in Europe. That fact scarcely enters the scene. By contrast Julius Morgenstern, president of Hebrew Union College, was securing immigration visas for European scholars of Judaism, saving their lives. Among those Morgenstern saved was Abraham J. Heschel.

*Jacob Neusner is Distinguished Service Professor of the History and Theology of Judaism and Senior Fellow, Institute of Advanced Theology at Bard College Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. ★*

**PARSHA PERSPECTIVE**

(continued from page NAT 8)

Strength for Yaakov-Israel, for us, lies in factors that cannot be weakened by Eisav. If we do fall, it is not because we are not equal to Eisav in material power. And if we stand, it is not because of our strong material power – but because God bears us aloft on the wings of eagles. And that is the word that was sent to Yaakov, which is to find its home in our hearts.

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*Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and his wife Magidah Khulda bat Sarah are the co-directors of Gather the People (www.gatherthepeople.org), which provides online resources for congregational community development and organizing. ★*

**SWARTZ**

(continued from page NAT 10)

of children killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict speak by telephone, Jewish and Arab children attend integrated schools in Israel, and women of multiple faiths build small businesses together. People change their minds every day. They learn trust – and to call each other friend.

*Sue Swartz lives and writes in Bloomington, Indiana. Her decidedly Jewish blog, Awkward Offerings, can be found at <http://swartzsue.wordpress.com/>. ★*

**EPSTEIN**

(continued from page NAT 12)

seen in theaters but is on DVD. Many copies were sold at the showing.

*Charlie Epstein, of Indianapolis, has been a theater, movie and the performing arts critic for The Jewish Post & Opinion for more than 30 years. ★*

**LEAPMAN**

(continued from page NAT 9)

The Amidah knows this: Whether in egalitarian or traditional versions, each generation invokes its understanding of God. Abraham's God is not known as well to Isaac as is Isaac's God. Leah's God is more pertinent to her than would be Sarah's God. No, there is a place for the linear, but the soul also seeks size, share and relationship. Let us ignore none of these, for the blessings and benefits that might arise for all of these.

*Rabbi Steven M. Leapman is an addictions counselor at Oaklawn Facility in Elkhart and Goshen, Ind. He is a former U.S. Navy/USMC chaplain with interests in pastoral counseling, healthcare and bereavement as well as interfaith relations. He also enjoys creative writing. ★*

**GOLD**

(continued from page NAT 11)

and also to the excellent percussion playing by Richard Brown. The CD may be ordered from Kaspro productions, Inc. of Houston (713-305-6166) or by email at David@DavidPropis.com. To conclude: I found *Inspirations* to be inspiring!

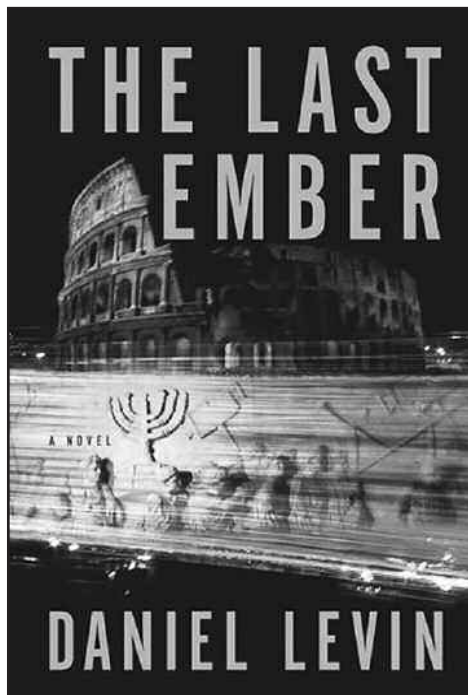
*Dr. Gold is a composer, conductor, educator and a music/drama critic. He may be reached at: 6 Webster Street, Springvale, Maine 04083, or by email at: drmortongold@yahoo.com. ★*

**TEICHER**

(continued from page NAT 13)

Based on this premise, the exciting story proceeds to follow carefully the efforts to retrieve the menorah. Two rival groups are competing with each other. One that is digging under the Temple Mount is led by a man known as Sheikh Salah-ad-din, which is the "name of the 12th-century Islamic warrior who defended Jerusalem from the Crusaders." The man now using this name is the grandson of the Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, implacable foe of the Jews who spent most of World War II with Hitler in Berlin. It was the grand mufti who passed on to his grandson his belief that the menorah was buried under the Temple Mount. Salah-ad-din is determined to remove all evidence of Jewish (and Christian) presence from the Temple Mount. The other "group" consists primarily of the story's protagonist, Jonathan Marcus, a young international lawyer with a background in classics that included a thesis on Josephus, and Dr. Emili Travia, a female UN preservationist with whom Marcus had been very friendly seven years earlier when they were both students in Rome.

The exciting action swings back and forth mostly between Rome and Jerusalem. Other characters are introduced, most of whom are acting in deceptive roles, thus complicating the strenuous and dangerous



efforts to locate the menorah. Roman police, UN officials, the Vatican, and Israeli authorities all contribute to the action that becomes perilous and murderous at times.

This fictional account of archaeology demonstrates fully the contemporary relevance of ancient artifacts and the truism that archaeology is politics, especially in the Middle East. Embroidering on what we know about Josephus from his own writings, Levin has spun a powerful narrative of deadly intrigue, filled with keen conflict and rousing exploits. He has woven arcane secrets and complicated personalities into a rich tapestry that grips the reader's attention. We eagerly look forward to his future work.

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

**KAPLAN/ISRAEL**

(continued from page NAT 16)

olive oil, honey liquor, jams, spices, cosmetics, candies, sauces and spreads.

**An Artists' Colony in the Golan Heights**

Three years ago we were visiting Katzrin, capital of the Golan, and found an industrial area with a ceramicist. He told us we ought to stop at the artists' colony at Aniam, just ten minutes away.

At the time, Aniam had a few cottages for artists living on this moshav and the beginnings of an artists' colony. The one that attracted us was Golan Gold, run by New Yorker Joel Friedman, a third generation goldsmith who had been at Aniam for 12 years. He noticed our braided wedding bands, asked to see them and discovered the DFS trademark in each of them. He had made them when he was working at his father's workshop and they had been bought by a Kansas City, Mo., fine jeweler where we bought them.

After parking your car, you walk into a cobblestone rectangular area with various

artists' cottages, a meat restaurant, a makolet, a dairy restaurant and a gift shop. Not all the studios were open, but here is a sampling of those that were.

My hostess was Dafna Kadoushevet, a silver jeweler, who came here with her carpenter husband and four children from Ramat Gan seven years ago. In her cottage, she also carries gold-filled "knitting" jewelry of Anat Paz; belts by Chaim Bar; and pottery by Michal Polak. In the back is a small kitchen with wooden silverware holders, hat racks, shelves, coasters, trays, toys and decorative items all made by her husband.

Ettee Shalom has been at the moshav for 31 years, since its beginning. She weaves palm, which provide baskets and other decorations to the metal tables, chairs and items made by her husband, Shlomo.

Miriam and Aryeh Yaeovitsky are in the moshav five years, decorating glass lids of wooden boxes for tea or jewelry, desk holders, mezuzot, hamsot, pomegranate candle and toothpick holders, ceiling lamps with hand painted glass and more. They also sell art supplies and do printing on caps and t-shirts.

Chana Pollak is 30 years in the moshav but just one year in the village as a ceramicist. Her useful stoneware ovenproof items for home and kitchen include casseroles, mugs, dishes, Kiddush cups, pitchers, platters and plates, using a special glaze she and her husband created and she bakes in a gas oven.

Osnatt Rottman, an art teacher, is 25 years on the moshav and creates artistic tiles, decorative tiles, mezuzot, numbers for apartment doors or houses, Hebrew letters and sculptures in her ceramics studio, which she has had for 11 years.

Deniz is a store selling evening gowns, hats, shoes and wedding dresses. In Hasimta, there are handmade handbags, jewelry and scarves on the main floor; upstairs is Bet Chocolate, a cafe specializing in – chocolate.

Joel Friedman of Golan Gold, opened in 2005 although he has lived on the moshav with his wife and children since 1997. Joel carries a full line of wedding rings, earrings, bracelets and pendants, and he can custom make anything. Joel works with all karats gold, sterling silver, semiprecious and precious stones. He also repairs and restores antique jewelry and Judaica.

Finally, Yechiel Argaman runs the gift shop with mezuzot, jewelry and gifts bought elsewhere but not by the moshav artisans.

**Background**

After years of aggression, the area of the Golan Heights was acquired by Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967. In 1981 it was annexed for security reasons and has undergone economic growth and development. Israel's only ski resort, many wineries and a variety of archaeological sites are available for visitors.

Katzrin is the capital of the Golan, founded on the original 2nd-3rd-century Jewish town of the same name, and is located 23.5 miles northeast of Tiberias.

*Sybil Kaplan lives in Jerusalem. ★*





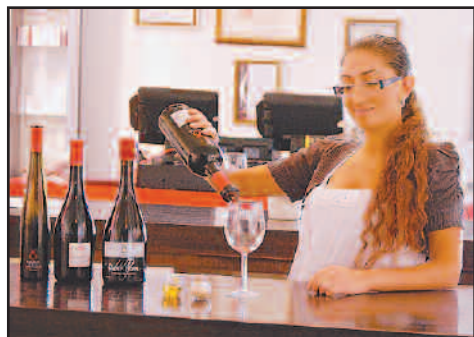
## Seen on the Israel Scene

By SYBIL KAPLAN

### Wineries and an Artists' Colony in the Golan Heights

How would you feel if you could swallow less than a tablespoon of something every day and know it would prevent heart disease and bad cholesterol, destroy cancer cells and even stop the development of cancer? If you are a diabetic, it would balance the level of insulin in the blood.

A miracle drug? No, much simpler. These are the claims of the Rimón Winery in the Upper Galilee and no grapes are involved. Tair Iluz, the darling, 21-year-old niece of the owner and in charge of exports gave us a tour recently and explained.



Tair Iluz of the Rimón Winery pour us a sample. All Photos by: Barry A. Kaplan.

Fourteen years ago, her uncle and his son were part of a family of farmers who had founded Moshav Kerem Ben Zimra in the Upper Galilee. He read about healing aspects of pomegranates and developed a pomegranate hybrid three years later, where each weighed 1-1/2 kilos (3.3 pounds). When it was sent to a lab, he learned that the level of sugar was very high, like grapes for wines.

The family decided to produce a dessert "wine." In 2004, they decided to establish commercial production of wines, which resulted in today's enterprise with six varieties. They maintain this is the only place in the world to produce these "wines," 70% of which are exported. In 2008, they bottled 560,000 bottles.

At the beginning of November, they will have the harvest season, on the mountain next to Moshav Kerem Ben Zimra. The process is very interesting. The seeds and pulp are put into a special separator (yes, says Tair, the big pomegranates have 613 seeds each just like small ones). There is a legend that each pomegranate has 613 seeds like the number of Torah commandments.

The seeds go to a squeezing machine, which is pressure controlled by air so the seeds and juice are separated. The white seeds are used for oil for medical and cosmetic purposes. The liquid then goes

into tanks for 2 to 4 months and then into aging barrels. Aging takes place 10 to 24 months, depending on the type.

Pomegranate seed oil contains high levels of antioxidants and provides moisture for dry, cracked or irritated skin as well as for eczema and other skin problems. Unfortunately, it takes 200 pounds of pomegranates to produce 16 ounces of pomegranate seed oil. There is a mashgiach on the premises, but not the same as in wineries because pomegranate wine is not a real wine.

Rimón Winery produces six types of "wines":

Pomegranates for Rimón Pomegranate Dry Wine are harvested at the peak of ripeness. The wine is aged for 12 months in French oak barrels and it is 13.8% alcohol.

Pomegranates for Rimón Pomegranate Dessert Wine are harvested at the peak of ripeness. The wine is aged for 10 months in French oak barrels and it is 15% alcohol.

Rimón Pomeranate Port Style Wine is created with the addition of fermented pomegranate juice. The oak barrels, which give it a smoky taste, are aged in the sun for 18 months. It is 18% alcohol.

Premium Dry Wine is aged 24 months and gets some of its sour taste from the wood. It is 13.8% alcohol.

Refreshing Wine is 16% alcohol, and is light and bubbling.

Bubble is champagne-like, 14.8% alcohol, and has a special Australian stopper to keep in the bubbles.

What blessing do you say over this "wine?" *Shehakol nehiah bidvaro* – everything was created by his word.

In the gift shop, in addition to the "wines," one finds pomegranate comfitures, almond marzipan made with pomegranate extract, pomegranate oil and cosmetics.

#### Dalton Winery

Daniel Rogov, Israel's most influential and preeminent wine critic, gives Dalton Winery four stars for consistently producing high-quality wines. In his *Guide to Kosher Wines for 2010*, listing the world's 500 best wines, for dry red and white wines, Dalton scores with four in the very good to excellent and highly recommended, and 12 in exceptional in every way category. For dessert wines, Dalton has one in the exceptional in every way category.

Located in the Upper Galilee, in an industrial park, Tomer Bitan, a young man from Safed, was our guide. After completing the army, he worked a year in the bottling room. He studied business and economics at the College of Safed, and a year ago he began guiding and assisting tasting.



The mashgiach, Rabbi Chaim Aberger, in the holding area of Dalton Winery.

Dalton Winery, as we know it today, was established in 1994 through a large investment by the Haruni family from England, with vineyards in the nearby moshav, Keren Ben Zimra. Alex Haruni, had come to live in Israel in 1991; his father, Matt, came with Alex's mother to live in Israel in 1993. He provided the vision and the capital. Their first harvest was in 1995. Dalton started as a small boutique winery with an annual production of 20,000 bottles a year, and every year it increased its production. In 2000 the winery was moved from the moshav to this industrial park.

In 2008, Dalton reached 800,000 bottles a year; Alex hopes to expand production in the future to 1.5 million bottles. Alex is the one who makes sure the winery works properly and deals with exports, corporate identity, and business and product development on a day-to-day basis.

Dalton is one of the few wineries that is surrounded by its vineyards where it grows its own grapes – Cabernet, Merlot, Shiraz, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Viognier. The area where the grapes are grown is 700–900

meters above sea level. The winemaking team is headed by an Israeli woman, Na'ama Mualem, who studied in Australia and California and joined the winery in 2002.

On the day we visited in late October, we were told the harvest had been finished the day before. Outside the winery is a garden with examples of the grapes grown. As we walked around the winery, we were accompanied by the mashgiach, Rabbi Chaim Aberger, Moroccan born, from Safed, who came to the winery six years ago after tiring of being a teacher. He supervises the three certificates of kashrut the wines have.

Our guide explained that the wine sits in barrels four months to two years; the bottling room bottles 1,500 bottles an hour, the bottles coming from Italy for all the wines except the rose, which comes from Israel.

At the end of the tour, one can taste some of the wines and walk around the store, which carries the wines, liquors, (see Kaplan/Israel, page NAT 15)



The mashgiach shows branches from this olive tree said to be about 750 years old.



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