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Happy Hanukkah



Art by John Domont

Editorial

The following was my editorial for the Jan. 14, 2004 issue. I wrote my first editorial Feb. 26, 2003, because at age 95 after 74 years of writing, my father, Gabriel Cohen, z"l, the founder of this newspaper, was running out of new material. The editors at the time, Ed Statmann and Dr. Vicki Jones told me that they needed something to fill his space. My father's last editorial was in June 2005 for the 75th anniversary tribute issue.

I wasn't planning to write more than once. Writing must be something I was meant to do, because practically seven years and about 250 editorials later, I'm still doing it. Hopefully this year, 2010, I will publish the best ones in a book.

The two nephews in this reprint from six years ago, Eli and Ethan, are now 11 and 10 respectively. They have grown to be such mensches, and to this day they still get along rather well, looking out for each other and not fighting too much.

Not everyone plays by the rules and sometimes that is okay. Our house seemed very quiet on Jan. 4 after all the out-of-town visitors left. When the 18th visitor had arrived, I stopped counting, so I do not know exactly how many of my family came to visit this December.

One of the highlights of this holiday season was playing dreidel with my nephews from Birmingham, Ala. Eli, age 5, and Ethan, age 4, are the two youngest of my sister Rena's three sons.

When I was growing up, we played dreidel sitting in a circle on the floor. One sibling took a turn spinning the dreidel, and everyone watched to see on which Hebrew letter it would land. Each person had a turn until it was back to the original spinner who would start the next round.

If it landed on *shin* the spinner would get 300 points. *Heh* was worth 50 points, *nun* was 5, and *gimel* was 3. After several spins, everyone would add their total points, and the one with highest was the winner.

We also had contests to see who could keep their dreidel spinning the longest, which one of us could keep the most dreidels spinning at once, and who could spin the dreidel upside down.

During Hanukkah this year, my sister took Eli and Ethan to the local Jewish Community Center where they had their choice of two different indoor pools in which to swim. When they returned to the house, Ethan said, "We went to a different JCC."

Eli and Ethan attend preschool at the JCC in Birmingham. It is a nice JCC, but smaller, which is not surprising because the Jewish community in Indianapolis is larger.

One of the boys was carrying a 3"x5" card that said, "LET'S PLAY DREIDEL." When I read it, I saw the rules were very different. The most desired letter became the least and vice versa.

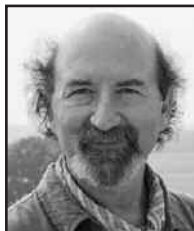
It said, "Everybody gets an equal number of pennies (or nuts) and puts one in the

About the Cover

Hanukkah 5770

John Domont speaking about his art, light, and Hanukkah:

Hanukkah is the celebration of light....It is the time of gratitude and surrender to the darkness of winter and the unknown...the time for going within. We have an opportunity to learn from the lessons of sustained faith in life. This is a time of gratitude, trust and celebration. We celebrate LIFE, the light and opportunity of existence. Hanukkah is the kiss of trust and faith.



John Domont

About the artist: In his late 20s, Domont worked exclusively for conservation groups photographing threatened habitats and endangered species around the world. He photographed so many different mammals in water habitats that water became a primary focus for his artistic endeavors.

In the process of abstracting the qualities of water, as transformed into its various aspects of light, color, movement, and energy, he began to experience a relationship with painting. By 1983, painting had become the primary focus of his work.

Domont's paintings are an expression of inspirations from nature and his relationship to the landscape. He strives to create harmony among the three forms of light available to an artist: surface light, the light of nature, and the light of spirit. His art is about presence and place.

Domont works in the Heartland, his home, where roads, pastures, fields, and forests are the essence of the landscape of the American Midwest. This countryside is both simple and nourishing. It is in the basics of the landscape that one can see and feel the beauty of the essential – the



center for the pot. Each player gets a turn to spin the dreidel. If it lands with the *nun* up, the player gets nothing; with the *gimel* up, the player takes all the coins in the pot; with the *heh* up, the player takes half the coins, with the *shin*, the unlucky player gives one penny to the pot. When the pot empties out after a *gimel*, each player puts a penny in and the game goes on."

I sat down to play this new version with the boys and all went well for the first two or three rounds. At that point, when it was either one's turn to spin, and the dreidel landed on a letter other than a *gimel* (win the pot of pennies), there was a pause in the game.

"That did not count, it accidentally hit my knee," or "I get to do it over because it was a bad spin," they would say. Mind you, when it was a *gimel*, there were no complaints.

The rules were altered. The new rules were: I put pennies in the pot. One of the

(see Editorial, page NAT 5)

elements of land and sky, of nature and humanity coming together. Rather than portraying the realism of the country scene, Domont is in pursuit of the experimental expression. When one stands alone in a field with grain and sky, wind and color as companions, an experience of unity can occur.

Domont is interested in expressing the harmony of the seen and unseen. This experience of unity, which brings with it a sense of awe, supports and guides his work. His paintings are an attempt to honor the beauty and magic of living in our time and place.

Domont spends his days painting, photographing and writing poetry. During the past two decades, his paintings have garnered wide recognition from collectors, museums, and other institutions. His large-scale works with saturated colors have been acquired by museums and hospitals.

In 2001, he received the prestigious Creative Renewal Fellowship, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., and awarded by the Arts Council of Indianapolis. He used the funds to travel to China and Nepal, where he spent two and a half months writing, drawing, painting, and photographing. From November 2003 through January 2004, the Swope Museum of Art in Terre Haute featured an exhibit of his work, a mid-career retrospective.

In 2008 he was awarded American Artist Abroad by the United States government. He acted as an artist ambassador to the nation of Thailand. In 2009 he has received a second Creative Renewal Fellowship, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., and awarded by the Arts Council of Indianapolis.

The Domont Studio Gallery is located at 545 S. East St. in Indianapolis, but you can check out his work on his Web site: www.domontgallery.com or email him: john@domontgallery.com.

Editor's note: These two Hanukkah covers for 2009 (from the Dec. 2 issue and this one) were made especially for you, dear readers and both are available for purchase. ★

Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

Dec. 11, 2009, Shabbat Chanukah (Genesis 37:1–40:23), 24 Kislev 5770

Yes, it is true that Chanukah is not a major Jewish festival. It is true that it doesn't rank in importance with Yom Kippur or Pesach. Yes, it is true that the only ritual act connected with Chanukah is to light the *Chanukiah* (Chanukah menorah). Regardless, it doesn't mean that Chanukah is without anticipation and that Chanukah is not an important holiday for the Jewish people.

We teach our children about the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days instead of just one day. It is easy to grasp, opens our eyes wide with wonder, and reminds us of the presence of God. We then tie other things to this story such as eating foods fried in oil, which really means latkes or sufganiot. Children spin dreidels with letters that tell us that "A great miracle happened there." Chocolate gelt adorns the tables and seems to fill candy dishes everywhere I look. (What did we do before Europeans came in contact with potatoes and chocolate?) And, of course, the custom now is to give or exchange gifts at this season. Chanukah is nice, happy, uplifting, and fun.

We shouldn't forget though what our ancestors did for this holiday to come about. Faced with the annihilation of our nearly 1,000 year old religion, the Jews of 165 BCE, rebelled against the Syrian-Greek King, Antiochus IV, and his army. King Antiochus had imposed laws that forbid the Jews from celebrating Shabbat, reading Torah, and circumcising their sons. On top of those laws, the King ordered idols to be set up throughout the country and the Temple in Jerusalem sacked and desecrated.

The story goes that in the village of Modi'in, between Jaffa and Jerusalem, (see Adland, page NAT 15)

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Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

In my last editorial I wrote about someone finding freedom behind bars. I was reminded of another amazing letter that I received four months ago, from a different prisoner who found freedom and happiness in prison, of all places. There is a lot to learn from his story, so I will share it with you. If he can find freedom in jail, then why can't we find freedom and joy outside?

One answer may be that we aren't really looking. We convince ourselves that the life that we know is all that there is, even if it doesn't bring a lot of happiness, and even if it is downright depressing. Instead of searching for the truth in another lifestyle, our ancient heritage, we take antidepressants. Here are some excerpts from his letter:

*Dear Rabbi Cohen,
Shalom aleichem! The warmest Torah greetings to you and yours! I do always pray and hope that you are all well!*

My family is well! I am well and blessed and busy with my studies and work!

Rabbi Cohen, please allow me to share my story with you! First, your sister Jennie about two years ago blessed me with the gift of a subscription to the Indiana Jewish Post & Opinion newspaper. This is where I read your articles, as they are my favorite. Each time I receive my new issue I look for your article to read. I feel so much when I read your articles! In a recent article you wrote your story and it drew me to you! This gift your sister gave to me is so wonderful, she is a wonderful lady. I do appreciate her.

I was raised nonreligious, even though I did go to Hebrew school for a bit when I was young. I graduated high school and served in the Marines and so on.

All my youth I went through so many ups and downs. I went through abuse and so on, so I turned to alcohol and drugs to ease the pain. In the many years that I spent in addictions, I made one mistake after another. I am in prison as a result of my last big mistake, due to alcohol and drug addictions. For so many years I searched for the answer to my life and upon coming to prison, Hashem exposed my answer to me! So I became a baal tshuva and returned to my true Jewish heritage, and since then I have been complete, happy, and hopeful! I serve Hashem with simcha (joy).

Rabbi, I am a "Chabadnik," my rabbi is Rabbi Avi Grossbaum of Lubavitch of Indiana. Do you know of him?

When I made my return, the Aleph Institute of Surfside, Fla., embraced me and has saved my Jewish life! They have taught me to be Jewish, to be observant, and they have loved me during my time of prison. Because of them, I have my own tefillin, my own shofar, tallitot, yarmulkes, tzitzit and so on.

Rabbi Grossbaum who knew my family, embraced me as well. I study and learn as a result of his care and direction! He is so wonderful to me; he teaches me the proper

order to blow my shofar, and he comes to see me and teach me on a regular basis!"

In this week's Torah portion, we read about another Jewish prisoner, Joseph. So for the sake of privacy, I will call the prisoner who sent me this letter Joseph.

"Joseph, thank you for this beautiful and inspiring letter, and I hope to hear more good news from you. I'm sorry that I didn't respond to it sooner. My life is full of projects that I really want to do and just can't seem to find time for. I hope to meet you soon, together with all of our people, in the Beis Hamikdash, the third Temple, which will be built in Jerusalem. We believe that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is Moshiach, and that right now he is gathering in all of the lost souls. You and I are just two examples of the millions of lost souls who are coming back to our wonderful heritage."

If Joseph can be so happy behind bars..., then anyone can be happy.

There are many lessons to be learned from Joseph's letter, and here are two that come to mind.

First, for those who are not yet observant, here is a beautiful proof that the Torah is true, the word of Hashem. Sometimes people ask me for proof. How do I know that the Torah is the word of Hashem? Because it works! Hashem created us and all of the world, and He told us in the Torah how to live. He, and He alone, knows what is good for us. For over 3,800 years, the Torah has brought a good and happy life to all who have lived by it, no matter what the circumstances. Even if you are in jail!

What is the lesson for those of us who are observant? Be happy! All of us face challenges and difficulties in life. Why does Hashem make it hard for us to do Mitzvahs? This is how we grow. We have to make the best of the situation, as Joseph does. Instead of getting upset by difficulties, look at them as challenges. To overcome challenges we have to strain ourselves, to find strength that we may not have known that we possess.

Fulfilling a difficult Mitzvah is a real accomplishment, and this brings Moshiach that much closer and brings us real happiness. If Joseph can be so happy behind bars in America, then anyone can be happy. So much more so should I be happy living here in our wonderful and holy land, knowing that Moshiach is coming and any minute we will all be celebrating together. So if something is getting me down, I just think of Joseph, and a big smile comes to my face.

I hope that you will also be inspired by Joseph to learn more Torah and do more Mitzvahs, to bring Moshiach now!

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



An Observant Eye

BY RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

The candle within

It would make a good Chelm story. The resident philosopher sagely announces that since he can't perceive his own face directly, he must not have one. Besides, as anyone can plainly see, what seems to be his face clearly resides in his mirror.

The thought is inspired by "materialist" psychologists, who lament the persistence of the idea of "dualism," the belief that human beings possess both physical and spiritual components. "The qualities of mental life that we associate with souls are purely corporeal," asserts Professor Paul Bloom of Yale, for example. "They emerge from biochemical processes in the brain."

Another would-be re-educator of the backward masses is Harvard professor Steven Pinker, who advises us to set aside "childlike intuitions and traditional dogmas" and recognize that what we conceive of as the soul is nothing more than "the activity of the brain."

Or, as they might say back at the University of Chelm, since the soul seems perceptible only through the brain, the latter must define the former.

Sometimes, though, deep intuitions are right and interpretations of evidence (or the lack of it) wrong. And scientists, as the noted British psychologist H.J. Eysenck famously observed, can be "just as ordinary, pig-headed and unreasonable as anybody else, and their unusually high intelligence only makes their prejudices all the more dangerous."

Were the contemporary dualism debate merely academic, we might just ignore it. Unfortunately, though, the denial of humanity's specialness – the ghost in the Bloom/Pinker philosophy-machine – is of formidable import.

Negating the concept of a soul – what makes human beings special and requires us to take responsibility for our choices – yields deep repercussions in broader society. It bears impact on a slew of contemporary social issues, from animal rights to abortion; from marriage's meaning to the treatment of the terminally ill.

In the absence of the concept of a human soul, there is nothing to justify considering humans inherently more worthy than animals, nothing to prevent us from casually terminating a yet-unborn life or a life no longer "useful"; no reason to consider any way of life less proper than any other. Neither would we be justified to consider any insect our inferior, nor bound to any ethical or moral system. Put succinctly, a society that denies the soul-idea is, in the word's deepest sense, soulless.

The game's zero-sum: Either we humans are qualitatively different from

the rest of the biosphere, sublimated by our souls and the responsibilities that attend them; or we are not. A soul-denying world might craft a utilitarian social contract. But right and wrong there could have no true meaning at all.

The materialist notion is not novel. De-spiritualizers of humanity's essence served as the high priests of the Age of Reason and the glory days of Communism.

But the first "materialists" may have been the ancient Greeks, who placed capricious gods on the pedestal where, today, professors lay gray matter.

Hellas celebrated the physical world. The ancient Greeks developed geometry, calculated the earth's circumference, proposed a heliocentric theory of the solar system and focused attention on the human being, too, but only as a physical specimen.

Accordingly, much of Hellenist thought revolved around the idea that the enjoyment of life was the most worthwhile goal of man. The words "cynic," "epicurean," and "hedonist" all stem from Greek philosophical schools.

And so it followed almost logically that the culture that was Greece saw the Jewish fixation on the divine as an affront. The Sabbath denied the unstopping nature of the physical world; circumcision implied that the body is imperfect; the Jewish calendar imparted holiness where there is only mundane periodicity; and modesty or any sort of limits on indulgence in physical pleasure were unnatural.

The Greeks had their "gods," of course, but they were diametric to holiness, modeled entirely on the worst examples of human beings, evidencing the basest of inclinations. And when Hellenist philosophers spoke of the "soul," they referred only to what we would call the personality or intellect. The idea of a self that can make meaningful choices and merit eternal reward was indigestible to the Greek world view.

This idea of a self is indispensable to the Jewish one though, which insists that humans are unique within creation, and that we are charged with living special lives; that our souls are eternal and that what we do makes a difference.

Chanukah celebrates the crucial difference between the ideals that embodied Hellenism and those that animate the Jewish people.

In recent years, it has become fashionable among the ignorant to dismiss Chanukah as a "minor" festival on the Jewish calendar. Anyone familiar with the centuries-old and voluminous mystical, conceptual and halachic Chanukah literature knows better.

The Hellenism/Judaism philosophical battle continues to this day and its stakes are high. Gazing at the Chanukah candles this year, we might want to recall the words (Proverbs, 20:27) of King Solomon, the wisest of all men: "A flame of G-d is the soul of man."

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



Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

Another year

It seems that time escapes us no matter how we try to hold on to it. It is as though we blink and in that instant we travel to another time and place. Was it yesterday when we were young and full of life? Perhaps it was a moment ago when we were accomplishing things unreachable today. Regardless, here we are entering a New Year. Hopefully it will be a year filled with many achievements and fulfillments.

The Jewish calendar has several New Years because there are times and events that shape our lives that require celebration. In fact, each time we enter into a new period of joy, we utter the words of the *Shehechaynu* prayer, which reminds us of our good fortune in attaining another milestone in our survival.

Of course, we are all aware of Rosh Hashanah – the New Year that enhances our ability at reconciliation. And there is Passover – the New Year identifying our religious maturity. Perhaps there are those who remember Tu B'Shevat – the New Year dedicated to nature and ecology symbolized by our appreciation of trees. In modern times this is commemorated by planting trees in Israel through the efforts of the Jewish National Fund.

A New Year gives us the opportunity to not only cast off the past but look forward to the future as well. Our responsibility to the betterment of society can and should be part of that awareness. Volunteerism is a part of that determination essential to make a better place for all of us as we develop relationships and forge alliances in human relationships.

Some of us get involved in charitable efforts that enhance our ability to repair the tear in a world that is so fragile that one turn in any direction can lead to disastrous consequences. And some combine their talents to forge a new link in the chain of Jewish survival by walking into the synagogue, rolling up their sleeves and digging right into Jewish life with a commitment of time and resources.

The people who devote their energies in synagogue endeavors are, to me, the unsung heroes of Judaism's connection to the past and the sanctity of moral living through the continuing link in the chain of Divine aspirations. To say that this task is awesome would be to understate the nature of leading a congregation in achieving its durability.

I am reminded about a quote attributed to the 11th-century poet Moses Ibn Ezra, who is credited with writing a great many of the Selichot prayers we utter each High Holiday season. The quote I am referring to, aptly describes the frustrations of

congregation leaders: "Pleasing everyone is an impossible aim, and escaping all criticism is an unattainable goal." I am sure those who have chosen to serve know full well the truth of his wisdom.

There are those who will argue that the panacea for the continuation of Jewish thought and pronouncements is not the synagogue but rather adherence to traditions and laws and customs that have become so interwoven that we really can't discern one from the other. I reject this notion because, to me, the synagogue represents all these things and more.

The synagogue was designed to bring together all forms of religious observance. It was created to deliver a place and time for study and worship that otherwise would not be part of our daily expressions. How many set aside a certain time for prayer or a certain time for learning? Not too many. We are busy with all sorts of issues that require time and money for everyday living. Perhaps there are occasions that draw our attention heavenward, but they are nowhere near the time needed for gratitude and sorrow.

Each denomination in Judaism claims adherents, but in reality the actual involvement in a particular synagogue, in most cases, is not related to our religious fervor. We attend a particular synagogue because of past connections or familiarity or location. Some profess to follow a certain religious doctrine and are motivated to do so because of strong conviction, but they are not the majority but rather a minority.

Judaism without the centrality of the synagogue will not survive. Say what you will about organized religion, its purpose is undeniable and its function undisputed: To maintain that tie that will ensure religious survival. Supporting the synagogue is tantamount to observing all the laws because it leads you to them. The Temple in Jerusalem was ordained because it was the focal point of all things Holy and all things necessary for life. To hold the value of our synagogues in any less stature is to demean the essence of our heritage and the fountain of commitment in disrepute.

So here we are – a New Year not only representing the march of time but also marking the belief in creation through the care and concern of nature. And here we are welcoming and encouraging involvement in our religious institutions so that the task necessary for Jewish association will be solidified for the next generation and beyond.

Let us remember that each of us brings to the table of Jewish delights different backgrounds and thoughts and ideals. Some come from traditional backgrounds, some from liberal leanings and some from no involvement at all. However, we all join together to create an atmosphere of caring and commitment to Jewish living. And just as we are different so are our understandings of faith. This is the strength of which we are – not the weakness.



Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

Suspicion: America's greatest obsession

As you look at any issue facing us today, there is an ever-present obsession with truth. And the president's effort to be open and transparent seems to be fueling the obsession rather than quieting it.

Firstly, it is contra-intellectual to believe that government can be open and transparent. Inherently we do not feel that government can function in public, and the very efforts that are being made, have not made us feel any better.

We have mixed messages on Afghanistan. We have mixed messages on health reform. Now, after we were scared that a pandemic was at hand, and not having access to the vaccine, it has become available, and people are not showing up to take advantage. They don't believe the message.

Women and the doctors who treat them are in a hostile debate over mammograms, their value, their goals, who should and when. And the debates are clouded with politics and economics. Is it possible for people to believe that respected doctors would collude with the government to save money at the cost of women's lives? Apparently it is. And will insurance companies see this as an opportunity not to fund mammograms outside the directive? If they can, why not?

We don't believe in the integrity of the banks, or the investment companies. We do not believe that the stimulus is working. We certainly don't believe in any of the numbers about jobs. The Government Accounting Office said publicly, that they cannot audit the results. People, government officials, business people in this country, at this moment, cannot be trusted without an independent audit, with outside verification.

Nothing is beyond question. Why is the U.S. Post Office so aggressive in competing with UPS and FedEx when they continue to lose billions of dollars? Will this expense make the USPS profitable, lose less money? Who among you believe that it will? Would those of you who raised your hands like to buy a bridge?



Perhaps Erich Fromm said it best: "The danger in the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots." Diversity allows us the opportunity to develop and grow, and what better place than in the synagogue in the New Year. This certainly is cause to repeat the words of the *Shehechaynu* prayer and understand it.

Rabbi Irwin Wiener is spiritual leader of the Sun Lakes Jewish Congregation near Phoenix, Ariz. Send comments to raoyitz@cox.net. ★

Did you read about the "Cash for Clunkers" program? The \$1 billion project that quickly became the \$3 billion project. According to the reports, the number 1 selling vehicles were Ford trucks, which was wonderful for Ford and the buyer, but since the difference between the truck they traded in and the one they are now driving is only 3 miles per gallon, we are now stuck with trying to figure it out. Is that what we intended? Was anyone watching?

Our world is getting closer to the *National Inquirer* than to the *New York Times*. If the banner of the latter, something about only the news that is fit to print, was realized, there would just be advertisements. Even the weather report is really only a guess.

We have issues and reactions. Do we board up and leave because of the reports of a pending hurricane? Where should we go? If we stop the world and get off, what exactly will we do? What shall we hold on to while everything is circling around us?

Many of us will be suspicious of whatever plans are made in Afghanistan. Many of us will be suspicious of any final health plan. Many of us will be suspicious of any claims about the stimulus plan. Many of us will not believe that Goldman Sachs is really repentant.

In a recent issue my column appeared on the same page as Rabbi Avi Shafran. If you read his columns, and you should, you will discover that because he is centered on faith and principles that are not relative, there is a certain calm and serenity in his writings.

I share that total commitment in my day-to-day life, but I have made a space to try to understand what is happening all about us, and am appreciative of the opportunity to share the feel of it with you in the pages of the *National Jewish Post & Opinion*.

I look forward to hearing what you think.

Howard W. Karsh lives and writes in Milwaukee, Wisc. His e-mail is howkar@wi.rr.com. ★

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Jewish Educator

By AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Cultivating awe and wonder

She could do anything with her professional life that she wanted to do. Not many can boast of Sandy's talents (and Sandy certainly would be the last to do so), but she is a highly educated, talented musician, a wonderful teacher and a dedicated mother and wife. So when she told me what she does in a typical work day, I sat back in wonder.

Several days a week Sandy takes care of Ruth, an elderly and infirm woman to whom she is both care-giver and devoted companion. She does many of the things that a dutiful daughter would do – from driving her to doctor's appointments and helping her shop, to writing holiday cards and paying bills. But she also does many things a daughter would find difficult, because they require a certain physical and emotional intimacy that does not come easily for everyone, especially grown children of aging parents.

On the days when she doesn't work for Ruth, Sandy is a nanny for Jason and Becca, two adorable children under the age of four. Her time with them is "delicious" and exhilarating, but it is also filled with the endless changing of dirty diapers, bandaging of scraped knees and preparing meals that often end up on the floor. She loves them as a doting grandmother would – and tells me it feels as good as eating frozen yogurt. "All of the pleasure, none of the guilt," she jokes and proudly displays the photos that she keeps in her wallet.

EDITORIAL

(continued from page NAT 2)

nephews takes a turn. When his spins finally produce a *gimel*, he takes the pennies from the pot and adds them to his pile. Then I put more pennies in the pot. The other nephew gives it a whirl until he lands a *gimel*.

Three things impressed me. The first was that neither of the boys seemed to mind that much when the other one wanted to "do over" his spin. In my day, the response would have been, "Sorry it hit your knee, but it still counts," or "No do-overs allowed."

Secondly, how their eyes lit up when they "won" a few pennies. If they only knew that small amount would not be enough to buy even a candy bar. Last but not least was how well, at such a young age, they identified and uttered those Hebrew letters. (Jennie Cohen 1-14-04)

Happy Hanukkah!
Jennie Cohen 12-16-09. ✨

"Why do you do it," I asked her one day, "when you could do so many other things that would be less taxing and more lucrative?"

"Because," she answered thoughtfully, "I'm in awe." Then Sandy proceeded to share two stories that have stayed with me ever since.

One morning when traffic was particularly bad, Sandy was about 10 minutes late getting to Ruth's house. She knocked on the door and when no one answered, she called out Ruth's name. Concerned, she knocked again and again – but still no answer. Just as she was about to call 911 on her cell phone, she heard someone cough. Slowly, the door opened. Ruth's husband, Abe, stood breathless before her in his pajamas, while Big Band music drifted in from the kitchen.

"Sorry, couldn't get to the door," Abe mumbled somewhat apologetically. "We had to finish our dance."

At 9 in the morning, when others might be complaining about their aches and pains, Ruth and Abe were cutting the rug! Her cane was propped up against his walker, silent witnesses to a love affair that had lasted more than 60 years.

Then, about a year ago, the phone woke Sandy in the middle of the night. Hoping it wasn't one of her own kids, she was relieved to hear Jason's mother on the other end.

"Can you come over, right away?" she pleaded. "I think I'm having the baby!"

Within minutes, Sandy raced out the door so that she could stay with Jason while his parents took off for the hospital for the birth of his little sister, Becca. When Jason woke up, Sandy greeted him with a big smile and a bowl of Cheerios. They spent the morning together, making pictures and cards for the new baby. Jason was so excited, he could barely sit still.

When Sandy brought Jason to the hospital, he became very quiet. They walked into the room, Sandy holding his chubby hand. Jason tiptoed over to his mom and climbed up on the bed. Before she could say anything, he leaned over and shyly kissed the sleeping infant in her arms. Then he cuddled up and said, "I love my family."

These stories, and Sandy's ability to experience the magical moments of everyday life, serve as great reminders of our continuing opportunity to experience wonder in our daily lives. We don't need to travel to exotic lands or have mystical experiences on the top of a mountain. And while it is easy to become caught up in the nuisances of life, the details that can cloud our vision and preoccupy our thoughts, the wonder is there for the taking – if we are able to let it in.

Sandy's stories remind me of the beautiful words of the great 20th-century Jewish mystic, philosopher and writer, Abraham Joshua Heschel:

"Awe is an intuition for the dignity of all things, a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme. Awe is a sense of the transcendence, for the reference everywhere to mystery beyond



Jews by Choice

By MARY HOFMANN

Comeback(s)

I've stayed involved for many years with an interfaith group centered in Livingston, California, a surprisingly small community about 15 miles to the north of Merced. We tried to start such a group in Merced, but for some reason it's been far more successful out in the rural north county, home of almond orchards, sweet potato farms, and Foster Farms poultry processing.

Perhaps one reason it works so well there is that they have such a truly interfaith, as well as multicultural, population in that area. Livingston (population 13,000), after all, has two large Sikh temples. Tiny Ballico (population 798) has a Buddhist church (the area has a famous Japanese farming community), and there's as an active Bahai group nearby as well. We also usually have at least some representation from the Native American group, a Moslem mosque, and the Hmong. Then there are the churches...lots and lots and LOTS of churches. No Jews, to speak of, so they drafted a few of us from Merced to round out the perspectives.

It's been a great experience over the years. We've done many interreligious presentations, including some that are thematic (coming of age practices in different religions, and so forth), as well as holidays and more general ones. Every year we have a big Thanksgiving bash at one of the facilities in the area, and everybody shares some kind of appropriate thanksgiving blessing, tradition, music, or dance. A friend and I usually open the festivities with the *Shehecheyanu* and a shofar blast. Then others do various renditions of thanksgiving music (bringing in the sheaves or whatever), Spanish/Mexican poetry and blessings, and Native American dancing. The Native American representatives are always terrific sports...I can't imagine it's easy for them to hear about a bunch of white European pilgrims, bringers of disease and death, inviting the "Indians" to dinner

all things. It enables us to perceive... the divine – to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal."

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on that first (probably apocryphal) celebration. But somehow it always works, and then everybody adjourns to the social hall where a lot of good food provided by the host facility and anybody else who remembers to bring something.

This year something odd happened, and I've decided I need to prepare myself if there's a next time. I need a good comeback.

I was talking to the very kind Lutheran minister hosting the event, who has also been involved with some volunteer activities in Merced with me. A woman I didn't know tapped on my shoulder and asked, "Mary, were you born Jewish?"

I was stunned into a momentary silence. Why would a perfect stranger ask me that? On the one hand, it's none of her business. And yet, this was an event of interfaith sharing of information.

Could it have been a totally innocent question from someone who naively assumes people often switch "churches?"

Was she curious because of my name? There *are* other Jewish Marys, but not commonly.

Was it because I didn't fit a preconceived (ergo probably prejudicial) image of what she thought I should look like?

Was it because somebody else wondered and she was the one gutsy enough to ask? What was going on in her mind that would make her ask? I didn't have a clue.

Though my mind was a jumble of conflicting possibilities, I was candid. I smiled and told her that, though I hadn't been born of Jewish parents, I had been Jewish for most of my life and that my adult children and all my grandchildren had certainly all been born Jewish.

But it has rankled. Even many weeks later, I find myself unsettled when I think about it. So at our congregation's Shabbat dinner last week, I asked my Jewish friends what they would have done.

One thought I might have asked the woman why she was curious...but even in retrospect, I wasn't sure I would have been prepared to deal tactfully with whatever her response might have been.

Another said I should have asked if she had been born the religion she now practiced. A third said I should have told her it was a very personal issue, while a fourth said I should have told her it simply wasn't any of her damned business (which would have been distinctly anathema to the spirit of the evening).

At last, one of my best friends looked at me, smiled, and said, "Mary, I've known you for over 30 years. I know you were never able to accept Christianity even as a child. You *were* born Jewish. Haven't you ever realized that?"

So now I'm ready in the event it ever happens again. If I'm asked if I was born Jewish, I'll merely say, "Yes, of course... I just didn't realize it at the time." Then I'll smile and move on, perhaps leaving the inappropriate questioner as nonplussed as I felt.

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



The Art of Observation

BY RABBI ALLEN H. PODET

What comes after?

Death – and how we respond to it – is a topic of central importance in most religions. Maybe that noble sage, Confucius (a Westernization of Master Kung, “master” in the sense of teacher, hence, Rabbi Kung), was mostly content with teaching people how to live in this world. But Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Muslims spend quite some time on the subject.

Wise scholars from Lucretius onward have said, in effect, “before you passed the gate of birth, you had no idea and no way of knowing what was awaiting you on the other side. As you pass the second gate, the situation is the same.”

Either you will be aware, or you will not.

If you are aware, then be comforted that all those who have had a near-death experience, or who have in fact been clinically dead, have reported pleasant and often profound experiences. Except the young girl who recently, on her path to the Great Light, encountered her grandmother, who slapped her soundly and sharply commanded: “Go back!”

If you are not aware, then, Good night, sleep well.

Our sages, the great rabbis of the 1st and 2nd centuries, while producing the Talmud, inevitably dealt with this question: What lies ahead.

It seems that, according to the rabbis, in heaven there is a great banquet, a vision that suggests that Israel and Babylonia had at that time a lot of hungry Jews. And at that banquet all kinds of foods would be served. Not only kosher pastrami and sable, but *treyf* dishes including the great sea monster Leviathan and the great monster of the air, Ziv, who looks to me from his pictures in antiquarian books like a big chicken, King Kong size, but who is in any case most assuredly super-*treyf*. One can assume that ordinary ham and bacon will be there for the less adventurous. So we will all finally get a taste of the forbidden sweet meat of our choice.

This picture is not just a bit of silly rabbinic whimsy as it may seem to be. They go on to inform us that in the *olam habáh*, the world to come, the Shabbat laws will be rescinded, along with the regulations of Yom Kippur and all the other holy days, even including Hanukkah. All the holy days and holidays will be passé; only Purim will still be observed. An odd and puzzling pronouncement. What will the ultra-Orthodox do without the endless punctilia of the observances that help impart structure to their lives now?

Perhaps the point is that the endless regulations should not become an end in themselves, but are only a means to make us into something different and better, and once our life is finished, then the rules

disappear also along with the holidays. Except for Purim, a fun celebration of national survival.

There is another version of heaven that the later rabbis have imparted. There are long tables with books piled on them, and we are studying Talmud in small groups, using the “chevruta” system of analysis and argument, challenge and defense with a study partner or two.

When we have a problem too difficult for us to solve, we can call on the greatest sages of all time for help. And if they do not know, why, then there is Moses himself. And if you can stump Moses, he can always turn to the Holy One, Blessed Be He. This is a real students’ heaven obviously, and its appeal may be somewhat limited. Better not scrap the eating and drinking one just yet.

These two pictures, and many others like them, have in common that they don’t seem to be taking the question all that seriously. When Dante pictures Inferno and Paradiso he means us to take those pictures to heart. That is, he means, how it really is. When Jonathan Edwards describes us as a spider hanging by a thread over a terrible fire, he is not smiling. Who has not read Edwards can find the equivalent readily today, and the enthusiastic ministers of this gospel seem almost gleeful in their damning, frightening presentations.

Islam, in the popular Islamic imagination, presents a much more interesting and entertaining heaven. When I was taking Arabic, we were informed that the righteous, and in particular those who died in the defense of Islam or of Allah, were vouchsafed many wonderful things in heaven.

There were the traditional perfumed gardens with many fountains and endless dishes and drinks of beauty and delight beyond earthly imagination. There were in addition some traditions that promised 40 virgins for each man, called “houris” from the dark, mysterious, deep pools of their eyes. And these midnight-eyed, magical beings were, in fact, perpetual virgins. (I think I used to know a girl like that in Chicago.) Such were the delights that awaited the faithful martyr.

Recently I have been informed that current recruits for martyrdom have been promised 72 virgins, an increase of nearly 80% over what we were taught, and a manifestly unfair disparity.

How seriously these heavenly descriptions are to be taken is a matter of some debate. Our classmates in Arabic took them about as seriously as a Ziv sandwich. But I have no doubt that there are young, passionate, dedicated lads with healthy hormones today in some lands who hope and believe, even unto death.

Once dealing with the dead body, however, our beliefs and customs become hard or impossible to explain sensibly.

Major living religions seem to agree that we have a soul, which is different from the body. When the soul has left the body, what remains is the empty vessel, devoid of life and thought and feeling. The empty milk bottle after whatever is of

worth has been poured out of it. One respects it, at least in Jewish tradition, because of what it once contained, that is, the “breath” of God. When it is consigned to the earth, we expect it will disintegrate and feed a new generation of flora and fauna.

In Hillel’s time, the body was often wrapped in a shroud and buried with no box and no vault. Dust to dust, indeed, and no delay or pretense about it. Sometimes, as with Joseph in Egypt or certain dignitaries such as royalty, embalming was done, but not normally. Cremation was not unknown, notably where infectious disease was a consideration, but was normally to be avoided.

Today in England, a small island where burial land is both very limited and very expensive, cremation for Jews is common. The presumption is that the same God who can resurrect a body from residence in earthworms and daisies can do so from ashes as well. As to the issue of *nivul*, disrespect, there need be no more disrespect in cremation than in burial.

There is a principle that if something about the body of a dead person can, by providing information or the like, save a living patient in the same place with the same disease, the effort is proper and should be made. At one time “the same place” meant the same house or hospital. But today, with doctors sharing detailed medical information routinely via journals and teleconferences, the medical world has become one big hospital.

The implication of this, to some, is that perhaps one should consider becoming an organ donor, because my liver, for example, upon my death, may mean life to someone I never met. Many modern Jews have indicated in writing that they wish to be organ donors if that proves desirable and feasible. They look upon it as a gift that costs the giver nothing and which may mean life itself to the recipient. It is perhaps noteworthy and curious that it is not more frequently done.

Along the same line of thought, the logical next step is to become a cadaver donor. A young college coed, relentlessly pursued by a pesty boy who needed to be put down, was promised that he could have her body...after she was done with it! Once you are done with it, is it not reasonable and even noble to will it to a medical school for the training of a new generation of surgeons? Is it not a better use of the body to use it for the saving of life than to stick it, at great expense, in the ground to disintegrate?

Emotions, of course, run high at such times, when our dead lie before us, and reason takes second place if any place at all. Valerie Jill, my bride the scientist, has expressed a desire to be an organ and a cadaver donor, but I am not in the least certain that I would honor her wishes in the event itself. Some decisions are made by the head, and overruled by the heart. It has always been that way, for that is the way we are made. If you don’t like it, go and complain to the Maker.

Not too soon, however.

Comments? apodet@yahoo.com. ★



The Roads from Babel

BY SETH BEN-MORDECAI

Bread and meat

The Hebrew word *lekhem* and the Arabic word *lakhm* derive from a common source: the Semitic root L-KH-M, meaning “food,” “solid food,” or “prepared food.” Despite the common source, Hebrew *lekhem* means “bread,” a food obtained through planting, while Arabic *lakhm* means “meat,” a food obtained through killing. The progression of meaning from L-KH-M to *lekhem* and *lakhm* demonstrates nicely how culture influences the development of language.

The ancient Jews were farmers, herders, and urban dwellers. Their primary foods were bread, olives, vegetables, fruit, and cheese, in that order. Animals were far more valuable for their milk and wool than for their flesh. Meat was eaten only at holidays on which the people offered the fat of food animals on the altar. Thus, because bread was the principal food of the Jews, Semitic L-KH-M (food) gradually took on the very specific Hebrew meaning of the basic food, “bread” (i.e., *lekhem*).

By contrast, the ancestors of the Arabs were pastoral nomads and raiders. They were not farmers and did not have a ready source of wheat or other grain. Nor did the ancestors of the Arabs often slaughter their own animals, which were more useful as sources of milk and wool, than meat. But the ancestors of the Arabs did acquire food by hunting and by raiding farms, villages, and the flocks of other nomadic tribes. Meat and not bread was their principal substantial food. Thus, in Arabic, the Semitic root L-KH-M acquired the specific meaning “meat” (i.e., *lakhm*).

We see a similar progression in English. “Bread” comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “to ferment,” since bread is prepared by fermenting wheat with yeast. While “bread” means baked fermented wheat loaves, it has acquired the general meaning “food.” Thus, we can say, “He was so poor he couldn’t put bread on the table.”

“Meat” originally meant “solid food” (as distinguished from liquid food, such as beer) but acquired the specific meaning of “animal flesh eaten as food.” Yet a trace of the general meaning remains in use in the phrase “nut meat.”

An attorney and Semitic linguist with degrees from Brandeis, Stanford and Univ. of Calif., Seth Watkins (pen name, Ben-Mordecai) merges linguistic analysis with legal sleuthing to uncover lost meanings of ancient texts. His Exodus Haggadah uniquely includes the full story of the Exodus in an accessible format. When not lawyering or writing, he tends his 20-year-old ocicat. Email: Seth@VayomerPublishing.com. ★



Seen on the Israel Scene

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

A visit to Hebron

I'm not quite sure what the rules are for Israelis visiting Hebron, but when the Government Press Office (GPO) offered a journalist's tour recently, I did not hesitate to sign up quickly. I had not been there in more than 30 years, and Barry had never been there.

We left downtown Jerusalem about 9:20 a.m., and the route out of the city was a new one, past the suburb of Gilo, on Derech Hebron, past the protective barrier, past the communities of Efrat, Gush Etzion, past Biblical-looking fields and olive trees.

Danny Seaman, director of the GPO, gave the foreign journalists a briefing, explaining this was to be a background tour to understand the community, not to deal with current events. He told the journalist the communities in Judea/ Samaria are not the enemies of the State of Israel or violators of the State, and they have been demonized unnecessarily by the press.

Each day before we came, teams working in communities are suspending new permissions and new construction in Judea and Samaria and issuing stop-work orders. He then handed the journalists a background folder on Hebron.

In a little over half an hour, we had traveled the 23 miles south and driven by an army base, to the center of town and to meet our guide David Wilder, an American from Northern New Jersey, in Israel 35 years, in Hebron 15 years. The father of seven and grandfather of 10 is very straightforward and direct as he explains fact after fact. He says there are four Jewish neighborhoods with families and yeshiva students, totaling approximately 800 Jewish people in the city with approximately 160,000 Arabs.

Kiryat Arba, the nearby suburb, has around 7,000 Jewish inhabitants. Hebron is the only Jewish community in Judea/ Samaria and Gaza situated directly in the middle of a city with a large Arab population.

Tel Rumeida

Our first stop is Tel Rumeida, the site of the Biblical city of Hebron where the patriarch Abraham lived 3,700 years ago, although the wall we see is probably 4,300 to 4,500 years old. The steps lead to a gate, and if uncovered, would be the place Abraham put money down to buy the cave of the Machpelah. Here there are the remains of a 4,000-year-old house.

The land on which this tel is located was purchase by Jews in the 19th century. Jews came to this neighborhood the summer of 1984 and in 24 hours put up seven caravan homes and named the neighborhood Admot Yishai. In a terrorist attack in 1998, across the road in one of

the homes, Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anani was murdered. A year later, excavations were begun prior to building permanent homes since the people promised they would stay here because "it is one of the most important archaeological sites in Israel."

The Israel Archaeological Authority excavated, uncovering findings from the time of the Patriarchs, First and Second Temple periods and periods of the Mishnah and Talmud. Today, 18 families live in this neighborhood, and there is a kollel (study group of men) study hall in the former home of Rabbi Ra'anani and in his memory, directed by his son-in-law who lives in the neighborhood with his family. An archaeological park is planned here in the future.



This is thought to be the tomb of Jesse, King David's father, and Ruth, King David's grandmother.

Nearby is Tel Hebron, the place where 3,000 years ago after the death of King Saul, G-d told David to go to Hebron and build on the highest point as King of Judah. Seven years later, David was anointed King of Israel in Hebron.

We then visit the area that is thought to be the tomb of Jesse (King David's father) and possibly the burial place of Ruth, King David's grandmother. This area has to be excavated because it is steeped in Jewish presence. Inside is a synagogue and study hall.

Beit Hadassah

Our next stop is Beit Hadassah, whose ground floor was built in 1893 as a medical clinic for Jews and Arabs until 1929. Rabbis lived next door. All were attacked by Arabs in 1929, the clinic was destroyed.

Inside today is the Hebron Heritage Museum, three painted, arched rooms with stone walls. One was pre-1929 with photographs from the synagogue built in the 1500s. A photographer/historian from Russia did the painting and put the museum together. In 1979 there was an attempt in the middle of the night by women and children of Kiryat Arba to come back to Beit Hadassah, and they lived there for one year.

Following the 1980 attack, the government agreed to renovate Beit Hadassah and the adjoining two houses where about 25 families live today. An additional floor was added to Beit Hadassah and families moved there in 1986.

Return to Hebron

The return to Hebron took place in 1968 when families rented a hotel for

Passover. Moshe Dayan gave them permission to stay, Kiryat Arba was approved by the government, and people moved there in the 1970 because the goal was to come back to Hebron. In 1980 a group of six men were attacked by terrorists and murdered. The Israel government reestablished the Jewish community, and the building was rebuilt.

The Jewish Quarter

This neighborhood, built on the ruins of the Jewish quarter, is the beginning of modern Hebron. In 1540 a group of Spanish exiles who had settled in Turkey bought the land from the Karaites and set up a ghetto, which lasted until 1929. At the center was the Abraham Avinu Synagogue. After the 1948 Jordanian conquest, the quarter was destroyed and a market, dump and toilet were here. A sheep sty was on the ruins of the synagogue.

In 1975 Professor Ben-Zion Tavger went to live in Kiryat Arba and began to clear out the sheep sty. After a year of interruptions by the government, he and others finally received a permit and cleared out the garbage to restore the synagogue. Today in the Avraham Avinu neighborhood are 30 families, a guest house, two kindergartens and a playground and the municipal committee offices. In 2001 a sniper killed 10-month-old Shalhevet Pas at the entrance to the neighborhood. Today the parents still live here.

Land outside courtyard was bought in 1800s, used subsequently as an Arab wholesale market and then restored to Jewish hands in the 1990s. Nine Jewish families live in these buildings and there is also a study hall. The government issued an ultimatum three or four years ago for all to leave and they would renovate the building then they reneged. Eventually the people will move back.



Barry with some of the Israel Defense Forces that patrol the streets and guard in Hebron.

Main Street Hebron and Relations with the Arabs

Along the main street of Hebron are closed shops where Israel security forces patrol to keep the residents and the visitors safe. However, Arabs live above the stores and have no curfew. When the Israeli army determined they were a security threat, they were shut down and Arabs opened them on the other part of the city. The old Arab market was also closed, and a huge market was opened on the other side of the city with large amounts of European money invested in its renovations.

Hebron encompasses 18 square kilometers. In 1997 when Hebron was split, 15 square kilometers (or 97%) was declared by the Palestinian Authority as off limits to Jews. One can see their taxis, houses and stores in the distance. The Jews were given access to 3% of Hebron, open to unrestricted Arab traffic and presence.

In the 1900s relations between Jews and Arabs were good. There were 7,000 people here – 5,000 Arabs and 2,000 Jews – until 1929 when the Arabs went on a massacre and killing rampage.

When Jews returned to Hebron after 1967, relations were good. In the 1980s and 1990s, over 1,000 Arabs were killed by Arabs for being collaborators, and that was the end of a lot of good relationships. In 1999, 80% of the city was transferred to Arafat in the Hebron Accords. With the Second Intifada, there were terrorist attacks for two and a half years and relationships became nonexistent.



Steps which, if excavated, would lead to a gate where Abraham stood when he put down the money to buy the Cave of the Machpelah.

Cave of the Machpelah

This building is the symbol of the Jewish people, built 2,000 years ago by King Herod, King of Judea, at the time of the Second Temple. It is the second holiest site of the Jewish people in the world, purchased 3,700 years ago by Abraham for 400 shekels, which would be about \$750,000, to bury Sarah. He chose this particular place because tradition said Adam and Eve were buried in the cave. Subsequently, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Leah and Rebekah were buried here. The building is still used for the same reason it was built.

Byzantines and Crusaders turned it into a church; Muslims made it into a mosque. When the Moslem Mamelukes conquered (see Kaplan/Israel, page NAT 15)



The gate that leads to the chapel over the tomb of Sarah. All four photos by Barry A. Kaplan.



Funsmith

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

New dreidel games

Dear Funsmith,

I was wondering if perhaps you have any playworthy thoughts to share with us regarding the dreidel. Insofar as it's Chanukah, I was hoping you might be moved by the seasonal relevance of my wonderment to respond to this request with your usual wit and wisdom.

Your faithful reader, Lotta Lotkees

Dear Ms. Lotkees,

And a holy hello from Jerusalem. Which happens to be where I am. Where dreidels are different, and the fact that it's Chanukah takes on significant significance, further urging me to respond to your dreidel query with the fullness of my wisdom and at least half of my wit.

Dreidel games, you say. Hmm. Dreidels. Also known as Teetotums. Or perhaps Teetota. The traditional dreidel game makes one think that there is a historico-cultural connection between Chanukah and gambling. And that if there isn't, it'd be fun to invent one. But I never liked gambling. Especially with kids. Because it's hard enough for them to deal with winning and losing, even without financial consequences, even when they're playing for pennies or peanuts or latkes.

So it seems to me that if there aren't non-gambling kinds of dreidel games, we should make them up. Which is what I thought we'd spend the rest of this column doing.

Dreidels are very much like dice except they have only four sides, and each side has a Hebrew letter on it. They are equally very much also like tops, because you spin them.

The spinning part makes me think of games like *Battling Tops*. Which seems appropriate, given that Chanukah is not just about a miracle, but also about a very significant battle.

Battling Tops, in case you forget, was a commercial game introduced by Ideal Toys (I actually worked for them many years ago, as a game designer even). You had your tops. You had your plate-like arena. You spun your tops in the hopes that you would knock all the other tops out of the arena.

And with dreidels, you also get letters. Hebrew letters.

So, you get a plate – a paper plate, maybe, or a nice flattish bowl-shaped plastic plate like you had in Fiesta Ware. Or something like a Chinese restaurant dish. Something cheap and especially unbreakable. And that's all you need for your official *Battling Tops*-like arena. And you get four dreidels. And that's all you need for your tops.

Add to that, the observation that dreidels have Hebrew letters on each side. And in the traditional game, each Hebrew letter

has a different value. Very interesting. So, what if after the battle is over, the winning player (the one whose dreidel stopped the last) earns, shall we say, points. How about 4 points for a gimmel, two points for a hey, no points for a nun, and minus 2 points for a shin. And the first person to score, what, 8 points, wins or gets a hug or has to cut a latke into 8 parts or something.

Or, how about a dreidel version of *Yahtzee* (we could call it *Yachtzee*). It could be maybe a semi-cooperative game. We could make a *Yahtzee*-like score pad. A *Yachtzee* would be 4 of the same kind. Then there's three of a kind (and the 4 different kinds of those), two pairs (6 different kinds of those), and one of the one of each kind. And we'd put a check mark for every different combination thrown (or, in this case, spun). I suppose a more extreme, and perhaps even more Chanukah-like version of *Yachtzee* would involve 8 dreidels. One could even consider employing a couple or several or even 4 Israeli dreidels (where the *shin*, which stands for "there" is replaced by a *peh*, which stands for "here").

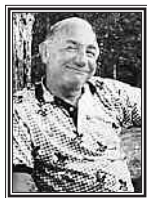
Let's also make it a rule that once we end up with a combination that we already checked, the round would be over. We'd stop whenever we thought we should. And each round, we'd see if we could get more different combinations than we did the round before.

We could all spin together – on a plate – or not. Or we could take turns if we so desired. And we could play over and over again, each night of Chanukah, and see if on this night we can do better than on all other nights.

An entirely different dreidel game could center around the act of trying to spin a dreidel in a spoon. This would no doubt evolve to trying to spin several dreidels in several spoons with a goal of sorts being to pass spinning dreidels from spoon to spoon as a cooperative or even solitaire feat of dreidel juggling. We could just as easily contemplate using very large soup-spoon-sized spoons. Or perhaps even soup-ladle-sized spoons, in which case we might call our game *Dreidel Ladles*.

So there you go, my dear Ms. Lotkees. At least two brand new dreidel games. Who knows what good these new dreidel games could create for dreidel players everywhere, for the children of dreidel players, for the very future of dreidel playing? Who actually knows?

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>. ★



Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

The night the Rebbe did the kazatzky

My zayde was a story teller, especially on Chanukah. High on the list of "Zayde's Ten Biggest Hits" was The Tzadik of Zomzach. "Tell us the story of the Tzadik," we grandchildren chorused.

He couldn't resist. Although the tale had many variations, it always began the same: "Once there was a peasant and a Rebbe in the village of Zomzach. The peasant was only a peasant, and I'll tell you about him later, but the Rebbe – he was the Tzadik of Zomzach. That's what they called him. Visitors, petitioners, followers from the entire district paraded through his court. Infertility? Halachic questions? No job? A sour stomach? An unmarried daughter? Go tell it to the Sage of Zomzach. We Jews, you know, don't really need an intermediary – like Catholics need the Pope. But if your Malcha was unmarried, 36, and had a small wart on her forehead, why not let the Rebbe offer a short prayer so Zalman, the tailor, might suddenly be captivated by small warts. It couldn't hurt.

Now in this same village of Zomzach that was glorified by the presence of the Rebbe and Zalman the tailor lived Mendel the peasant, his wife, and a seven-year-old daughter. As poor and hungry they were like the crows who pecked in the winter fields of dried corn stalks. Their total possessions would have fit on a one-horse wagon. They were drowned in poverty because Mendel – believe it or not – was a kazatzky dancer. That's what he did. He had a nature, shall we say, like the butterfly, not the industrious honeybee. For weddings, bar mitzvahs, birthdays, anniversary parties, he danced the kazatzky. His pay was a sack of flour, maybe a chicken, a handful of copper coins.

And as though their life wasn't bleak enough, their only child – seven-year-old Miriam, a beautiful child with vivid red hair – was bedridden. She hadn't walked since her fifth birthday. And it was this misfortune that provoked the strange, unexplained, events at Zomzach.

"But why am I telling you this?" suddenly blurted out Zayde. "You've heard it a dozen times. You know what happened." He turned away to light his pipe.

He knew we would plead. And we knew because he loved to tell the story that he would continue.

"So, on Chanukah," he went on, "the wife said to Mendel, 'Go to the Rebbe – ask for a blessing for Miriam. It's Chanukah, the rabbi won't deny you. It couldn't hurt, you know. And G-d knows we can't send for the doctor in Cracow.'

"But I have no gift," said the kazatzky dancer. 'And you know everyone who

asks the Tzadik of Zomzach for a prayer on Chanukah brings something. A token that the Rebbe gives to his students.'"

"Go!" said the wife. 'Pick some flowers from the fields. Find a colored stone. Anything. Just go!'"

"Soon, there he was at the Holy man's holiday court shouldering his way through a crowd of admirers and petitioners. He stood in front of the Tzadik of Zomzach – who listened attentively to his plea: that he should pray for the sick child who hadn't walked in many months."

Here, Zayde paused. "You know what happened. Why should I continue? Let me drink my tea." But a roar of protest from us kids reinspired the story teller.

So he continued, "As Mendel humbly stood at the Rebbe's table, he thought, 'I have no gifts; but nobody, nothing, including a whirling Chanukah dreidle, can spin like me. I'll bet the Rebbe would enjoy my Cossack kazatzky – the one where I hop on one foot, kick straight out with the other with my arms folded tightly across my chest.'

"And that's what he did. And the onlookers picked up the beat of his flying feet. They clapped, they roared with approval. Who could do the kazatzky like Mendel? No one, including the Cossacks who guarded the Czar himself.

"The Rebbe clapped, too. As he clapped he looked heavenward and his lips moved as though in prayer. And before you could say 'Judah Maccabee,' the Alte Rebbe had leaped the table, joined hands with the peasant and whirled around the room with him. 'G-d wants the heart,' he cried over and over."

"The spectators grinned and clapped and whistled with delight. Ah, that was their Rebbe. And what a heart he had. But soon their smiles turned to astonishment. *There were three figures* in the circle. And one of them was a small red-haired girl!"

We listeners screamed, "Zayde, Zayde, tell us how she danced."

"How she danced? How do you think she danced. She had the kazatzky gene in her blood."

"She was magnificent. Naturally quicker than the Alte Rebbe, she kept up with her father. But when the dance was completed, only the Tzadik of Zomzach and Mendel the Peasant was seen."

"And when the peasant arrived home, Miriam standing erect beside her mother, met him at the door. She smiled at her father. Then quickly, she dropped into the traditional kazatzky position. Three quick spins brought joy to his heart. They hugged."

"It's not true," said my older brother. "It's what they call a 'Zaydemeiser' in Yiddish. Or a 'Tall Tale' in English."

"All I know," said my grandfather, "is that *my* zayde, who was there the night the Rebbe did the kazatzky, told me the story every Chanukah."

Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner living in Huntsville, Ala., is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. His collected works, The Scribbler on The Roof, can be bought on Amazon.com or lulu.com/content/127641. Check out his Web site: www.wonderwordworks.com. ★

A Hanukah bush in a Gentile forest

By Ed Weiland

Once upon a time there lived in the forest a little tree. It was no ordinary tree. Even though it looked like all the other little trees, it was an Evergreenberg tree, a Jewish tree.

The little Jewish tree had a problem. He wanted to grow up to be a Christmas tree. All the little Evergreens wanted to be Christmas trees when they grew up. It was all they talked and dreamed about during their saplinghood.

"It won't be long now," said one of the young Evergreens. "My branches are full and my trunk is straight. I'm sure I'll get the axe this season. I can hardly wait."

Little Evergreenberg asked: "Will they put you in a nice home and decorate you with pretty lights and put an angel on your tippy-top?"

"Of course," said his young Evergreen friend. "But I think I'm destined for bigger things. I may even end up in the village square. Then all the people will gather around me and sing Christmas carols."

Little Evergreenberg grew very sad. Being a member of a minority wasn't easy. He sagged his branches and cried. An elderly Evergreenberg wiped his tear-stained branches and asked: "What troubles you, my son?"

"I want to be a Christmas tree," little Evergreenberg sobbed.

"How can you say such a thing? You, a Jewish tree, want to be a Christmas tree? My son, God made you Jewish and a Jewish tree you shall always be."

"But it's so hard being a Jewish tree in a Gentile forest. If I can't be a Christmas tree could I be a Hanukah bush?"

Old Evergreenberg was astonished. "A Hanukah bush? For shame! We Evergreenbergs are a proud family of Jewish trees. We will never assimilate! A Hanukah bush is only a Christmas tree in kosher clothing. If you become a Hanukah bush, what is to prevent the next generation of Jewish trees from converting to Gentile trees? That would be the ultimate in assimilation. Before you knew it, there would be no more Evergreenbergs in the forest, only Evergreens."

Old Evergreenberg looked up into the heavens. "Dear Lord," he prayed, "Forgive this Jewish sapling. He knows not what he says. It is not his fault he cannot see the forest for the Jewish trees."

Weiland of Indianapolis lives in MorningSide, a senior living community. After nearly 50 years as a newspaper reporter and editor, he retired from daily journalism and became the editor of a Florida magazine for several years until it went bust. Now he has returned full-time to his first love, poetry, and has developed a unique new style of verse, which he calls Rhyme on Rhyme on Rhyme. He has written nearly 1,000 verses on a wide range of topics and averages about five new pieces a week. Comments are welcomed, and to read more, go to: wegads.blogspot.com. ★



Kabbalah of the Month

By MELINDA RIBNER

Listen to light: Meditation for Hanukkah

At a time of the year when the days are shortest and the nights are the longest, the holiday of Hanukkah comes to help us find the light within darkness. Unlike most Biblical Jewish holidays that require lots of preparation and have certain restrictions, the holiday of Hanukkah has neither. One simply lights the Hanukkah menorah for eight nights and one is plugged into Divine light and blessing. It is simple, but profound. There is a treasure chest of blessings that has been accumulating for thousands of years that we can draw upon at the time of Hanukkah.

The Hanukah candles radiate hope, faith and unconditional love, reminding us to dream again, and that our dreams are beautiful and important. Even though we may not have lived our lives as fully as we would have wanted, even though we may have even harmed others or ourselves or have been hurt by others, the light of Hanukkah reminds us of who we really are and who we can be. Hanukkah is also known to be a time to find one's soul mate or to have the love for one's spouse ignited. May those of us who are still looking for our soul mate be blessed with Hanukkah eyes. May those who are married be blessed also with Hanukkah eyes.

Unfortunately, people too often light the Hanukkah candles and then quickly move on to other activities without taking the time to receive its spiritual gifts. One of the problems we have in life is that we do not know how to receive. We shop too much, we eat too much, we are running here and there, constantly busy when we need to take time to simply be, to feel what is occurring within us and be present to what we truly need and want in our lives. When we try to meet our spiritual needs with material things and various distracting activities we will never be satisfied.

Meditative gazing upon the simple sweet light of Hanukkah can fulfill us in the way we have yearned for our entire life. Consider taking the Hanukkah challenge this year, and meditate with the candles for eight days. This is a spiritual practice that will be transformational. Even if you do it for just one night, or even for 10 minutes on one night, you will receive much benefit.

Meditating on each night of Hanukkah will help us transform our lives in ways we have always hoped. No matter what is happening in the external world, Hanukkah teaches us that we can be free, we are holy, we are loved unconditionally and we need not be limited by our fears or guilt. We can live our lives with greater integrity, love and beauty. What a divine

gift! And it is free to all who open to receive it.

On an even deeper mystical level, gazing at the lights of Hanukkah provides a glimpse into the eternal light of God, the hidden light, the holy light, the light before creation, the light of our own souls. The light of God has burned forever and will burn eternally. When we really get a glimpse of this holy light of Hanukkah, we know deeply that life itself is truly miraculous.

Even though we Jews as individuals and as a people have faced and will face many challenges in life, the light of Hanukkah reminds us that God is with us. And now more than ever, this is a great comfort. If we are truly blessed, the light of Hanukkah will reveal to us that the Jewish people are eternal, all the wondrous things that have been predicted for the Jewish people will be fulfilled, and we will be quite joyful.

Make a connection to the Jewish people who have been lighting Hanukkah candles for generations.

As you prepare to light menorah candles this year, take a few moments to center yourself with deep breaths. Prepare yourself so you can be as present as you can be as you do this mitzvah of lighting the Hanukkah menorah. Energetically connect to the thousands of Jews who are lighting Hanukkah candles throughout the world at this very time. Make a connection to the Jewish people who have been lighting Hanukkah candles for generations.

As you say the blessings with this consciousness, assume your place with the Jewish people throughout history and align yourself with Divine Will. Assume your place in this ancient lineage of righteous people, prophets, sages, martyrs and ordinary Jews, like you and me, who have celebrated Hanukkah for thousands of years. If you can, place the menorah by the window to indicate your desire to share this light of miracles with others. The mission of Jewish people has always been to share the light of God with others.

It is a spiritual principle that when we share our spiritual light with others, our light is not diminished but is actually increased. The more light we share with others, the more light flows through us.

Sample Meditative Instructions

Imagine yourself standing in front of the Menorah in the Holy Temple. The miracle of Hanukkah occurred in part within the Holy Temple. You can access this memory within your consciousness. This was a time and place for the most intense and palpable revelation of the presence of God. Whenever we pray, we do a mitzvah; we seek to return in our consciousness to the Presence of God that was revealed in the Holy Temple.

Read the Al Nissim blessing found in Jewish prayer books slowly. Then light the candles and say the Hanukkah blessings.

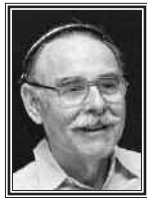
As you light candles on your own menorah, you will ignite the space deep within yourself where you are most powerfully and intimately connected with your soul. Within your heart is your holy temple. This holy temple within yourself holds your deepest dreams and holiest visions. Although this may be a little uncomfortable, keep your eyes open and continue to gaze at the lights. The holy light of Hanukkah has the power to purify and to transform. Take note of the various colors of light within the flame.

Be gentle with yourself, allowing space for any discomfort without running away. Simply be with the light as much as possible. If your mind begins to wander too much and you find yourself filled with extraneous thoughts, simply take note of this and bring your focus back to the breath and the gazing. Imagine that you can cast into the light anything you want to get rid of. Exhale your negative thoughts into the light. Cast your fear, your guilt, your regrets and your insecurities into the flame. The more you are able to let go, the brighter the light will be. You can close your eyes if you need to do so, but continue to meditate, allowing the light to be experienced within you.

Now, as your eyes are closed, imagine that you are a Hanukkah candle and the light of Hanukkah burns within you. Your body is the candle and your soul is the flame. As you identify with this candle, becoming this candle, experience yourself as a being of great light. Visualize the light of your soul radiating and shining brightly in this world. While the candles are burning, alternate between keeping your eyes open and closed. Gaze directly at the light.

After gazing for 10 minutes or more, you will find yourself in a heightened spiritual state and you will be able to listen deep inside to your own soul. The candles are symbolic of the soul. Each night the light offers a high frequency vibration. If you want, you can even ask a specific question or simply ask for guidance. Then, listen to the light. It is helpful to have your journal or a piece of paper and write on the top of the page in the name of God or the light of Hanukkah. "This is what I have to say to you..." When you are ready, write in stream of consciousness the words reflecting your present thoughts and feelings. Simply write from the heart without judging or evaluating. This is just for you. You will be amazed at the wisdom that pours out of your own soul. Done with intention and prayer, you will receive answers to your questions.

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Parsha Perspective

BY RABBI MOSHE BEN ASHER, PH.D.

The righteous in death are called living

We read in *parasha* (weekly Torah reading) Vayechi: “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years...And the days of Israel drew near to die; and he called his son Joseph and said to him: ...bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt” (Genesis 47:28–29).

So Jacob asked Joseph to swear that he would not bury him in Egypt. He wanted to be buried with his ancestors in the cave at Machpelah.

Rabbeinu Bachya (Rabbi Bachya ben Asher, 1255–1340) teaches that Jacob did not want to be buried in Egypt because he feared the Egyptians would deify him after death. If this was Jacob’s concern, it suggests he was interested in more than his own future in *olam habah* (the world to come). He was also interested in how his spirit would be treated after his death, and the effect that treatment would have in *olam hazeh* (this world), for those who remained after him.

Why should Jacob want to be buried in the Holy Land?

The Akeidat Yitzhak (Rabbi Isaac ben Moses Arama, 1420–1494) teaches that the place of burial was believed to facilitate the ascent of one’s spiritual qualities. From Rabbeinu Bachya we learn that the preference for burial in the Holy Land was because, “the nature of the land helps those buried there to obtain atonement for their sins.” And according to Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105), those who were buried outside of the Holy Land would only be resurrected “after the agony of rolling through cavities [in the earth, until they reach Israel, finally to be resurrected there].”

These traditional beliefs raise more questions than answers. What does it mean to be resurrected? What are we to make of the idea of atonement after death? And how are we to understand facilitating the ascent of one spiritual character after death?

Taking a cue from Jacob’s concern about being deified after death, we may ask: Who is to be served by these beliefs – the dead or the living? For example, one of our traditional practices is gathering *shomrim*, guardians who remain with a deceased person until the time of burial. The job of a *shomer* is to sit with the deceased and read Psalms. My experience in asking people to serve as *shomrim* is that they feel honored and privileged. Several have told me afterward that the experience was surprisingly meaningful for them. Needless to say, they didn’t regard themselves as protecting the deceased from ghosts and goblins. They saw the

experience as a two-fold opportunity for themselves: to meditate on the life of the deceased, meditation that is enhanced by the presence of the deceased; and to do a *mitzvah* that helps to relieve some of the pain and suffering of the surviving mourners and others who loved and cared for the deceased. *Shomrim* often learn that it’s a comfort to those who are grieving to know that the deceased is not “alone” in the cold room where the body is prepared for burial, but instead is “accompanied” by a friend or loved one who is reading Psalms.

But if it’s true that our tradition’s practices for dealing with death are designed to affirm life, how are we to make sense of ideas such as resurrection and spiritual ascent after death?

The belief in resurrection of the dead, *tichiyat hameitim*, is that the dead will be revived in their bodies and have life once again on Earth. Jewish tradition, however, has had a long-standing series of disputes about how much the dead know of the world they leave behind. There is a wide range of rabbinic opinion on the condition of the soul after death. Not surprisingly, the normative understanding is that “none but God can have a conception of the matter” (i.e., “Eye has not seen, O God, beside You” – Isaiah 64:3).

It reminds me of what a rabbi told me when I was about 18 and was asked what we Jews believe happens to us after death. He answered that the same God who created life and maintains the creation in motion also governs that which follows this life, which is not for us to understand.

Possibly, however, we can understand resurrection in two ways. Just as every molecule of matter on this planet, including those that comprise our bodies, was once part of a distant star, we too will live again in the future in ways that are not for us to comprehend in this incarnation. And in ways that elude the limitations of scientific method, our spirit – long after we’re gone – can animate and uplift life.

Which raises the question, what can be meant by the ascent of one’s spiritual qualities after death? If we believe, as many contemporary Jews do, that the dead have no consciousness, the ascent of the spirit after death must refer to the effect of one’s spiritual qualities on the living – the spirit is raised up in the consciousness of the living. So burial practices and locations can make a difference for the living.

Some time ago a congregant called me to seek advice about whether or not to disinter and rebury her husband. She had learned that the plot adjoining her husband’s plot, which they had purchased for her, inadvertently had been deeded to another party, so that she and her husband would not be buried together. She was distraught knowing that after she died she would not be buried with her husband. She imagined the pain her children would suffer when visiting their father’s grave in a section of the cemetery populated by members of

the family that had treated them with unkindness and disrespect.

It is precisely because the traditional reasons given for Jacob’s desire to be buried in Eretz Yisrael (land of Israel) are at first blush mostly incomprehensible to the modern mind that makes these verses important. To the extent that we can no longer make sense of Torah, we increasingly rationalize our indifference to it. To the extent that we’re indifferent to Torah, its vision and path of *mitzvot* (commandments) cease, as a practical matter, to guide our day-to-day lives. To the extent that we become alienated from Torah wisdom in our day-to-day lives, our children and their children become increasingly vulnerable to the poisoned and perverted values of the larger materialistic society and culture. And to the extent that materialism becomes the hallmark of our children’s lives, the likelihood of them finding long-lasting happiness and fulfillment declines – as it has for us.

Our belief that “after-life” is oxymoronic (inherently contradictory) is a reflection of how our society and culture glorify *death in life*. We see that those who, instead, glorify life, they live on in spirit after their deaths for others they leave behind. They are not simply models in the behavioral sense, that is, individuals we can learn from by observing them. They are often our inspiration, imbuing us with courage, vision, and commitment. But we live in a society in which death has become a profitable commodity. This isn’t an oblique reference to the funeral industry, but the many conglomerate media empires that grow fat on music videos, computer games, and films that are saturated with and glorify deadly violence.

We are the unwitting beneficiaries of ancient Jewish practices. In the ancient world, the perspective on death was different. Instead of imbuing life with death, they imbued death with life. Death was treated in such a way that, long after one had died, the effect of the treatment was to affirm life. In our world we rationalize practices in life and death in which only our own happiness and comfort, or that of our children, need be considered. Ancient culture inculcated a sense of responsibility for the well-being of far-distant future generations – making our children and us the beneficiaries. Jacob didn’t need to be buried in Eretz Yisrael for himself, but to ensure what he regarded as the sacred destiny of his progeny, Am Yisrael (the Jewish people).

How important, potentially, is a burial site? Of course, it depends on how an individual lives his or her life. When we have no spiritual legacy, it matters little where or how we’re buried – which may partly explain the popularity of cremation.

But consider: The cave of Machpelah to modern times has been a place of pilgrimage for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury Abraham there. Jacob and Esau met there to bury Isaac. Notwithstanding the current conflict in the region, the



DVD Review

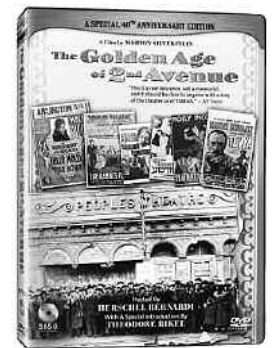
REVIEWED BY CHARLIE EPSTEIN

A history of the Yiddish Theatre

A DVD called *The Golden Age of 2nd Avenue* would make a perfect Hanukkah gift for your elder friends and relatives especially if they speak Yiddish. This wonderful look into the past is not a memorial, but a keen reminiscence. One gets to see and hear many famous names who were soon unfortunately forgotten, like Maurice Schwartz (as Tevya), Molly Picon, Celia Adler, Moishe Oyshe (singing “Romania, Romania”), Tomashevski, and many others of yesteryear prominence.

This wonderful DVD is a special 40th anniversary edition of a program that was on PBS television. It is hosted by Herschel Bernardi, who

grew up in the Yiddish Theater with a special introduction by Theodore Bikel. So many wonderful playwrights as well as performers are recognized. This 60-minute film is subtitled



when necessary. The Yiddish Theatre was the “Broadway” at the turn of the century. It brought joy, tears and laughter to the struggling immigrants from New York’s Lower East Side.

This nostalgic tribute to Yiddish heritage mesmerized me. It was so fascinating, my eyes were glued to the television screen, and it was very difficult to make accurate notes during my viewing. I remember hearing about playwrights Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Ashe, and plays like *The Dybbuk* and *The Jewish King Lear*. I thoroughly recommend this DVD for it was so enjoyable.

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

spirits of those buried there have demonstrated remarkable peacemaking powers for millennia.

The Talmud (Berachoth 18a-b) narrates a story in which Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Jonathan were once walking in a cemetery, and the blue fringe of Rabbi Jonathan was trailing on the ground. Rabbi Hiyya said: “Lift it up, so that they [the dead] should not say: ‘Tomorrow they are coming to join us and now they are insulting us!’” Rabbi Jonathan responded: “Do they [the dead] know so much? Is it not written, ‘But the dead

(see ben Asher, page NAT 13)



Jewish Theater

REVIEWED BY IRENE BACKALENICK

Doctorow's Ragtime on Broadway and Zero Hour off Broadway

When did it all begin – the Jews who arrived on these shores and went on to invent moving pictures and create Hollywood? What were those early years like for the Jewish immigrants? How did others of the same era survive – the blacks, the WASPS? E.L. Doctorow's tackled it all in his sprawling novel, which went on to become a Broadway hit musical in 1998. And now, on Broadway, the musical *Ragtime* is enjoying a revival, a streamlined version, which is more appropriate to our times with our downed economy. And while it lacks the star-studded cast of the original production, its story is more focused, more powerful.

Terrence McNally, with infinite skill, had adapted the novel for the stage, honing it into a powerful and focused work. It is the story of America at the turn of the last century, a time when ragtime, motor cars, and moving pictures first made their appearances. *Ragtime* focuses on three families of different ethnic and racial background – black, WASP, and Jewish – skillfully weaving all elements into one tapestry.

The upper-class WASP family (known only as Father, Mother, and The Little Boy) takes in Sarah, a black woman, and her infant son. The child's father is Coalhouse Walker, a piano player – and the creator of ragtime. When Coalhouse locks horns with racial bigots, his story ends in tragedy, as does that of his little family. At the same time Tateh, a Latvian Jewish immigrant, struggles to make an American life for his child. Along the way, he inadvertently invents both the motion picture and Hollywood itself. Mother gradually sheds her smugness, viewing her world and her husband with new eyes, ultimately forming a new alliance with Tateh. At the same time, celebrities of the times – Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbitt, Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, J.P. Morgan – weave their way through the story.



Audra McDonald as Sarah and Brian Stokes Mitchell as Coalhouse Walker in *Ragtime*.

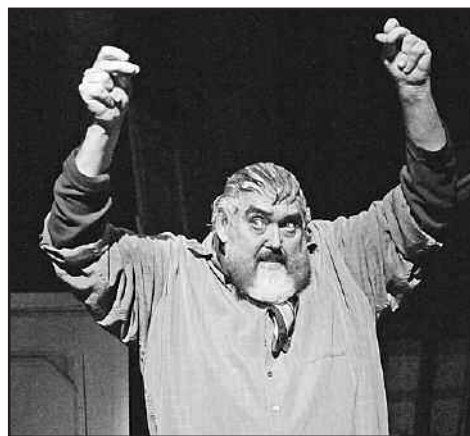
The original production featured a star-studded cast, making it a hard act to follow this time around. Both Audra McDonald

and Brian Stokes Mitchell gave magnificent, larger-than-life performances as Coalhouse Walker and Sarah, thus making their story the major issue. But in the current production, Quentin Earl Darrington and Stephanie Umoh, in appealing but less charismatic, performances, simply blend into the picture. This is true of all the players, who do solid yeoman-like work, but lack the extra pizzazz to make any one portrayal memorable. In fact, it is the design work (Derek McLane's Santo Loquasto's costumes, and Donald Holder's lighting), as well as the choreography and direction of Marcia Milgrom Dodge that are the stars of the show. And throughout, the ragtime beat of Stephen Flaherty's music provides a lively counterpoint to the abundant struggles.

Yet, *Ragtime* gives us a wonderfully poignant look back at an America just coming into existence. It is the birth of the 20th century, a legacy we have all inherited.

It's Zero Hour off Broadway

In a strong, affecting one-man show, actor/writer Jim Brochu tackles the legendary Zero Mostel. Written and performed by Brochu, the show is directed by Piper Laurie (a once-popular actor in her own right). Brochu not only takes on Mostel's story, but he literally climbs into his skin. Though the actor does not exactly resemble Mostel, he is close enough – with tufts of white hair, fierce eyes, and Mostel's huge bulk. But it is the portrayal, not just the surface attributes, that is so convincing.



Jim Brochu portrays Zero Mostel.

Brochu sets the scene in Mostel's studio (the actor had originally intended to be a painter and, apparently, continued to paint all his life). It is the occasion of an interview Mostel has with a *New York Times* reporter. He greets the reporter with bombast, insult and fury – in fact, setting the show's tone. Hurling epithets at the reporter, he adds, "Shut the door. You're letting out the flies."

Thus Brochu launches into the story, with one-liners peppering the earnest monologue – sometimes not so funny, sometimes clever and witty. He takes Mostel from his early days, born Samuel Joel Mostel on New York's Lower East Side, one of eight children of immigrant Orthodox Jews. The monologue continues through Mostel's two marriages, through his professional years, and finally, into the devastating McCarthy era.



As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

My pet peeves

Everyone has their likes and dislikes. Andy Rooney shares his on *Sixty Minutes*, and while I am not the *knocker* (big shot) that he is, I am going to share my feelings with you.

First of all, who decided that the *ch* sound as in *ba-ruch* had to be transliterated in English as *ba-ruk* with the letter *k* before the *h*. As I pointed out (at least once), this is a visual obstacle to one's eye(s). The transliteration probably came from the German and has been in usage for at least 100 or more years. I have not yet encountered a Gentile singer who would pronounce the *ch* sound as in Charlie. Jewish and Gentile singers alike have gotten accustomed to seeing and singing *ba-ruch* over an extended period of time. Someone or some committee decided that even though it was not broken, it needed to be fixed.

Wait! It gets worse. In the newer prayer books, the same *hakhamim* (Jewish wise guys) decided that even this solution left something to be desired. What did they do? They decided to have a tiny (almost invisible) dot placed under the letter *H*.

I maintain these people are descended from (or are related to) the really Wise Men (or Women) from Chelm,....err Khelm, whatever. These (perhaps not so mythical) folk hit on this solution for the aged *gabbai*. Everyone in the town would bring their shutters to him. Why? Because



When Mostel divorced his first wife, Clara Swerd (Jewish), who had been a City College classmate, and married Kathryn Harkin, a former Radio City Music Hall Rockette and a Gentile, his parents were devastated. "They considered me dead. They covered the mirrors, sat shiva, threatened suicide," he summarized. Not even years later, when his mother lay on her death bed, and he brought his infant son Josh to see her, would she succumb. "No!" she said, waving him toward the door. But Katie, his wife, Brochu/Mostel explained, turned him into an actor.

Mostel, who had attended a graduate program in art at New York University, went on to teach drawing and painting at the 92nd Street Y. There was no thought of acting at that point. But his comic style, constantly joking with his students, inevitably led him toward stand-up comedy and an acting career. Mostel made his professional debut at Café Society in 1941. It was there he acquired his nickname, when the Club's press agent said, "Here's a guy who's starting from nothing."

But it is the second act, when Brochu spells out the McCarthy era and its effect (see Backalenick, page NAT 14)

he was getting on in years and if he had the shutters in his home, he wouldn't have to go out in all kind of weathers knocking on the shutters in order to let the townsfolk know that it was time for *mincha* (afternoon services.) Now, he could knock on those same shutters in the comfort of his home! Since this is a family newspaper, I cannot tell those *hachamim* who are responsible for that dot, they know what they can do with it.

Trying to be up to date, I have used the KH prefix in several transliterations even though I did not like doing so. Having revisited those compositions I realize just how ridiculous I think the KH prefix is. One down.

Another source of annoyance (to me) is the preference of worshippers in Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist congregations for the ai-ai-ai wordless melodies of Hassidic or Hassidic-like tunes. (No K, No C before the H!) No Hassid would contemplate worshipping in any but an Orthodox shul. (And that shul would have to be *uber* Orthodox too.) That being the case, why do those *Yiddelach* try to appropriate the style of music from these pious souls when those worshippers have no intention of imitating their lifestyle? It seems that this is the musical equivalent of eating a bacon and cheese sandwich on a bagel! Two down.

Let us now start clapping more or less together. Clapping seems to be the providence of people who really would like to participate in a musical venture. They can't play a musical instrument, sing in a chorus, and almost always have a questionable sense of pitch. The activity left to them is to clap, clap, and clap some more. Even though it does no harm (I suppose) outside of making the participants feel good and that they are part of the "act." If one thinks about it, they do nothing to enhance the efforts of those who by dint of their practice and preparation are actually making the music. Three down.

Now we come to the "job" our bar/bat mitzvah candidates do with their blessings, haftarah and maftir. With rare exception they are an embarrassment. Their tin ears and stumbling Hebrew do not reflect creditably on themselves or their parents. I absolve their teachers as they can do only so much. I wish that bar/bat mitzvah services be held in the chapel in order to have their spectacle not place undue strain on those who come to worship. There. Now I have put in writing four things that annoy me.

Yes, there are others, but this will do for one time. I will add only one item not connected with music. Why do kosher butchers charge for chicken bones, which they would normally throw out, and charge much more than a nominal fee at that? I am certain you have your own list. More power to you.

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. ★

Kaufman's Conclusions

BY ARI J. KAUFMAN

65th anniversary of Auschwitz liberation

Mrs. Eva Mozes Kor, a survivor of Auschwitz, will be taking a group of 55 people to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp from Jan. 23–30, 2010, for the 65th anniversary of the liberation. Trip registration (\$2,000), though now closed, was open to the general public. In addition, CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center is sponsoring eight Vigo County (Ind.) teachers who would use the experience in the classroom.

The logo and theme for this Auschwitz Trip is “Tikkun Olam.” And Kor believes, “the best place to teach how to “Repair the World” is in Auschwitz, where the world was all broken.”

The trip includes tours of Auschwitz and Birkenau led by Eva Kor. By providing community members with an immersion experience in the historical setting of Auschwitz, CANDLES “hopes to foster powerful breakthroughs in awareness of our respective roles in creating a world based on understanding and respect, rather than prejudice and hatred.”

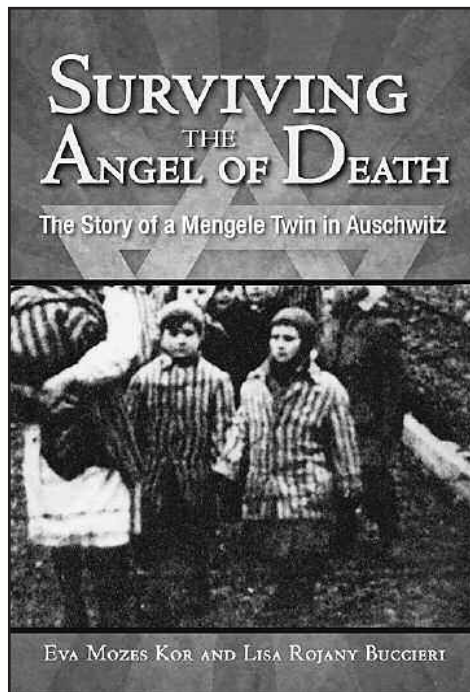
“If the teachers feel Auschwitz, they will teach Auschwitz.”

“I want the teachers to feel, and experience Auschwitz so it becomes part of their memory, and the best way to teach and learn is when we feel it with our hearts,” Kor, founder and director of CANDLES in Terre Haute, Ind., explains. “If the teachers feel Auschwitz, they will teach Auschwitz.”

Eva has returned to Auschwitz many times on an individual basis, but this is the third trip in which CANDLES will be taking a larger group of community members. Prior trips were taken in 2005 and 2007, but the 2010 group of 51 will be the largest group yet.

“We will be accompanied by friends who have been profoundly affected by Eva’s education about forgiveness as a way of self-healing, including juvenile detention case workers, international media and the mayor of Terre Haute, Duke Bennett,” Kiel Majewski, museum coordinator at CANDLES told me.

“We are very pleased to have such a diverse group traveling with us, but we are very excited about, and devoting most of our resources to, funding the eight Indiana teachers who have described to us their belief in the power of the



Holocaust to teach important lessons today,” Eva Kor noted.

Teachers were selected based upon an essay application process in which they explained their passion for, and experience in, teaching about the Holocaust.

“Few people are so vitally important as teachers to our efforts to educate younger generations about the dangers of hatred and prejudice and make them aware of their roles as co-creators in a constantly changing world,” Majewski explained. “Therefore, CANDLES has committed to funding eight Indiana teachers to make the trip with us.”

CANDLES staff sees the teachers’ journey as an investment that will lead to a commitment and partnership between CANDLES and each teacher, to be developed further in the future.

“We hope that the opportunity for teachers to experience Auschwitz with their peers will lead to breakthroughs in new educational methods,” Majewski continued. “To this end, we plan to hold debriefing sessions after each day’s tour to unload thoughts, ideas, and experiences.”

The 2007 Auschwitz trip yielded 20 lesson plans, two 30-minute DVDs produced by Indiana State University videographers suitable for classroom use, while the 2005 trip gave birth to the Emmy-winning 20-minute DVD *Return to Auschwitz*.

The \$11,000 to sponsor eight teachers was secured through the support of individuals and groups in Terre Haute, Michigan and New York. The final \$5,000 to complete funding needs for the 2010 Auschwitz Trip was obtained via a grant request.

“I want the teachers to remember that in spite of all the evil of Hitler, the Nazis, and Dr. Josef Mengele, the human spirit triumphed even in Auschwitz, and that is the way we survived.”

Kaufman is a military historian with the Indiana War Memorials Commission in Indianapolis. Also an Associate Fellow at the Sagamore Institute, Kaufman is the author of the new book, Marble City. The book can be found through Amazon or Universe.com. ★

Book Review

REVIEWED BY NAOMI SCHEINERMAN

Eva Mozes Kor’s survival story

Surviving the Angel of Death: The Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz. By Eva Mozes Kor and Lisa Rojany Buccieri. Tanglewood, 2009, \$15.95.

This book is a narrative of Eva Mozes Kor’s terrifying experiences as she and her twin, Miriam, struggled to survive Dr. Josef Mengele’s dangerous medical experiments during their internment at Auschwitz. The book is a quick read and provides an intimate look into the traumatizing experiences of a 10-year-old twin with a basic survival instinct and a beautiful soul.

Written as an adult and with children of her own, Eva begins her story by relating her childhood during the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany as one of four daughters in the only Jewish family in her small village of Protz, Romania. The book recounts the common theme of disbelief and resistance to emigrating despite the deadly rise of anti-Semitism within her village, even as her family was well known for its goodness and patriotism. Her fellow students turned on her and the teacher showed propaganda films such as *How to Kill a Jew*. Her father was arrested on the baseless charge of failing to pay his taxes, and her uncle and his family moved to Palestine. Eva’s mother refused to move; Protz was her home.

In 1943, the Nazis came for the family and relocated them to a ghetto in Simleul Silvaniei before transporting them in a cattle car to Auschwitz. Eva and Miriam, age 10, were immediately identified as twins and were separated from the family for experimentation. The rest of the family perished in the gas chambers.

At Birkenau, the twins lived with other twin girls. Fed two meager meals a day of bread and coffee, the girls lived in a filthy, lice-ridden barracks and slept snuggled together on wooden boards. During the day, they were marched to Auschwitz, where Dr. Mengele, the Angel of Death, performed experiments on them. Mengele was trying to discover the secret of twinning, using crude and repulsive methods, which Eva describes in detail. One common method used on the girls was the injection of a dangerous disease into one twin, followed immediately by the antidote, to observe the body’s reaction. Eva also describes stories she heard while in the camp of twins being sewn together so that they would share the same circulatory system.

Early on, Eva resolved, “I could not think of myself as a victim – or I knew I would perish. It was simple. For me, there was no room for any thought except survival.” This determination to survive was a recurring theme throughout the book. When Eva got very sick from an

injection and was sent to the infirmary, she discovered that if she died, Miriam would be killed and then both would be dissected to compare Eva’s disease-ridden and Miriam’s disease-free body to learn more about the disease. Eva resolved to show the nurses at the infirmary that she would get better so that she could be sent back to Miriam, so she faked her lowering temperature by shaking down the thermometer. Eva recounts many similar survival lessons, such as boiling water to clean it to avoid dysentery and volunteering to carry the soup from the kitchen so that she could steal potatoes.

The book contains other themes commonly found in Holocaust literature and presents them in an unambiguous and straightforward manner. She expresses great regret of Jews’ compliant behavior. For example, she determines that she will not submit to the Nazi demands to have her arm tattooed and four men are required to hold her down to inject the identifying mark into her arm. She describes the rapid spread of anti-Semitism in her home village and the drastic effects it can have. When the Nazis came for her family in Protz, none of the villagers objected or attempted to help them. She expresses the basic need for affection she and Miriam had after liberation and the inability of grown Holocaust survivors to provide it. Lastly, she expresses the great passion and love for the Land of Israel and the sustenance and security it provided for Holocaust survivors. The Jewish homeland provided a long-needed home and place of belonging and acceptance for the twins and many other Holocaust survivors.

Eva writes the book many years after the Holocaust, yet her writing expresses great clarity and insight. She overcame the most perilous of circumstances due to her dependence on and commitment to her sister. Surrounded by death and hatred, Eva and Miriam’s love for one another proved the source of each other’s reason and ability to endure. Eva recounts many times that the reason she was not sent to the gas chambers in the first place was that she had a twin. When the Nazis evacuated the camp, she and Miriam stayed behind and hid. During this time Nazis rounded up the remaining Jews in Birkenau and marched them to Auschwitz. Amidst the crowded march, Eva and Miriam were separated. Panicked and terrified, Eva spent the entire day calling Miriam’s name and searching every barrack at Auschwitz. Eva recalls that when they did reunite, it was the most emotional experience she had ever had.

Eva and Miriam developed health complications later in life as a result of the experiments. However, Eva concludes at the end of the book that forgiveness is good and that resolving to love one another and fight prejudice is the most significant thing one can do in life: a beautiful and poignant message from someone with an authoritative background on the subject. ★



Book Review

REVIEWED BY EDWARD HOFFMAN

Accessible anthology of learned scholar

Pebbles of Wisdom from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Collected and with notes by Arthur Kurzweil. Jossey-Bass, 2009, 350 pp, \$24.95.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz is among the most erudite leaders of today's Jewish world. Undoubtedly best known for his monumental commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, he is the author of over 60 books on subjects ranging from Kabbalah and Hasidism to holy days and biblical personages. From his base of scholarly activity in Jerusalem where he was born, Rabbi Steinsaltz also still lectures actively around the globe.

Remarkably for one with such Jewish commitment, Rabbi Steinsaltz was raised by secular, socialist parents. But when he reached early adolescence, his father unexpectedly provided a Talmud teacher and declared, "I don't care if my son is a heretic, but he's not going to be an ignoramus." His early Judaic learning was supplemented by studies in physics, mathematics, and chemistry, and at the age of 24, Rabbi Steinsaltz became the youngest high school principal in Israel. About the same time, he began offering inspirational talks on the Torah.

In 1967, with the encouragement of Israeli President Zalman Shazar – who was one of Rabbi Steinsaltz's students – he published the first of his multivolume, enormous project of translating and interpreting the entire Babylonian Talmud. Internationally, he is probably best known for this impressive work and related sponsorship of Talmudic study throughout the Jewish world. Starting in the early 1990s, he turned his scholarly attention to Kabbalah and Hasidism with such books as *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, *In The Beginning*, and *The Strife of the Spirit*.

Within the United States, Rabbi Steinsaltz's leading exponent is Arthur Kurzweil, and he is to be commended for producing this wonderful anthology. A Long-Island-raised Baby Boomer turned *baal teshuvah* as a young man, Kurzweil has been a major figure in American Jewish publishing for more than 20 years as a prolific writer and editor – and has ably turned his literary talents to presenting and explicating Rabbi Steinsaltz's aphorisms on a variety of Judaic topics. Kurzweil has gathered statements from Rabbi Steinsaltz's many interviews and published essays in both Judaic and ecumenical periodicals, as well from his numerous books. As a result, even readers familiar with Rabbi Steinsaltz's work will find new and evocative material to ponder and savor.

Pebbles of WISDOM

from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz



EDITED and with COMMENTARY by
Arthur Kurzweil

Pebbles of Wisdom is divided into six broad sections: God, The Seeker, The Children of Israel, Torah, the Trials of Life, and Guidance. Within these sections are 23 chapters, including those dealing specifically with Kabbalah, suffering, evil, the human soul, intimacy with God, and spiritual progress.

What I have long found refreshing and uplifting about Rabbi Steinsaltz's public lectures and writings is his complete avoidance of clichés and platitudes about human existence, family life, Jewish history, and other matters. For example, much of American Jewry has turned to shallow, Victorian Protestant beliefs about human progress and perfectibility in attempting to arrive at a meaningful theology, but not so Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz.

For instance, in discussing the reality of evil, he cogently observes that, "In our world, which is so full of information of every possible kind, especially about lesser and inferior things, which is what sells newspapers and brings high ratings to TV shows, it should be natural for people to be well aware of the existence of evil. Nevertheless, it seems, oddly enough, that people still do not really know that evil, as a force with a power of its own, actually exists." Elsewhere, Rabbi Steinsaltz remarks inspiringly that, "These are pregnant times throughout the world... Anything can be born. And this is precisely the time when one must not sleep."

It's rare to find a profound new Jewish work these days, and even rarer to find one so accessible. If you've ever been touched by one of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's essays or books, this anthology is a must. And if you're yet unfamiliar with his vibrant thought, then *Pebbles of Wisdom* is perhaps even more crucial a book to have for mastering the personal and communal challenges today that we all face as Jews.

Edward Hoffman, Ph.D., is an adjunct associate psychology professor at Yeshiva University, and the author of numerous Judaica books including *The Way of Splendor* and *The Wisdom of Maimonides*. ★

Travel

BY HAROLD JACOBSON

Manhattan is a site under construction

Fall in New York City has been described as exuberant chaos. The latter has been intensified this year, however, by a construction fervor that seems to have invaded every section of Manhattan.

With the possible exception of the lower east side (most of the construction and renovation has already been completed) hard hats, scaffolding, pneumatic drills, temporary covered sidewalk promenades and tradesmen of all kinds are seen virtually everywhere in Manhattan.

Ground Zero, nine years after Bin Laden's evil minions laid it to waste, was once visible through transparent barriers. It is now closed off from public scrutiny by opaque fencing 10-feet high, while engineers, laborers and architects work to erect two new structures that will memorialize the victims of 9/11 and provide office space for thousands.

Ironically the dust, congestion and noise caused by the public construction projects have not deterred tourism in the city. Fifth Avenue continues to be clogged with wall-to-wall people enjoying the sites, shopping, filling the restaurants and watching various versions of street theater. On the newly revamped Times Square, a treed pedestrian mall has replaced six lanes of traffic.

One lacuna: The itinerant Senegalese sellers of knock-off watches who used to peddle their merchandise (a "Rolex" for \$10!) on every major street corner have disappeared, leaving only licensed dispensers of inexpensive shawls, handbags and costume jewelry to ply their noisy trade.

Manhattan's two main museums, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and the equally prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art on Fifth Avenue and 84th St., were packed with tourists from all continents. At MOMA crowds cloistered around the brilliant artistry of Israeli-born Ron Arad (no relation to the missing Israeli pilot) whose wildly original furniture designs have attracted worldwide admiration.

This fall MOMA's prestigious film series presented Costa Gavra's little-known film *Amen* – a breathtaking biography of SS Colonel Kurt Gerstein who tried unsuccessfully to alert the Vatican to the genocide of the Jews taking place in the death camps – camps in which he worked as a specialist in water and chemical purification procedures, including supervising the handling of the infamous Zyklon gas.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's painting, sculpture and ceramic galleries were attracting thousands of visitors in early September, some of whom repaired to the museums rooftop garden where spectacular views of Manhattan are available.

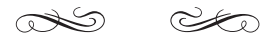
In the 1970s it was said that New York City had 25,000 restaurants; that number has diminished somewhat since then, but there are still enough to satisfy every palate. Aficionados of kosher fare can avail themselves of dozens of kosher restaurants, ranging from the traditional Noah's Ark on the lower east side to the spectacular and original menu at Mike's Bistro on 72 Street.

Original is also a word that can be used to describe an all-suite hotel – The Benjamin, located at 125 E. 50 St. off Lexington Avenue. Built in 1927 The Benjamin is *sui generis* for its ecological sensitivities, low-key amenities (a beautiful spa, a comfortable second-floor salon area), luxurious and superbly appointed guest rooms and – the tranquility it affords guests despite the fact that it is situated in the middle of one of Manhattan's busiest thoroughfares. It's a welcome oasis for business people, families, couples and ordinary tourists.

It can offer this, in part, because of its solid construction (which blocks out all exterior noises) and the graciousness of its service personnel. The concierge desk will go out of its way to assist guests in planning itineraries, booking theater tickets, making all kinds of reservations and even determining the right postage for mailing letters.

The Benjamin is a hotel that guarantees guests a perfect nighttime sleep (a choice of pillows, among other things, makes that possible) and the absence of the ubiquitous "Don't Disturb/Please Make up the Room" door tags found in other hotels, means that no one will accidentally awaken you before you wish.

But don't sleep too long; the pulsating and frenetic dynamism of Manhattan awaits you just outside The Benjamin's entrance. ★



BEN ASHER

(continued from page NAT 10)

know nothing at all'?" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Rabbi Hiyya then replied: "...These are the *righteous who in their death are called living*, as it says: 'Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a living man from Kabzeel, who had done mighty deeds, he struck down two commanders of Moab; he went down and also killed a lion in the middle of a well on a snowy day' (II Samuel 23:20). 'The son of a living man': are all other people then the sons of dead men? Rather 'the son of a living man' means that *even in his death he was called living*. ... 'But the dead know nothing': These are the wicked, who *in their lifetime are called dead*, as it says: 'And you, defiled and wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come...' (Ezekiel 21:30)." (Emphasis added.)

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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. ★



Kosher Kuisine

By SYBIL KAPLAN

A nice winter breakfast or brunch treat

I was looking in my recipe files and found eight similar recipes with the names Apple dessert pancakes, Apple latkes and Apple fritters. If you're still in the latke mood but want something special, try these recipes.

Apple Dessert Pancake (8 servings)

1/4 cup margarine
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/4 cup sugar
1 large apple, sliced in 1/4 inch slices
1/3 cup flour
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/3 cup milk
4 eggs
1/3 cup sugar

Preheat oven to 400°F. Melt margarine in an oven-proof dish or oven-proof frying pan with oven-proof handles or with handles wrapped in foil. Stir in cinnamon and sugar. Arrange apple slices overlapping slightly. Cook on stove 10 minutes. In a bowl, beat flour, baking powder and milk. Separate eggs and add yolks. Beat egg whites in a bowl with 1/3 cup sugar until soft peaks form then fold into other mixture. Spread over apples; bake 10 minutes in preheated 400° oven. Remove from oven, loosen with spatula and invert onto warm serving dish.

Apple Latkes (12 pancakes)

2 apples cut into chunks
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
1 1/2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 Tbsp. sugar
1 cup milk
1 egg
1 Tbsp. melted unsalted margarine oil

Combine apples with brown sugar and cinnamon in a bowl. In another bowl, combine flour, baking powder, sugar, milk, egg and melted margarine. Add apples. Heat oil in a frying pan. Spoon batter around pan for latke. Fry until brown on each side. Drain on paper towels. Keep frying until all batter is used.

Dessert Pancake with Apple Topping (8 servings)

1 cup flour
1 cup milk
1 cup milk

BACKALENICK

(continued from page NAT 11)

on Mostel, that the show has its most powerful – and most attention-grabbing – moments. No longer bombastic, the actor sits quietly at a table, answering questions posed by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In the exchange (which Brochu presumably took from actual records), the politicians come off as fools, Mostel as brilliant.

Ultimately, as Brochu spells out, the years would bring Mostel triumph upon triumph, in film, stage, television – with such shows as *Ulysses in Nighttown*, *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, the wonderful *Rhinoceros* and, ultimately, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

And now, in *Zero Hour*, Jim Brochu offers a fine tribute to this legendary man of the theater.

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



2 Tbsp. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1/4 tsp. almond extract
3 eggs
1 tsp. margarine
1 Tbsp. confectioners' sugar

2 tsp. margarine
3 thinly sliced apples
2 Tbsp. sugar
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
1/2 tsp. grated lemon peel
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1/4 tsp. nutmeg

Preheat oven to 450°F. Spray a pie plate with vegetable cooking spray. Combine flour and 1 cup milk. Add 1 cup milk, sugar, vanilla, almond extract and eggs and blend well. Add 1 tsp. margarine to pie plates. Bake in preheated 450° oven for 1 minute. Add flour, milk and egg mixture. Bake 5 minutes. Reduce oven to 425°F. Bake 20 minutes until puffed and golden. Meanwhile melt 2 tsp. margarine in a frying pan. Add apples, sugar, lemon juice, lemon peel cinnamon and nutmeg. Cook 8–10 minutes or until tender. Remove pancake from oven. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar and spoon apple topping into the center.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, book reviewer, food columnist and feature writer who moved from Overland Park, Kan., to Jerusalem in Septmeber 2008. She has just completed compiling her ninth kosher cookbook 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. ★

Jews in Sports

Five elected to Jewish Sports Hall of Fame

World heavyweight boxing champion Max Baer, who K.O.'d reigning title-holder Primo Camera to capture the heavyweight crown in June 1934, is one of five sport figures elected to the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame for 2010. Announcement is made by IJSHOF chairmen Alan Sherman, Potomac, Md., and R. Stephen Rubin, London.

Baer is joined by two-time Major League baseball all-star Sid Gordon, a 13-year big league power-hitter with a lifetime .283 batting average and 202 home runs for the Giants, Braves and Pirates during the 1940s and 50s; and South African tennis star Ilana Kloss, ranked the World's No. 1 Doubles player in 1976, and currently CEO of World Team Tennis.

Also honored are champion judoka Yael Arad, who's Judo silver medal at the 1992 Olympic Games (61kg middleweight) registered Israel's first-ever Olympic medal; and Holland-born Canadian figure skating coach Ellen Burka, who's innovative techniques and ground-breaking choreography produced 26 Canadian Olympic and World Championships medalists.

Since 1979, 342 athletes and sportsmen/women, representing 24 countries, have been elected to the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

The IJSHOF Museum resides on the campus of the Wingate Institute, Israel's National Sport Center, in the city of Netanya.

2010 IJSHOF Honorees

Yael Arad, in 1992, earned the first-ever Olympic medal won by an Israeli – a silver medal in the Judo half-middleweight (61kg) event at the Barcelona Olympic Games. (Israel first competed in the Olympics in 1952.) Wrote the *Jerusalem Post*: "When the history books of Israeli sport are written...the name of Yael Arad will be one of the most seminal." Arad earned silver medals at both the 1993 World Championships and European Championships. During her active international judo career, she captured seven gold, eight silver and nine bronze medals.

Max Baer's 11th-round knockout of Primo Camera on June 14, 1934, gave him the World Heavyweight Boxing title, which he held exactly one year, until June 13, 1935, when he lost a 15-round decision to James Braddock. The Omaha-born champion was elected to the Boxing Hall of Fame in 1968, World Boxing HOF in 1984 and International Boxing HOF in 1995. *The Ring Magazine* (in 2003) named Baer No. 22 on the list of the "100 Greatest Punchers of All-Time." His pro record: 83



bouts, 70 wins (52 by K.O., 18 by decision), 8 losses by decision, 3 by K.O., 2 by foul.

Ellen Burka's unique figure skating training techniques and ground-breaking choreography produced 26 Canadian Olympic and World Championships medalists.



Holland-born, Burka's most prominent pupils include 1965 World Figure Skating champion Petra Burka (her daughter), Elvis Stojko, a three-time world champion and two-time Olympic silver medalist, and Toller Cranston, the 1976 Olympic bronze medalist who, together with his coach, developed "Theater on Ice," changing the face of men's artistic skating choreography. Burka, herself, won the 1946 and 1947 Dutch women's figure skating singles championships – after surviving (with her family) World War II Westerbork and Theresienstadt concentration camps. It was there that she met her future husband, with whom she immigrated to Canada in 1950. Burka received the Order of Canada in 1978, was inducted into the Canadian Figure Skating Hall of Fame in 1992, and into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 1996.

Sid Gordon, a 13-year Major League infielder-outfielder, was a two-time National League All Star (1948 and 1949) and lifetime .283 hitter. One of the consistent power-hitters of the post-WWII era, he hit 30, 26, 27, 29, 25 home runs in consecutive seasons (1948–1952). During this period his extra-base hits ranked him among the National League's top ten slugging averages. His stats include 202 career homers, and he once hit four grand slams in a single season (1950). In 1,475 career games, Gordon had 1,415 hits. The Brooklyn-born third baseman-outfielder played his first full season in 1943 with the New York Giants, then joined the U.S. Coast Guard for the duration of World War II. He rejoined the Giants in 1946, was traded to the Boston Braves in 1949, the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1954, and finished his career with the Giants in 1955.

Ilana Kloss, of South Africa, was the World's No. 1 ranked Doubles player in 1976, winning the U.S. Open, U.S. Clay Courts, British Hard Courts, Italian Open, German Open and Hilton Head Open (mostly with Linky Boshoff). That same year, she also captured the French Open Mixed Doubles crown (with Kim Warwick). Her highest WTA Singles ranking was No. 19 in 1979. The youngest player ever ranked No. 1 in South Africa, Kloss gained tennis world notoriety by capturing both the Wimbledon and U.S. Open Junior Singles titles before turning professional. In 1991, Kloss succeeded Billy Jean King as executive director of World Team Tennis (WTT), and was named its CEO/commissioner in 2001. ★



KAPLAN/ISRAEL*(continued from page NAT 7)*

the country 700 years ago, they declared it a mosque and forbid entry to Jews beyond the seventh step.

When Hebron was liberated in 1967, religious rights to the site were given to the Muslim Qaqf. Then in 1994, the areas were divided giving the hall in which the portals to the caves where the tombs are located to the Muslims. Jews are allowed entry into the hall 10 days a year. With 75% control of the building, the Muslims intentionally come to the Jewish side and turn on their microphones.

We enter a large room and the Arab muezzin is screeching for several minutes. These loudspeakers are open from 4:30 a.m. to late at night. Chambers are on three sides, over the tombs of those whose names are written on the gates – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Leah, Jacob and Rebekah.

The future of Hebron and the Jews

The major problem in Hebron is a lack of apartments. To build is very difficult; to buy is also hard because the Palestinian Authority decreed that any Arab who sells property to a Jew can be executed, a law adopted from Jordanian law. The hills are covered with Arab houses, they can build without permits.

According to Mr. Wilder, "Hebron is a microcosm of the State of Israel. We came back home, we want to continue to live freely where people want. We have to survive. I would like to see Hebron as an open city. Their goal is to get us out. If you allow terror to control your lives, it follows you. You cannot allow terror to ruin your lives."

Sybil Kaplan lives in Jerusalem. ★

On this date in Jewish history

On December 16, 1394

Jews were expelled from France.

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

ADLAND*(continued from page NAT 2)*

Mattityahu (Mattathias), a member of the priestly community, killed a soldier, knocked down the idol and declared, "Whoever is for God come with me." His leadership was replaced by Judah HaMaccabee, Judah the Hammer, who, along with his four brothers – Shimon, Yochanan, Elazar, Yonatan – led the rebellious Israelite army to victory.

This was not an overnight victory, but a very difficult campaign for religious freedom against a mighty army. Many people died so that others could continue to celebrate, worship, and live a Jewish life. In many ways there was another miracle that happened at this season in those days. It was the miracle of the smaller army defeating a larger one, of the

weak struggling to victory over the strong, of the oppressed over the oppressor. More than 2,000 years later this miracle and this lesson continue to strengthen our resolve when we face uphill battles for human rights, the poor, the homeless, the hungry, the weak and the forgotten.

As Jews, for most of our history, we have been the weaker in the countries and communities in which we lived. It cost us many lives and homelands. After WWII we resolved that no longer would we be silent not only for our own fate but the fate of all those whose voices aren't loud enough to be heard. It is why we talk about *tikkun olam* and social justice as much as we do. It is why we send out letters four times a year asking you to help feed hungry children. It is why we collect clothes for Crooked Creek or bring in supplies for the Pillowcase Project or help a struggling Jewish family get through this time of year.

It is also why we lobby, write letters, sit on non-profit boards, contribute to causes that help those in need, work to pass legislation that affords people rights where none existed before, and march to change individual's minds on any number of issues.

Chanukah is about miracles, but you and I are the agents to help make miracles happen. Enjoy your latkes and spin the dreidels, but take a moment to remember what this holiday is all about. It is about changing the world to a better place. It could be religious freedom or human freedom, but everyone deserves the right and opportunity to be free.

When you light your Chanukah candles this week, light them not just for the beautiful glow, but to remember what happened a long time ago and what it means to us today. When you light your Shabbat candles this evening, light them with the knowledge that Judah HaMaccabee fought for our opportunity to do this.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Chanukah!

Rabbi Adland is senior rabbi of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation. ★

**MEDAD***(continued from page NAT 16)***For this they have money? or Chanukah in our time!**

I wonder who's going to be hired as Ehud Barak's building inspectors. Just like Arik Sharon planned the destruction of Jewish Gush Katif for Tisha B'Av, the 9th of Av, the Hellenist Ehud Barak is going against Jewish life in Judea and Samaria as a sick, perverse Chanukah celebration.

Yes, *davka Chanukah*, the Jewish holiday celebrated by Jews all over the world. How do most of them celebrate it? They may light a *Chanukiyah*, special nine candle menorah. They may even eat some oily food, like potato latkes. They probably just give and receive presents in what has become the Jewish version of *Christmas giving*.

What is the real Chanukah story all about? Why are we celebrating this holiday in the middle of the winter? Chanukah is actually the easiest of



all Jewish holidays. There aren't any restrictions. We can cook, eat, drive, play musical instruments, watch a movie. There are fewer *mitzvot*, requirements/ commandments than Purim.

For eight nights, as the moon is waning, we're required to light candles anytime from sunset throughout the evening and night. Each night we light one more candle, so the lights get brighter and brighter in our doorways or window sills. We must place these candles in a place where passersby will see them. We must be proud of our Judaism.

Torah/G-d loyal Jews were battling two fronts. One was against the Greeks who were ruling the Holy Land and had made laws forbidding the practice of Judaism. Our other enemies – actually the most dangerous — were the Hellenists, the Jews who tried to be more Greek than the Greeks. They took the side of the Greeks against Judaism. There was a fierce battle for our *Beit HaMikdash*, Holy Temple. Everything was destroyed.

The pro-Jewish Jews led by Judah the Maccabee defeated the Greeks but were almost in despair, because it seemed certain that there wasn't any pure oil, which was necessary to resume worship in the *Beit HaMikdash*. When a small vial was found, it seemed like a mockery. The quantity wasn't enough to last until more would be fit. But with great faith, it was lit and lasted long enough. That's why the holiday lasts eight days. Each day the miracle got stronger, more amazing.

Logic was against us. We didn't have the people and arms to fight the strong well-equipped Greeks, but we were victorious! And then we didn't have enough pure oil, but G-d continued to bless us with miracles. Yes, it takes faith and action on our part. And yes, we'll keep building and fighting today's Greeks and today's Hellenists! And we certainly will be victorious!!

Making sense of Obama's new health plan

I've been trying to make sense out of the plan, not because I live in the United States, but because we've been hearing very peculiar and frightening things about the proposed law. At first I ignored

the scary emails, because I just couldn't believe that the United States would tax expats, those of us citizens who have chosen to live abroad. Then more and more people who generally are immune to scare tactics showed worry. So I blogged about it.

But I really wanted to hear the opinion of my rebbe in these matters of United States law and how it affects us in Israel. I'm referring to Yitzhak Heimowitz, known as "our lawyer" by New York Betarim of my generation.

I asked Yitz to summarize the proposed law and his opinion of it. Here's what he sent me:

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives are considering bills for health insurance reform, a major Obama campaign promise. The purpose of the law, when enacted, will be to force all Americans to buy health insurance from "qualified insurers," a term that will not be defined for some time to come.

Americans who do not buy such health insurance will be encouraged to buy it, or be punished by having to pay an excise tax of \$750 per person per year, for which they will get nothing.

Americans who live outside the U.S. are unable to obtain health insurance from American carriers, because these do not provide services abroad. Medicare and Medicaid only provide services in the U.S., not outside. In the past when an effort was made to set up an HMO in Israel to enable such services, it was not successful.

Thus the law will force American citizens abroad to buy insurance from which they cannot benefit, and if they don't, it will punish them by charging them the \$750. For us it will be a lose-lose situation.

The House bill recognizes this and exempts Americans abroad from the penalty. The Senate bill does not. We are trying to explain this injustice to the Senators so they will also include the exemption, as the House bill does.

If the Senate and the House pass different bills – which is quite likely – there will be a conference committee of members of the Senate and the House to compromise the differences. If by then both bills do not provide the exemption for Americans abroad, the conference committee will provide another chance. One of the causes of the American revolution was "taxation without representation". We must do our best to remind the Senate of that.

Yitzhak Heimowitz

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



Musings from Shiloh

By BATYA MEDAD

Local democracy

Last night we held local elections here in Shiloh for our Town Council aka *HaMazkirut*. Yes, that was the venue for the early stages.

We couldn't get the door to the school open. Eventually we did get in and made ourselves at home in the teachers' room. There was a good turn-out and a pleasant atmosphere. Two of the winners are graduates of the school, having been born and raised in Shiloh and now they're raising their own children here. You can call that a vote of confidence in *yishuv* life.

Our school, the Ohel Shiloh School has really grown since it first opened on Sept. 1, 1981. That day, just 18 kids in three grades studied in three brand new prefabricated buildings in the then-brand-new upper neighborhood of Shiloh. That's where we had just moved, also. It was one of Arik Sharon's brilliant pioneering ideas to build a large neighborhood high above the site of Biblical Tel Shiloh. Half of Shiloh's residents live here today.



After a year the school moved to the area of Tel Shiloh, using various buildings and caravans. Then a proper permanent school building was constructed. We were there last night. Actually, today it's a very tiny portion of the school building, a maze of various additional classrooms and even more caravans. They also use rooms in a nearby building as classrooms. We now have two elementary schools, which educate the kids until the eighth grade, separate administrations and play yards for boys and girls. The students come from communities all over. It's a regional school. Many of its graduates live in Shiloh or other YESHA, Judea and Samaria, communities.

Special second wedding at Tel Shiloh

Thursday night, when we attended a "second wedding," not "second marriage" at Tel Shiloh, we considered it a rather unique event, when an already married couple with kids in their quest for a more Jewish life decides to get married again.

Our chief rabbi of Shiloh, HaRav Elchanan Bin Nun conducted the one here in Shiloh. Tonight I read that Chabad is doing the same sort of thing.



There was a very interesting crowd, as suited the couple, considering their history. Most of the invitees were either native English or Russian speakers. Few of the guests grew up in Israel. The official language of the wedding was Hebrew, because that's the language we all have in common.

The *chuppah*, Jewish wedding ceremony was outside at the Tourist Center of Tel Shiloh. Afterward there was a festive meal, a *se'udat mitzvah*, a required meal according to Jewish Law.

Mazal Tov to the couple and their children!

Menu conversion, or what to serve for special meals, like Thanksgiving

This morning I woke up to find a letter from someone asking help in converting some traditional American Thanksgiving recipes to kosher *parve* (no dairy products).

I don't think she liked my general approach, which is to ignore tradition. First of all, I like simple foods and menus. I don't think it's healthy to have all sorts of animal proteins (meat, fish, poultry, dairy) at one meal. Kashrut, the Jewish Dietary Laws, forbids meat/poultry with dairy. Also, fish isn't cooked with meat/poultry, though they can be served separately. As far as I'm concerned, it's enough for our bodies to have either meat/poultry or fish. You don't need both, certainly not all at once.

I like my vegetables to be just vegetables and not full of fats and animal proteins. For over a year now, I eat very few starches (carbohydrates,) and due to that diet change, I've lost over 35 pounds or 15 kilos.

My meals include a serving of animal protein, or tofu, plus lots of low-starch vegetables and salad. I find these meals filling and satisfying. My vegetables are baked, roasted, sautéed and stir fried. They're attractive and delicious when cooked those ways. In addition, it's very easy to prepare vegetables like that.

Most studies show that overeating proteins is the cause of illness, high cholesterol and so forth,

so if you only serve one animal protein, the chances are that you'll eat less than if there's a choice. Make a variety of vegetables, and you'll find yourself healthier and slimmer. Limit the carbohydrates to one starchy vegetable and one grain at most. Don't sweeten vegetables. Properly cooked, they're sweet enough.



Change the game plan to bring Gilad Shalit home

The number of terrorists touted to be released in exchange for Gilad Shalit is going up faster than my weight when I eat carbohydrates! The latest rumors say that close to 1,000 Arab terrorists may enjoy undeserved freedom.

It's obvious that the Israeli government hasn't a clue about how to negotiate. Every time our hapless government gives in and agrees to a terrorist demand, a new demand pops up like poisonous mushrooms after a long rain.

Paula Stern who blogs the very popular *A Soldier's Mother* wrote a rather confusing post about Gilad Shalit. What she sees as a major dilemma is what to give the terrorists in exchange for him. Here's my comment:

As I write this, my two sons are in *milu'im* (reserves). Gilad Shalit would probably have been home now if we hadn't been nice to the Arab terrorists in our jails, if we had told the RC that they don't see those prisoners until they see Gilad and arrange his return home. He's not the equivalent of a terrorist, and it's dangerous for us and our kids for that formula to be accepted.

If we hadn't kept offering more and more, he'd probably be home in Israel already. If we'd acted strong and sovereign rather than weak, desperate and pathetic, he'd probably be home already.

The doubt she shows is dangerous and weakening. We have to be pragmatic and recognize the fact that all of our niceness, gestures and such have only brought us more trouble.

When we close our eyes to reality, the pressures spin us around like in a game of "pin the tail on the donkey." We could end up walking out the door, going miles, blindfolded, searching for that tail-less donkey. We must resist the pressures to play the games that the world keeps pushing us into. We must pull off the blindfold and take a good look at reality.

Only our determination to do what's best for us and us only will free Gilad Shalit. We've lost the deterrence weapon a long time ago. The Arabs know very well that we're a paper tiger. The time has come for us to change gears and play by different rules, our rules, Jewish rules, Torah Laws. (see Medad, page NAT 15)

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