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Festival of Sukkot

This photo comes from Universe's 2010 The Jewish Historical Museum of Amsterdam calendar. More on this and other Jewish calendars on page NAT 14. Cover designed by Crystal Kurz.

Editorial

As you can read in Howard Karsh’s column on page NAT 10 of this issue, in 5769 the Jewish community suffered embarrassment because of a few Jewish individuals. In contrast, I would like to focus on a Jewish man from Indianapolis who was an example of the exact opposite – a true *mensch*.

Melvin Simon, of blessed memory (see obituary NAT 3), was a man we can all be proud of. Coming from a meager upbringing in the Bronx, N.Y., he – together with his brothers Herbert and Fred Simon – set a standard for Jews and non-Jews alike of what a man can achieve and contribute to his community with dedication and hard work.

The Simons also set an example by embracing their Jewish upbringing, celebrating their life cycle events at the synagogue – in this case even to the very end – and continuing throughout their lives to support Jewish causes.

He was also well loved among non-Jews locally and internationally, with President Bill Clinton and Vice-president Al Gore as two of the speakers at the funeral. Because Simon was co-owner of the NBA’s Indiana Pacers, several famous professional basketball personalities such as Larry Bird and Reggie Miller (along with NBA commissioner David Stern who is Jewish) were also in attendance. Perhaps this was the first Jewish life cycle experience for many of them.

Simon’s funeral, which took place at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck, with reportedly 2,000 people in attendance, was led by Rabbis Dennis and Sandy Sasso. When assuredly so many would turn out to pay tribute to Mel, the seating in the synagogue was already set up in expectation of the large attendance later that evening for Erev Rosh Hashanah services.

Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels said about Simon, “A giant, pure and simple, and a citizen in the noblest sense of that word. When the U.S. Army sent young Mel Simon to Fort Benjamin Harrison instead of anywhere else, it was one of the greatest breaks the state of Indiana will ever get.”

Indeed, the NBA, Indiana, and the world have lost an exceptional role model who made the world Jewish community proud.

As is our tradition, we extend the words of comfort to the family of and all who mourn Mel Simon, “May G-d comfort you among your fellow mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

Forgiveness

The following two articles did not arrive until after our deadline for the previous issue or I would have included them in my editorial then.

The first adds an important dimension about forgiveness that I did not think of: being able to forgive yourself. The second is very poignant and shows again that even in the worst of circumstances it

is not only possible but also beneficial to one’s well-being to be able to forgive.

Again, L’shana Tova to each of you and your families!

Jennie Cohen 9-23-09

Forgiving yourself

by Rabbi Steven Z. Leder

Guess how many pages it takes in the prayer book until God forgives us on Kol Nidrei? Three. Barely a minute into the service, God says, “Salachti – I forgive you.” Almost immediately our slate is wiped clean.

When it comes to forgiveness, God acts quickly. But what about us when it comes to one of the most difficult and important kinds of forgiveness; forgiving ourselves? How many of us are good at that?

Most of us expect an awful lot of ourselves. And we expect a lot of our children, parents and spouses. We have a hard time forgiving them for their human frailties.

The Torah knew better – the heroes of the Bible aren’t perfect. Their great deeds overshadow their mistakes, but they all make their share of mistakes. Virtually every family in the Torah is dysfunctional.

God doesn’t expect us to be perfect. When God creates the world in the Torah, the world is called “good” – not “perfect.” For God, good is good enough. Life isn’t a trap set for us by God, so that God can condemn us for failing. God doesn’t set us up for failure. We do that all by ourselves.

Author Anne Lamott puts it this way: “I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox, full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up, I found that God handed you these rusty, bent, old tools – friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty – and said, ‘Do the best you can with these; they will have to do.’ And mostly, against all odds, they’re enough.”

God, on Yom Kippur, You forgive us our imperfections in just three pages.

For You, good is good enough.

Remind us not to give up on ourselves But to give up instead on the search for perfection.

Help us to love ourselves as much as You do; making peace within; entering the New Year forgiving, forgiven and renewed.

Rabbi Leder is senior rabbi of Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles. This message if from their Sept. 1, 2009 bulletin which can be found at: www.wilshireboulevardtemple.org/pages/bulletin.

Facing Tragedy

by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish

The 16th of January, 2009, is the day when my three precious daughters and niece were killed by Israeli shells. I do not want anyone in this world to see what I have seen.

What I have lost will never come back. I need to go forward and be motivated literally by the spirit of what I lost, and to do them justice. I lost three precious

(see Editorial, page NAT 3)

Shabbat Shalom

By Rabbi Jon Adland

Sept. 11, 2009, Nitzavim/Vayelech (Deuteronomy 29:9–31:30), 22 Elul 5769

Where were you eight years ago this morning? That is the question many of us will be asking as we think about this day.

The Adland family was scattered. Josh was in Israel on his semester in high school program, and Rachel was in school in Lexington. Sandy was flying that day heading toward Dallas for an aunt’s funeral and ended up in Pittsburgh at the home of a colleague of mine after the plane was grounded. I spent some of the day in Louisville at a rabbis’ meeting before returning home. My mother-in-law had gone to New Jersey for a wedding and was stuck there for a few days until we got her home on a train.

Many of us have stories of that day, but all of us have memories. It is one of those defining moments. Where were you when you saw Neil Armstrong walk on the moon? Where were you when you heard the news that President Kennedy was shot? Pearl Harbor, D-Day, and the end of WWII mark dramatic moments for our senior generation. We mark time by the memories we accumulate.

Our Torah portion this week marks a moment in time as well when we are reminded that all of us stood together at Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah that links and binds us together with its stories, teachings, ethics, rituals, and morals. But, what is amazing about this part of Deuteronomy is that the writers also told us that it would link every generation of Jews to this moment.

It says, beginning in Deut. 29:13, “I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before Adonai our God and with those who are not with us here this day.” We,

you and I, are included in that moment of revelation. That moment is part of our collective memory. If these verses had been left out, then we could have easily said that the revelation on Sinai was just for those who had been liberated from Egypt. Instead, it included all of us.

What does this mean? It means that Torah is a part of every Jewish person’s life, heart, and soul. It means that a Jew can’t just dismiss what Torah teaches and what Torah commands without a struggle to understand. It doesn’t mean that every word or ritual or commandment of Torah will work in our lives, but one shouldn’t dismiss it without just cause.

For me, over the years of reading, studying, struggling, and comprehending Torah, I have found that what a section meant to me 30 years ago or 20 years ago is different today. As we grow older, the meaning of our actions and thoughts, as well as the world around us, change and we need to rethink what it means. Torah study gives us the opportunity to confront deep and meaningful questions about life and love, death and loss, as well as the everyday mundane that we face.

Beginning next weekend, our holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will be at the core of our Jewish lives. The words in our *mahzor* (Gates of Repentance) challenge us to think about what is truly important in our lives. We are urged to set things right, as well as to celebrate God’s magnificent creation. These holy days are meant to be spent with family and friends, not at work or at school, but in surroundings that allow for celebration and contemplation. These are days, not a couple of hours in shul, but days to refrain from the everyday grind and, at the same time, struggle with the meaning of our existence.

In the midst of all of this, we build memories with the special dinners with loved ones, phone calls from children, and worship with family. Unfortunately, the day will come when the chair will be

(see Adland, page NAT 16)

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Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

As I write this, this coming Shabbos and Sunday are Rosh Hashanah. One aspect of Rosh Hashanah is that it is the Day of Judgment. On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem passes judgment on each of us what kind of year we will have. Our health, wealth and everything else are all in Hashem's hands. If we decide now to learn Hashem's Torah and fulfill His commandments, then He will inscribe us for a good and sweet year. If we don't, we will most likely still survive, because even those of us who consider themselves secular still do a lot of Mitzvahs.

For example, all acts of kindness and anything that we do to help others are Mitzvahs. But is this what we want? Just to survive, to struggle on? No! We want a rich life, full of happiness and fulfillment, and this we can achieve only by learning Torah and doing all of the Mitzvahs. For those of you who read this after Rosh Hashanah, we have until the last day of Succos to make good resolutions to earn blessings for a good and sweet year.

Now I'll tell you a beautiful story about a Mitzvah. Our daughter, Sheina Sarah, got married Sept. 7. We thank Hashem with all our heart that He helped us to do this Mitzvah. Baruch Hashem she had a beautiful and very happy wedding.

How did she find her husband? The traditional way, through the service of matchmakers. Is this the best way to find a spouse? In my experience, definitely.

I grew up in the secular world, where you find a spouse by yourself. This can be really difficult, frustrating, painful, and in many cases impossible. I am by nature a shy person. I remember being attracted to many girls, but I was too shy to ask them for a date. A lot of the time, I was really frustrated.

In the middle of my second year of college, I dropped out and went to learn in the yeshiva (rabbinical school) in Kfar Habad, Israel. While learning in yeshiva I also saw attractive girls, but I was no longer frustrated. I had been told that when I was ready for marriage, a matchmaker would help me to find the right girl.

The matchmaker gets an idea of who is suitable for whom. Then he suggests the idea to the boy and girl, or to their parents or teachers. He gives references, so that you can check out the character of the person who is being suggested. If both sides agree, then a meeting is arranged in a comfortable setting, such as a park or hotel lobby, where the couple can talk in privacy and get to know each other. After an hour or two of talking, they say goodbye.

Later they speak to the matchmaker. If they think that this person might be right for them, they tell the matchmaker that they are interested in meeting again. If not, they tell the matchmaker to look for someone else for them. No feelings are hurt.

Who was the matchmaker for our daughter Sheina? My dear wife, Malka. She has been a matchmaker for almost 30

years. A few months ago she asked the head of a yeshiva if he knew someone suitable for Sheina. He suggested one of his students. Malka called the young man's aunt. The aunt told her that this boy wasn't interested in marriage yet, and suggested his younger brother. We did some investigations, and got favorable reports.

Then we asked the Rebbe. How do we ask the Rebbe? We write the Rebbe a letter, then take one of the Rebbe's books and open it. We read the pages that we opened to, and see if that is a reply to what we asked. In this case we received a positive answer.

Then Malka called a friend who is also a matchmaker and asked her to work on this idea. Her friend spoke to the boy's parents. They checked up on our Sheina, and decided to give the match a try.

We spoke to Sheina about the young man. She decided that she wasn't interested. Why? Because his mother is Moroccan. We had a long talk. We explained that marriage is a meeting of souls. When you are born, half of a soul enters your body. The other half enters the body of your future spouse. The main thing to look for in a marriage partner is whether this is my soul mate. Does this person have the long lost other half of my soul?

If you find your soul mate, marriage can be truly wonderful. When you are single, you are only a half. When you marry your soul mate, you find your other half, and together you become whole. If you decide that you will only marry someone from America (or any other country), you can get into big trouble. What if your soul mate was born in a different country?

Sheina decided to ask her spiritual advisor what to do. Her advisor agreed with us, and convinced her to meet Shneur. The matchmaker set up a meeting.

The day of the meeting, we got an urgent call from the matchmaker. The young man decided to put off the meeting. He heard that our Sheina has a slight problem with her vision, and wanted to investigate. After a few days of investigating he spoke to his spiritual advisor, who told him the same idea, that the main thing here is whether she is his soul mate. He agreed to meet our Sheina, but now our Sheina refused to meet him. She had been insulted.

What could we do? Malka started to look into other possibilities. A month later Sheina got a message from the Rebbe implying that she had insulted someone and should seek forgiveness. She understood from this that she should swallow her pride and meet Shneur. A meeting was arranged and this time they really met. After three meetings they decided to get married.

We hope that you will bless the new couple with great success in their efforts to build an everlasting family. We bless you that you should also merit to fulfill this Mitzvah, and all of the Mitzvahs. Each Mitzvah brings Moshiach closer. We want Moshiach now!

Rabbi Cohen lives in K'far Chabad, Israel. He can be reached by email at bzcohen1@neto.bezeqint.net. He and his wife Malka now have 10 children and 26 grandchildren. ★

Obituaries

Melvin Simon, 82

Melvin Simon, shopping center industry pioneer and Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Simon Property Group, has died at the age of 82 after a short illness.



A native of the Bronx, N.Y., Mr. Simon attended the Bronx High School of Science and the City College of New York, where he earned a B.S. degree in accounting and an M.B.A. with emphasis on real estate. He moved to Indianapolis, Ind. in 1954 while serving in the U.S. Army at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

Upon his discharge from the Army, Mr. Simon worked as a leasing representative with the Albert Frankel Company, an Indianapolis developer of community shopping centers. In 1960, sensing the vast potential in this industry, Mr. Simon, joined by his brothers Herbert and Fred, created Melvin Simon & Associates, who quickly became known for their willingness to do business on a handshake.

From the early years of developing enclosed regional malls and community shopping centers, the company has



EDITORIAL

(continued from page NAT 2)

daughters, but I am blessed with five other children and the future. I believe that life is like riding a bicycle, as Einstein says – "To keep your balance, you must keep moving." I will keep moving.

And what about forgiveness? Is forgiveness necessary? When you forgive someone, you forgive and value yourself. Forgiveness is about letting go, completely and permanently.

Then there is the choice, the crossroads, the path of light or the path of darkness. I chose the first. Most people assume that this path, that of forgiveness, is difficult, but in the long run it is easier to forgive than to live with hatred or be consumed with revenge.

Forgiveness helps you move forward, away from the pain of the past to the brightness of the future. Indeed, forgiveness opens the door to a future that will not repeat the old tragedies. Sometimes the beauty in forgiveness is to forgive when you do not know whom to forgive, when no one asks you for forgiveness. Whatever the situation, to err is human, but to forgive is truly divine.

Dr. Izzeldin Abuellaish, M.D., M.P.H., is an associate professor in the Dala Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto; info@abuelaishfoundation.com. ★



pioneered cutting-edge development and retail concepts that have earned it the reputation as one of the industry's leading innovators. In 1993, under the leadership of Mr. Simon's son, David, Simon Property Group was formed into the largest initial public offering in the history of the real estate investment trust (REIT) industry. Subsequent property and portfolio acquisitions have created the world's largest retail real estate REIT.

Mr. Simon also enjoyed a lifelong love of sports, most notably basketball and golf. His love of sports culminated in the purchase of the Indiana Pacers in 1983, along with his brother, Herb.

Throughout his life, Mr. Simon was the recipient of many awards and honors, including the Jewish Welfare Federation's "Man of the Year," The Horatio Alger Award, and a seat in the Central Indiana Business Hall of Fame. In 1995, upon the opening of Circle Centre Mall in Indianapolis, he was named a Sagamore of the Wabash. In 2003, he was named a Lifetime Trustee of the Urban Land Institute and was a former trustee of the International Council of Shopping Centers. In 2007, Mr. Simon was inducted into The Indiana Academy, a recognition bestowed on him by the state's private colleges and universities. Most recently, in June 2009, he was named a Living Legend by the Indiana Historical Society.

Understanding the importance of giving back, Mr. Simon had many philanthropic interests, including organizations that serve underprivileged youth, the arts, museums, social services and education. From the early days of the Jerry Lewis Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy, to the formation of the Simon Youth Foundation, Mr. Simon always tried to help those less fortunate, never forgetting his humble beginnings. He was especially generous in gifts to Indiana University – Simon Hall and the Bess Meshulam Simon Music Library and Recital Hall on the Bloomington campus, the Simon Family Tower at Riley Hospital for Children, and most recently, the Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center at the Indiana University Medical Center in Indianapolis. He was a member of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis.

Mr. Simon is survived by his wife of 40 years, Bren; his children, Deborah Simon, Cynthia Simon Skjodt, David Simon and Tammy McCauley; his grandchildren, Eli, Rebecca, Hannah, Noah and Sam Simon; Erik, Samantha and Ian Skjodt; Tasha and Dylan McCauley; and his brothers, Fred and Herbert. He was preceded in death by son, Joshua Max Simon.

A funeral service took place on Fri., Sept. 18 at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck. A private burial service followed.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Joshua Max Simon Primary Care Center at St. Vincent Hospital, Indianapolis. Arrangements entrusted to Aaron-Ruben-Nelson Mortuary. Online condolences may be sent to www.arnmortuary.com. ★



Jews by Choice

BY MARY HOFMANN

It's the journey, not the destination

I'm always disappointed in Yom Kippur, and I bet I'm not alone. It's not Yom Kippur's fault, of course, it's mine. And this year my friend Marilyn Price has shown me what I was missing.

I don't know anyone in our tiny congregation in small-town central California who pays any attention to Elul. And hardly anyone notices Selichot. It's almost as though Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur burst unexpectedly from the calendar each year and everybody revs up (or at least shows up) for the Erev Rosh Hashanah service. Ten days later they turn up for Kol Nidre, after which many, I fear, feel they have satisfied whatever homing instinct brought them in the week before.

Since I teach the Shabbat School (we're up to nine kids now ranging from 2.5 to 11 years!), I at least have the advantage of needing to make time to bring the kids up to some level of speed about what we're doing and why, which creates its own self-reflective moments for me. But this year, as she has done for years with the Counting of the Omer, Marilyn has, without realizing it, shown me the way and brought me along for a wonderful, unexpected ride.

I first met Marilyn (at least officially) in 2001 at a delightful URJ weekend retreat at Camp Newman in Calistoga, Calif., called "Sukkot in Sonoma." Marilyn is a master storyteller who found she could overcome her shyness by telling her stories through puppets. Fulfilling an amazingly creative artistic flair, Marilyn (whose house in Evanston, Ill., must be an absolute riot of colors and strange Jewish characters lovingly created out of foam and scraps and brushes and every conceivable household object one can imagine) takes her "friends" on the road and delights children and adults all over the country and beyond with her stories. I was enthralled.

I met her again at a URJ Kallah in Santa Cruz, where she hosted workshops showing us how to make (with children and adults) all manner of Jewish creations out of the commonplace, and this time I felt confident enough to approach her and talk. In the manner of Small Jewish World, it turns out we went to the same high school in Chicago, where she graduated a year ahead of me. And it went from there...

We've seen each other at the occasional URJ event over the years and kept in loose contact, but she did me the incredible mitzvah of adding me to her group mail (it may have been a small thing for her at the time, but the rewards for me have been profound). Among her many other

talents, Marilyn writes like an angel (a funny, caustic angel) and decided, some years ago, to write a little spiel each day as she counted the Omer...and, happily, she included her email friends. She now has a little following in Merced, Calif., as a group of my folks loved her messages so much they asked me to forward them, which I cheerfully and gratefully do.

This year, though, she has surpassed herself. This year, during the month of Elul, she has taken familiar fables from Aesop and others and, each day, tied in an event or reflection of her own to it and created thoughtful little masterpieces that have brought Elul and its purpose to life for me and, undoubtedly, many others. Ah, the potential magic of email, at least when Marilyn is on the sender end.

It's almost as though Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur burst unexpectedly from the calendar each year...

If you'd like your own taste of Marilyn's inspired, instructional silliness, please check out her web site (www.marilynprice.com) and/or buy yourself a copy (or many copies) of her little book *Marilyn Price & Friends Present the Alphabet from Aleph to Tav*. Published in 1998 by Torah Aura, it's a colorful Hebrew reading readiness adventure (through her puppets, of course) that is not only a boon to kids, but to adults who love an outstanding example of a creative segue into Hebrew. I understand she may be publishing a group of her stories soon as well, and I for one cannot wait to snap up a copy. But I digress...

This year, because of Marilyn, I've been honoring Elul and enjoying every moment. We celebrated Selichot at home this year, close family and friends sitting around my living room lit by candles as we spoke the prayers and then invited our little ones (4 and almost 6 years old) to blow the shofar (and they surprised everyone, most of all themselves, being able to do it!). It was magical.

In a way, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a little like graduations. If you focus entirely on the graduation, you miss the entire education. And if you focus on the education, the graduation becomes but another step in the journey. Important ones, of course, but more in the context than in the performance. This year, more than ever, I'm all about the context.

Thank you, Marilyn. You may be thousands of miles away, but you've become one of the great teachers in my life. And when we were both at Sullivan High in the 60s, who'd a thought!

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



Between you & me

BY RABBI MICAH D. GREENSTEIN

One of the most unique qualities of Judaism is its emphasis on joy. Judaism is a faith that celebrates the goodness and fullness of life. Or, as Modern Orthodox Rabbi "Yitz" Greenberg put it at Temple just before the High Holy Days, "Judaism, at its core, is about the triumph of life"

The holiday that embodies this ideal of the joy of life – more than any other festival – is Sukkot. The prayerbook identifies Sukkot as "z'man simchateinu" – the "season of our rejoicing."

At first glance, this period of the year seems to be the least suitable for a "season of rejoicing." The days grow shorter, the weather in most of the Jewish world grows colder, grass withers, flowers fade, and the whole world seems to retreat into a state of hibernation. Maybe not in Memphis or the South, but in most places, this is a very difficult time for rejoicing!

How much easier it would be to revel in the sprint when all nature revives. Don't you think joy can be captured more readily at the beginning of a cycle instead of at the very end?

Maybe not. Too often we are inclined to rejoice in anticipation of the future. We think about the harvest we plan to reap in the days and weeks and months to come. We are often disappointed. We never achieve all that we seek. The future never fully meets our expectations, and, as a result, for many people that sense of "joy" either suffers or dissolves altogether.

However, we have all probably reaped a harvest of some significance in the recent past – personal achievements, however modest, that we can all look back on if we adjust our mindset.

What am I talking about? A little thoughtfulness or kindness directed our way, perhaps the return to health (or at least better health), much needed support from friends and family during a difficult time, sparks of love that have brightened our lives – these moments and recollections are more than sufficient cause for rejoicing, regardless of what the future holds.

The past is never so bleak that it does not contain a glimmer of hope, and that is the same principle Jewish tradition urges us to apply to the future.

Admittedly, a joyous mood may be harder to develop at this season than at others. It requires more courage and confidence to maintain a zest for living when nature is more in retreat than in resurgence. Still, that may be the purpose of Torah in commanding us to rejoice at this time!

It is not an instinctive or impulsive response; it requires determination with the assurance that, looking back, the rewards will more than compensate for this time! (see Greenstein, page NAT 5)



Unatana Tokef

BY RABBI ANNE BRENER

We now confront the meaning of this day As we stare into the face of our own mortality. We form a circle.

Hands and souls linked,
We stand as community.
Together we contemplate
The Yomim Noraim.
The days of awe,
The days of trembling.

Our eyes scan the room
And lock with the eyes of others,
As we consider the year just begun.

As we cross the threshold of a New Year,
We are not so foolish
As to think that it will be
A year unblemished by tears.

Give us the strength to stand as a circle,
When the year is touched by anguish and pain.
When injustice, illness, and death,
Enter the circle,
Give us the compassion not to avert our gaze.

Only You know what the year will bring.
Who will live and who will die.
Who will face cancer or depression
Or the other maladies of flesh and soul.

Job loss, addiction, infertility, heartbreak,
Temptations to stray from vows to family
and community.
Impoverishment, earthquake, hurricanes,
acts of terror,
We are vulnerable creatures subject to
Your grace.

We do not ask to be exempt from the
afflictions of being human.
We only ask that you be with us in the
peaks and in the valleys,
That you help us to stand with each
other in good times and in bad.
And that the circle of witness and consolation
Remains unbroken
In the coming year.

Amen.

Rabbi Anne Brener, LCSW has a private practice in psychotherapy and spiritual direction. She is a frequent scholar-in-residence, who assists institutions in creating caring communities. She is the author of the acclaimed *Mourning & Mitzvah: Walking the Mourner's Path* (Jewish Lights, 1993 & 2001) and has contributed to many publications. Ordained in 2008, she is a graduate of Hebrew Union College's School of Communal Service and the University of Southern California's School of Social Work (1983), Anne is a faculty member of the Academy for Jewish Religion, LA and has taught at Hebrew Union College. She is also on the faculty of Yedidya's Morei Derekh – Jewish Spiritual Direction Program. A New Orleans native, she spent three months doing relief work following hurricane Katrina. ★



Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Sukkot: Coming together under one roof

The holiday of Sukkot (which means “booths” in Hebrew) was not a big one on the Holiday Hit Parade in the town where I grew up. I did not know that it marked the season of harvest for Jews in ancient times or that it was the third pilgrimage festival after Passover and Shavuot. Not one single person I knew built a sukkah in their back yard, so when my own son came home from our synagogue preschool and asked if we could have one, my initial response was less than enthusiastic.

“Why don’t we just go and pick pumpkins instead?” I asked, hoping that Halloween might be a bigger draw.

“I want a sukkah!” Josh responded with gusto. “We can eat in it every night and sleep in it, too. It’s a mitzvah,” he concluded, as if he knew that would clinch the deal.

And so, we dragged palm fronds from the alleyway and built a small lean-to in the back yard with sheets nailed on to three sides. It wasn’t fancy, but it was a sukkah in every sense of the word. A fragile, temporary structure that a strong wind could have destroyed, our first sukkah withstood the weight of my children’s expectations as well as that of the numerous gourds and ears of dried corn that we hung from its thatched roof.

As the years passed and my family’s commitment to Jewish tradition grew, so did the size, shape and durability of our sukkah. I will never forget the proud look on my husband’s face the year we lived in Jerusalem and he built a sukkah the size of my first apartment (and decorated in much better taste!). Strings of bright colored lights and paper mache pineapples, strawberries and apples dangled over our heads as we dined with our friends for seven glorious nights.

Sukkot is the start of the rainy season in Israel and prayers for bountiful rain, called Hoshanot, are recited every day of the holiday. It must work, because the very first night of Sukkot, the sky unleashed a storm so great that it caused the reds and yellows of our paper fruits to bleed onto our T-shirts and chairs in a colorful pattern that no amount of bleach would remove.

As Jews, we are commanded to dwell in the Sukkah (Leviticus 23:42-3) and to “take the fruit of the citron tree (etrog), the branches of date palms, twigs of a braided tree (myrtle), and willows of the brook (combined to make the lulav), and rejoice before the Lord for seven days” (Leviticus 23:40).

The basic commandment is to take these four species in your hand and shake

them while reciting certain blessings. But why these four items rather than an orange, banana or peanuts? We find answers in the Jewish midrash, interpretations of Biblical passages. One such midrash views these four items as symbolic of parts of our body. The etrog is our heart, the willow is our mouth, the myrtle represents our eye and the date palm branch is our backbone. The idea is that we can reach our highest potential as humans and honor God best when we bring our heart, mind and body to the task, just as the four species are brought together during the holiday of Sukkot.

My favorite midrash suggests that the four species represent four types of Jews, each one in a different relationship with his or her faith and commitment to Torah. Some Jews are knowledgeable but do not act in ways that reflect Jewish values like compassion and justice. Others may lead with their hearts but have no formal Jewish training. Some may “feel Jewish” but not know how or where to begin to become connected to their Jewish roots. And others may have both the knowledge and the commitment to live their lives according to Jewish laws and values, becoming our role models and inspiration.

Sukkot is an annual reminder that each one of us is unique and different but that together, we form the Jewish people. We all begin at different starting points; we encounter different challenges and are blessed with different strengths. We live in different cities and countries, we have different family compositions and we encounter the world with different eyes, hearts and minds. When we dine together in the sukkah, we are called upon to create a time and place to honor these differences. For only when we are able to bring all Jews together under one roof, will we be able to reach our highest potential as human beings and as Jews.

Amy Hirshberg Lederman is an award-winning, nationally syndicated columnist, author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney. Her new book One God, Many Paths: Finding Meaning and Inspiration in Jewish Teachings is available at www.OneGod-manyPaths.com or on her web site at www.amyhirshberglederman.com. ★



GREENSTEIN

(continued from page NAT 4)

the effort, difficult as it may be to see when we’re going through it. Our Jewish faith is a faith that commands us to remember the good, to remember life, and, when we remember, we can count more than a few blessings.

Yes, I am convinced that each and every one of us can find more than ample cause for “a time for spiritual rejoicing.” Chag Sameach – Happy Sukkot to you and those you love.

Rabbi Greenstein is senior rabbi of Temple Israel in Memphis. This is from their Oct. 2008 bulletin. ★



Wiener’s Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

Sukkot gives meaning, purpose to our lives

Sukkot is one of the pilgrimage holidays – a time set aside to reconnect to our roots. A time to come together to rejoice and give thanks for all that we are and all that we have. And much more.

It is different from the other two pilgrimage holidays Passover and Shavuot. Passover commemorates the concept of freedom. Shavuot acknowledges the purpose of our existence, our religious identity. Sukkot, on the other hand, incorporates the meaning of the other two and adds a significant dimension: Sukkot emphasizes the tenuousness of our lives, the fragility of our existence and the temporariness of our sojourn here.

Sukkot is also a reminder of G-d’s protection. Just as the sukkah we erect gives shelter, G-d attempts to shelter us from the consequences of our choices. Just as the temporary dwelling reminds us how precarious is life’s journey, G-d attempts to guide us through the paths we determine for ourselves. And just as the lodging can disappear without warning, G-d reminds us how fleeting our existence is and comforts us in our time of need.

The holiday is known by several names, my favorite being “Z’man Simhateinu” – a time for celebrating. We have just completed our High Holiday observance, and we are satisfied that our expressions of contriteness and our wishes for a better tomorrow have been accepted. It is certainly a cause for jubilee.

Additionally, Sukkot gives us the opportunity to succeed in our efforts to understand that all is not good nor is everything bad. We need to learn that good and bad are connected, and we are the link that can separate them enough to give meaning to our lives.

Sukkot enables us to comprehend the true meaning of life, to be thankful for all the harvests of our days. And G-d is where G-d should be in our hearts and minds, in our deeds and actions, in our relationships and understanding of each other.

Sukkot should help us realize that we are responsible for each other and that there can be no true jubilation without this moral standard. The rabbis loved to demonstrate this with the story of a man sitting in a boat filled with many people. All of sudden the man began drilling a hole under his seat. The other passengers were outraged and admonished him for doing something so foolhardy. His reply was that he was drilling the hole under his seat and could not understand the commotion.

(see Weiner, page NAT 15)



Chag Sukkot

BY RABBI SAMUEL SILVER, z”l

Why the Pilgrims chose Thursday

Sukkot is one of the many ways the Jewish people say thank you to God.

It is a holiday that comes in the autumn when nature is so pretty with browns, yellows, reds, violets and purples on the trees and in the fields.

Thousands of years ago the Jewish farmers created this holiday because they wanted to give thanks to the Lord for the beauty around them and because it was a time to rest up a bit before they got to work gathering in the autumn harvest.

In your Bible you can read about Sukkot in Leviticus Chapter 23, Exodus Chapter 23, and Numbers Chapter 29.

The word *Sukkot* is Hebrew for *tents* or *huts*. The holiday is connected, too, with the time when the Jews were in the desert. For 40 years they lived in tents as they journeyed to the land of freedom and during all that time, the Lord protected them. So they declared a holiday they called Sukkot, huts – sometimes known as tabernacles.

Sukkot stands for so many things that it is celebrated for eight days by more traditional Jews. An added day is Simchat Torah, or the Joy of Learning. On Simchat Torah, the last chapters of the Books of Moses are read in the synagogue and, immediately, the first chapters are read, to show that one must never stop learning to do the right thing.

On Sukkot, it is our custom to build a hut outside one’s home or in or near the synagogue to remind ourselves that the ancient Jews lived in these fragile dwellings on their trek toward freedom. The hut, or sukkah, is open at the top so that one can see the sky, and it is decorated with the fruits and foliage of the season. The little hut reminds us also that many people lack decent houses in which to live. Sukkot is, therefore, a time when we are urged to make gifts to the poor and help to find ways of putting an end to poverty.

Our Thanksgiving Day in America was modeled after Sukkot by the Pilgrims, who loved the Bible. The Pilgrims felt that they were like the Jews of ancient times because they too left a land of oppression and wandered through unknown territory toward a land of promise and freedom. So when they emerged from their hard time, they proclaimed a feast of thanks to God, like Sukkot.

They thought first of establishing Thanksgiving on Sunday but they wanted it to be separate from their own Sabbath. They considered choosing Saturday, but that is the Jewish Sabbath. They decided against Friday, too, because it is the Islamic Sabbath. So they chose

(see Silver, page NAT 15)



Funsmith

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

Higher fun

*Dear Funsmith,
With all these holidays – Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah – I was wondering if you could say something about the one you think, from the fun perspective, has the most to teach us about fun. ~ Sue Kkot*

Dear Ms. Kkot (if that's really your name), I'm just guessing here, but I think you might already know my answer.

So, instead, I thought I'd tell you a little story about another funsmith. It's from the well-loved, unwritten and entirely apocryphal "Stories of Simcha Dick."

It was right after Rosh Hashanah, and Simcha Dick, the taste of honey still in his body, the echo of the Shofar still resonating in his soul, asked himself the very same question you just asked me. And he, being far more steeped, tradition-wise, and far higher, steeply speaking, decided that he would meditate significantly during the next few weeks on the kinds of fun each of the three holidays to come had to offer him, and which of holidays had the deepest lessons about life and fun and joy and stuff.

To prepare himself, he spent every day until Yom Kippur noticing the kinds of fun he was given to enjoy, the daily fun that came just from being alive. At first he was a little bit sorry that he didn't start earlier, for Rosh Hashanah was in deed full of fun – sweet tastes, sweet moments with family and friends and community, the joy of a renewed commitment to the holy. But, being true to his name, regret wasn't something he spent much time doing until Yom Kippur. So, instead, he looked to each new moment of fun that the days between had to offer him. And many were these moments – from washing his face in the morning, saying the brachot, walking to shul in the early fall – the days still warm, the trees just beginning to show the first intimations of color, and then, in shul, winding the tefillin around himself, wrapping himself in the tallit, davening with the minyan – so many kinds of fun, so many deep delights.

And when it finally came to be Yom Kipper, a new kind of fun started opening to him, and he to it. Eating a very careful selection of foods (nothing too salty or heavy) in preparation for a night and day of fasting, he felt like he was getting ready to embark on a voyage to the very gates of heaven. Lighting the candles, dressing in his finest clothes, he began to sense himself preparing for a kind of fun that was truly and uniquely Yom Kipperdik – the fun of devoting yourself totally to G-d. Forget work. Forget eating or drinking. Give yourself over entirely to your relationship with the divine. To making yourself pure

enough to join with your peers, acknowledging to each other the very basic of base humanity – the sins, the mistakes that we have all made, the holiest of us, the weakest of us. To absolute, total regret – not just for all your own failed intentions, but for a whole congregation-worth of broken promises. Together, every Jew, wherever, acknowledging, before G-d, our very human limits.

Ah, thought Simcha Dick, this is a special kind of fun in deed – not your laughing kind of fun, not your sweet, silly fun, but a fulfilling, transcending, out-of-body kind of fun. A oneness kind of fun, all these Jews, together, clean enough, pure enough, finally, at least for this moment, to stand together before G-d.

And then, almost immediately after the final blowing of the Shofar, hungry, thirsty, tired, but infused with the incredibly deep joy of connection and absolution, Simcha Dick found himself thinking about the kinds of fun Sukkot will bring.

Ah, Sukkot fun – a fun as vivid as camping, as playing house. Building the sukkah, decorating the sukkah, the kids making their paper chains and paintings, the parents and their friends building the walls, making a roof that really isn't a roof, that never allows them to think of the house they are building as anything other than temporary. Day by day, taking shape, the schach and hanging fruits creating their own, sweet, Sukkahdik incense. The beautiful table, sumptuously spread, the food glowing in the candle light. Everybody in the family making it happen, together. What thorough, magical fun. And everyone a magician.

And the singing. And the tasting. Even the Lulav and Etrog, ancient beyond understanding, bringing a smell and sound that embraces everyone.

Even the outsider who finds himself welcome and wanted and celebrated.

And then a week of visiting each other's sukkot. Everyone delighting in the delight they can bring to everyone else. Ah, thought Simcha Dick, this is full-bodied fun, this is total body fun.

Out-of-body, full-body, oy, such fun lessons in fun.

Even before he had a chance to taste the fun of Simchat Torah, Simcha Dick was convinced that the Sukkot kind of fun was in deed the fun that he, personally, cherished above all others. Such accessible fun. Fun that even the kids could understand. Fun that everyone could share, cross-age or abilities or language or understanding. Simple, thorough fun, that touches everyone, that welcomes everyone, that everyone can understand and rejoice in together.

And then, just as Simcha Dick was absolutely certain he had found the holiday that had the most to teach the most of us about the most meaningful, most penetrating kind of fun, came Simchat Torah. And Simcha Dick, dancing with the Torah, knowing the kind of complete, entirely, totally rejoicing fun – the dancing fun that we usually think of

(see DeKoven, page NAT 10)



An Observant Eye

BY RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Wings and prayers

From the flurry of e-mails and calls to Agudath Israel and other Orthodox Jewish organizations, it seems that some advocates for humane treatment of animals have concerns about the pre-Yom Kippur custom of *Kapparos*.

They are troubled by the fact that many Orthodox Jews – predominantly in the haredi, especially the Hassidic, world – use chickens in the ceremony, during which the bird is lifted and waved around the head of a supplicant. (Many Orthodox Jews use money instead of birds.) The advocates say that chickens are mistreated before and after the ceremony and that the ceremony itself abuses the birds. They are not happy either, with the ultimate fate of the chickens, which are slaughtered and given to the poor.

As it happens, while a chicken is not injured or traumatized by being held and waved, there have indeed been situations where chickens, before or after the Kapparos ceremony, have not been treated with the sensitivity to animals' comfort that halacha mandates. That is inexcusable; and concern that birds used for Kapparos be treated properly was one of the reasons nearly 30 leading haredi rabbinical authorities issued a proclamation two years ago enjoining their followers to patronize only approved vendors of Kapparos.

One of the recurrent themes of the anti-chicken-Kapparos crowd's communications, though, is that the custom itself is "primitive." The activists assume – and it is an assumption mistakenly made by many others (including *The New York Times* a few years back) – that sins are somehow transferred from the supplicant to the bird.

Ah, were expiation of iniquity only so simple.

Even when actual animal sacrifices were a mainstay of Jewish life, when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the cancellation of sin still required *teshuva*, repentance. It still does.

There are, unfortunately, no shortcuts when it comes to taking responsibility for our actions. Repentance is the only effective remedy for sin, though it is an amazing one. For it accomplishes much more than a simple apology; it has the power, Jewish sources teach, to actually reach into the past and change the nature of what we may have done. As such, we are taught, *teshuva* is a "*chiddush*," a concept that defies simple logic and expectation. And for erasing iniquity, it is indispensable.

So what's with the chickens?

Well, the definitive primary Jewish legal text, the Shulchan Aruch, notes the custom of Kapparos, but disapproves of its practice. The authoritative glosses of

the Rabbi Moshe Isserles, though, which present normative Ashkenazic practice, note that the custom has its illustrious defenders, and maintains that where it exists it should be preserved.

The custom's intent and meaning are elucidated in the widely accepted commentary known as the Mishneh Brurah, written by the renowned "Chofetz Chaim," Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan. Citing earlier sources, he explains that when one performs the ritual, he should consider that what will happen to the bird – its slaughter – would be happening to him were strict justice, untempered with G-d's mercy, the rule. As a result, the supplicant will come to regret his sins and "through his repentance" cause G-d "to revoke any evil decree from him."

So it seems that the Kapparos-custom is essentially a spur to meditation on atonement, intended to stir feelings of repentance and recommitment to the performance of good deeds.

Similar to Kapporos is the Rosh Hashana custom of Tashlich, which is likewise commonly misconstrued as a magical "casting away of sins." The practice of visiting a body of water and reciting verses and prayers, however, has no such direct effect. It, like Kapporot, is an opportunity for self-sensitization to our need for repentance. The verse "And cast in the depths of the ocean all of their sins," prominently recited in the prayers for the ritual, is a metaphor for what we can effect with our sincere repentance and determination to be better in the future.

As Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Sperling writes in his classic work known as the "Ta'amei Haminhagim," or "Explications of Customs," Tashlich reminds us that the day of ultimate reckoning may be upon us far sooner than we imagine, just as fish swimming freely in the water may find themselves captured suddenly in the hungry fishmonger's net – and that we dare not live lives of spiritual leisure on the assumption that there will always be time for repentance when we grow old.

All too often we moderns tend to view ancient Jewish laws, customs and rituals as quaint relics of the distant past evoking, at most, warm and nostalgic feelings of ethnic identity.

But, as a closer look at Kapporos and Tashlich suggest, there is a world of difference between Tevya's celebration of "Tradition!" for tradition's sake and the deep meanings that lie in the rites and rituals of Jewish religious life.

Jewish practice is laden with profound significance that speaks to us plainly and powerfully, if only we choose to listen, to confront our spiritual selves, to do *teshuva* – with or without the help of chickens or rivers.

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Rabbi Shafran is director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America. This essay, in a different form, was first published in 2002. ★





Seen on the Israel Scene

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

Standing Together

Someone once said every Israeli is a soldier, and every soldier is an Israeli. Nowhere has this idea been more evident than in a project of David Landau started 25 years ago with his family.

David comes from Queens, N.Y.; his wife, Sorra, is from Brooklyn and is a midwife. They made aliyah in 1977 with three children. After a year in the merkaz klita (absorption center) of Mevaseret Tzion, outside Jerusalem, they heard "about an important place to build up" and moved to Kiryat Arba, the Jewish suburb of Hebron.

After living there 26 years and raising their eight children, who now range in age from 21 to 39, they moved to the Jewish community of Efrat, 15 minutes south of Jerusalem, six years ago to build a one-floor home for themselves and when their 18 grandchildren visit. There, David founded the Shomrei Efrat Kollel to post young men who had completed their Army service around Efrat, to continue religious studies and work as guards. He then moved the kollel to Kever Rachel (Rachel's Tomb) for a couple of years.

In the meantime, 20 years ago he founded "Super Clean Chickens," a home delivery service for chicken, turkey, glatt meat and fish (landaus4u.com).

Five years before, he had noticed the looks on the faces of the soldiers at Kever Rachel (Rachel's Tomb); "they looked scared. I realized their sacrifices, so I started going out every once in a while in a bullet-proof van taking them pizza and drinks."

Then he and his family got the idea to set up a barbeque near a roadblock and share their food with soldiers. Soon people heard about what David was doing and wanted to come.

Someone sent pizza bags to keep the pizzas warm. Then someone told him about a donut machine that could make 200 mini donuts in an hour. By 2005, someone sent him money, and he bought the donut machine.

Soon someone sent a \$25,000 donation, so he bought a truck and a trailer and "Standing Together" was moving forward. Soldiers expressed a need to charge their cell phones, so a friend rigged up a box with 36 outlets attached to the trailer.

During the war up north in 2007, there was a need for socks and underwear and that expanded to soap and toothpaste, which the trailer then carried.

David coordinates his project with Libi, which is part of the Army and is run by four officers and six volunteers at Tel Hashomer Army base. (Libi is a fund for strengthening Israel's defense by funding projects that improve the quality of life

and enhance the well being of soldiers.) If soldiers on a base make a request, David passes it on to Libi, they check it out, and if it is okayed, David goes out to secure whatever it is.

David tries to go out to army bases twice a week, and the cost is \$650 each time. This covers the leased SUV, gas, maintenance, ice cream, pizza and drinks.

The night trip usually starts at 9:30 p.m., taking out pizza to a base; volunteers return about midnight or 12:30 a.m.

"The idea of someone coming to them, bringing pizza to a chaya, shows them someone cares," says David.

He takes out tourists; Dr. Elazar Jazz, leader of a band who volunteers his time to bring up the spirit of the soldiers and others.

On the day we went out with him, we met at the entrance to Jerusalem by the gas station at 11:35 a.m. and headed out in the SUV, pulling the trailer filled with a generator, a freezer filled with fruit ices on sticks and energy drinks. There is also an espresso machine – "a cup of coffee for a chaya."

"Espresso is different and special," says David. Sometimes hot soup is also available.

After passing the road to the community of Maaleh Adumim, we meet up with a busload of leaders and members of the Beir Meir Yeshiva boys' summer program. We head south on the four-lane highway, seeing Bedouin tents, camels, goats, sheep and a totally vast desolate area, much of it below sea level. Then we turn off onto a winding road for ten minutes, arriving at an army base in the middle of nowhere.

After checking in, we drove from unit to unit. The yeshiva boys gave the soldiers stickers advertising "Standing Together" and David and my husband and myself handed out the cold drinks and ices and visited with the soldiers. The soldiers were so nice, so welcoming, so friendly. They welcomed the yeshiva boys showing them their tent and their equipment; they let one of the boys wear one of their fully-equipped vests and attempt one of the training exercises. They then put camouflage cream on the faces of a few boys and explained its use.

"Every time I go out, I get such a high from it," David exclaims. "What we really need is a proper budget. I don't have time or strength to use the truck and have this working all the time even though lots of volunteers are involved."

David would like the summer and year course students, synagogue and organization missions, touring groups and individuals or families to make Standing Together campaigns part of their itineraries.

We are participating in the "ice cream program." The first campaign for the next year is for Rosh Hashanah. Send a Rosh Hashanah card to chayaolim by going to the web site www.stogether.org and clicking on Rosh Hashanah card.

"This is a project; we're not a business," says David. "This is one to one with a chaya. They're putting their lives on the line every day, and we have an obligation

Why are they called the "High Holy Days?"

BY RABBI STEVEN BALLABAN

I wonder why they're called the High Holy Days. They used to be called "Yamim Noraim" – or "The Days of Dread." (Norah can also mean "awe," so this term was also translated as "the days of awe.") They were called this because Jews believed during the time between Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur, the behavior of every living thing and every thing in the universe was reviewed and their fate in the coming year was decided: "Who shall live, and who shall die; who by water and who by fire..." In the days when life was unpredictable, and death came so suddenly to so many, this time of year was a period of fear and tears.

Rosh haShana was also called, "Yom Teruah" or "the day of sounding the Shofar." Of course, here the reason is obvious. Except that when Rosh haShana falls on Shabbat – as it does this year – we don't sound the Shofar. It is also called "Yom haZikkaron" – or "The Day of Remembrance" – not to be confused with the Israeli Memorial Day for fallen soldiers observed in the spring between Passover and Shavuot. This name reminds us that every single one of our deeds is recalled at this time, and we are accountable for every word we speak, and every thing we do from year to year.

Again, so why are they called the "High Holy Days?" I'm not really sure. I don't even know when or how the term became synonymous with Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur. However, I would like to believe that it is because it is the time that we reach higher as human beings. It is then that our sense of who we are, and the way we behave toward each other is most heightened, and it is the season during which we reach our highest level of perfection as people.

Shana Tova!

Rabbi Ballaban began serving Congregation Beth Shalom in Bloomington, Ind. on July 1, 2009. He was ordained at the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College and earned his Ph.D. from HUC-JIR in 1995. ★



to say thank you."

By 3:15, the yeshiva boys are loaded on their bus and we are back in the van heading back to Jerusalem, feeling some of the high David feels.

To make a donation or to become involved with Standing Together, contact david@stogether.org.

Their address is P.O. Box 1029, Efrat 90435 Israel.

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



The Roads from Babel

BY SETH BEN-MORDECAI

Origin of the name "Moshe"

Conventional non-Jewish scholarship denies the accuracy of the statement in the Book of Exodus that the name "Moshe" means "drawn from [water]." Even Etz Hayim claims: "Moshe is of Egyptian origin. Its verbal stem, ms'i, means 'to be born,' and the noun 'ms' means 'a child, son.' It is a frequent part of ancient Egyptian personal names, usually with the addition of the name of a god, as illustrated by Ahmose.... Two papyri from the time of Ramses II mention officials named Mose." (Etz Hayim, footnote, p. 323.)

But conventional wisdom may be wrong here, for two reasons. First, "Mose" and "Moshe" are phonologically different. The "s" of "Mose" and "sh" of "Moshe" are different sounds. Thus, whether some Egyptians were named "Mose" whose root is "ms'i," meaning, "to be born," is irrelevant to the origin and meaning of "Moshe."

Second, an Egyptian root exists that precisely matches "Moshe" in sound and meaning: "m-sh," meaning "to draw from [water]." (See, Beinlich Lexicon of Ancient Egyptian, at Wb II S. 154.) Moreover, that root exists in Egyptian and in Hebrew, but in no other Semitic language. These facts suggest that the Hebrew text is essentially accurate in describing the origin and meaning of "Moshe," and that early Hebrew speakers lived among Egyptian speakers and adopted Egyptian word-roots, such as "m-sh," into Hebrew.

The moral here is that sometimes an eagerness to "demythologize" and "deconstruct" ancient texts may prevent a scholar from examining linguistic evidence carefully and objectively. The good news is that much textual archaeology awaits the curious Biblical scholar willing to let the text, with its linguistic evidence, to speak for itself.

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. ★





Holocaust Educator

REVIEWED BY MIRIAM ZIMMERMAN

The 29th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival

Coming of age can be a rebellious time in the life of a teenager. It can also be funny, sensual, adventurous, painful and humbling. A variety of films at this year's San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF) caught all these emotions and more.

Billed as the "World's First and Still Largest Celebration of Jewish Cinema," the 29th SFJFF played in seven venues from July 23 to August 10, bringing 71 films from 18 countries to the Bay Area. Its diverse audience came from all over the state and beyond to watch quality independent Jewish cinema.

Hey Hey It's Esther Blueburger, the opening night film by Australian Cathy Randall featured an awkward but expressive nice Jewish bat mitzvah girl seeking release of her inner wicked child. Feeling like a pariah at her preppy private school where she eats lunch alone in an empty classroom, Esther masquerades as a Swedish exchange student (briefly) at a local public school. She hangs out with Sunni, played by Oscar-nominated Keisha Castle-Hughes (star of 2002's *Whale Rider*) and tries to emulate Sunni's effortless cool. The less-famous Danielle Catanzariti as Esther stole the show, appearing on camera in almost every scene. Toni Collette, also an Oscar-nominee, rounded out the leads as Sunni's mother in this hilarious coming of age film.

Fumbling explorations of the opposite sex, parents who never make eye contact with their offspring, family therapy with a psychiatrist who says nothing while the family sprawls uncomfortably on beanbag chairs, this film struck all the right chords with me. I laughed and enjoyed throughout.

However, not everyone had the same response. Rosyland Bauer of Los Altos, sitting a couple of rows behind me, answered my query with [paraphrased]: "I hated it. I lived through it with my three teenage daughters. It [the film] pushed all my buttons." I interpreted the strength and tone of Rosyland's reply to mean that filmmaker Cathy Randall, in attendance at the San Francisco screening, got it right.

Seeing so many coming-of-age films in such a short time made me realize that girls and boys experience this rite of passage differently. "Beauty vs. violence" sums up the discrepancy. Girls focus on appearance to attract men. Boys claw their way up a pecking order, sometimes violently, to become men.

Zion and His Brother was one of SFJFF Program Director Nancy Fishman's personal favorites. In her introduction to the film, she dubbed it "the best Israeli film this year" and described it as "an amazing portrait of sibling rivalry." Despite my

dislike of the character of the mother, this riveting and well-acted film deserves its nomination for the Grand Jury Prize in the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.



Zion and His Brother.

Zion and His Brother depicts the struggles of two working-class boys, Zion and Meir, in the city of Haifa. After viewing *Zion*, I am more sympathetic to Rosyland's response to *Esther Blueburger*, realizing my own visceral response to the sexy mother in *Zion*. What kind of mother attempts to control her sons by her flirty behavior? And what mother bathes her son after the age of six? No wonder 14-year-old Zion and his James Dean-like older brother Meir run amok. Although in general, mothers are blamed too much for the sins of their offspring, in this film, such criticism is warranted. By the end, both brothers have learned something; however, I am not sure I would want my son to learn the same dark lesson.

The riveting *Broken Lines* depicts two lost souls who find solace in each other even though that means cheating on their respective significant others, sort of an adult coming of age story. Making its U.S. premiere, screenwriters Doraly Rosa and Dan Fredenburgh also play leads Jake and Becca. Set in North London, Jake comes to terms with his father's death and his rigidly frigid fiancée by developing a passion for Becca. Stuck in the role of caretaker of her paralyzed former-boxer boyfriend, Becca returns the passion. Each turns to the other to escape an intolerable personal life.



Doraly Rosa as Becca in Broken Lines.

My problem with this engrossing film was that it felt like a 90-minute film crammed into two and one-half hours; actual running time: 112 minutes. Despite its overly-long close-ups and mood-setting

languor, I recommend this study in passion, dispassion and sexual escapism.

Two completely different Israeli films tied for my personal favorite: *A Matter of Size* and *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, both making premiere appearances in the Bay Area. Although poles apart in subject matter, both films exhibited great acting and high production values. I emerged from *Size* laughing (and crying); from *Seven Minutes* crying (and somewhat confused). Each film moved me considerably and I thought about things in a new way as a result of viewing them.

I am grateful to my husband for dragging me to *A Matter of Size* because a film about Sumo wrestlers, even one set in Israel, did not interest me in the least. He willingly accompanies me to so many Holocaust-themed movies and documentaries, that I felt I owed him one. I did not expect to laugh so much and certainly did not expect to cry at the poignant ending. I was hooked from the first moment when the letters in the opening credits wrestled each other, Sumo style.

Size matters in *A Matter of Size*. The premise, of establishing Sumo wrestling as an Israeli sport, is already funny. Herzl is a 340-pound salad chef (more irony) trying to come to terms with his bulk. He lives with his mother and has no girlfriend or prospects of getting one, as his mother relentlessly points out.

A mistress of mixed messages that no doubt began early in Herzl's childhood, his mother castigates him for being fat, then invites him to finish the couscous in the fridge. She has had to sew Herzl's clothes for him ever since he grew too large for store-bought garments.



Weighty issues in A Matter of Size.

His hilarious battle with the coach of his diet support group has the audience cheering. Unlike Weight Watchers cheerleaders in the U.S. who use positive reinforcement, this coach from hell evicts Herzl from the group because he has gained, not lost weight. SFJFF Executive Director Peter Stein's program note succinctly describes Herzl's progression in the film: "...from body shame to body celebration, and from loneliness to love."

Watching Herzl forge a path to self-acceptance, I, who am obsessed with diet, exercise, and thinness, came to love Herzl and his growing self-esteem. Having grown up in a family that preached fat as the original sin, I never imagined that I would condone obesity in any manner. For Sumo wrestlers, weight is essential.

All elements of *A Matter of Size* come together in the final romantic scene between Herzl and his new girlfriend,

Zehava. The movie works on many levels: as a comedy, a love story, adult self-acceptance, and overcoming society's prejudice against the "other"; in this case, the other as defined as fat.

July was a big month for this film. It opened the Jerusalem Film Festival on July 9 and made its California premiere at SFJFF on July 29. Dimension Films has acquired English-language remake rights. However, I wonder if the humor from the incongruity of Sumo wrestling in Israel will translate to the United States. Regardless, do not wait for the remake; go to <http://www.k5international.com/current-films/a-matter-of-size-comedy> to see the trailer or to order the movie.

Seven Minutes in Heaven was my other top choice from this summer's films at the SFJFF. The film took me back to the afternoon of Fri., April 12, 2002, at the conclusion of one of Yad Vashem's conferences on teaching the Holocaust. The conference began after six consecutive days of suicide bombings in Israel.

Debriefing our conference experience over a late lunch on the patio of the tiny Mama Mia restaurant just off King George Street in downtown Jerusalem, Sister Gemma del Duca, long time resident of the "City of Peace," told me that she has heard every suicide bomber in downtown Jerusalem.

Sr. Gemma administers the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education (NCCHE) in Israel, which funded my study of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies in 1998. She and I have kept in touch since that summer.

The good Sister brought me flowers for Shabbat that she had just purchased in the nearby *Mahane Yehudah* (the Jewish open-air market). The waitress brought our check after our delicious mushroom cannelloni and invited us to stay as long as it took for her to clean up and close the restaurant for Shabbat. Sr. Gemma started to explain how I could take a bus back to my hotel when we heard an explosion.

That moment of sound, paralyzing the city, transformed everything into slow motion, just like in the *Seven Minutes in Heaven* movie. We found out later that a young Palestinian woman detonated herself at a bus stop across the street from the *Mahane* as the suspicious bus driver closed the door in her face, killing herself and six around her. The heroic bus driver prevented her from boarding the rush-hour filled bus, saving countless lives. I acted on Sister's suggestion to take a cab rather than a bus back to my hotel.

If I am still traumatized seven years after, just hearing the sounds of a terrorist attack, can you imagine the PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) suffered by one who actually survives such an event? *Seven Minutes in Heaven* dramatically captures the trauma of a woman who survives a bus bombing in Jerusalem. Unfortunately in Israel, such trauma has become commonplace.

Galia is clinically dead for seven minutes, as pronounced by a rescue worker

on the scene. The paramedic who rushes into the burning bus to save her refuses to give up. Subsequently, he is able to revive her, although with extensive burns on her body. In the narrative of the film, Galia pursues fleeting memories, trying to reconstruct what happened to her and her fiancé Oren, who does not survive the bombing. Her itchy scars, which she is forbidden to scratch, become a metaphor for her itch to understand what happened to her so she can start healing spiritually as well as physically.



Reymonde Amsellem as Galia in *Seven Minutes in Heaven*.

I happened to be sitting next to Dan Jacobs, a plastic surgeon, who told me after the movie that all the medical scenes seemed correct. He said he was “constantly amazed at the creativity that comes out of Israel – now it is in its films.”

The film works in flashback as Galia patches together her bomb-shattered memory. Along the way, she discovers Kabbalistic wisdom that teaches if a soul goes to heaven, but is not ready to die, it can change its destiny when it returns to Earth. It is important to remember this teaching; otherwise, the ending will disappoint, a complete *non sequitur*, as it did to this viewer.

The Israelis in the audience got it. We heard the buzz in Hebrew around us as we walked to the lobby. Joe Abrams, long-time Israeli friend, explained the ending for us and other English-only viewers, making me wonder if something was lost in the translated subtitles. I so highly recommend this film that I do not want to spoil it by giving away the final twist.

A film I would not recommend is the 87-minute *Acné* from Argentina. How this coming-of-age depiction of an overly horny and unpleasant bar mitzvah boy made it into the Festival is beyond me. I will not waste my time writing about it; readers should not waste their time viewing it. Despite *Acné*, I believe 2009 was one of the best years for the Festival, in terms of quality and variety of the films presented.

My previous column in the P&O dealt with three of the nine Holocaust/World War II-themed films in the Festival. In a phone interview, I asked SFJFF Program Director Nancy Fishman if there had been a change in the quota for Holocaust films. In prior years, there seemed to be very few such films; this summer, I was delighted with the offering of so many.

“Holocaust films keep coming, despite prediction of their demise,” Ms. Fishman observed wryly. No quotas; the number of

Holocaust films in the Festival depends on what is out there.

Unfortunately for the Festival, Nancy will be stepping down after holding the post since 2004. I asked her what brought her to the SFJFF. “I was always interested in Jewish culture...ideas; worked in film 12 to 13 years. When the opportunity arose to work for the Festival, I jumped at the chance.”

Please, Nancy, define “Jewish film.” Nancy laughed and referenced Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s famous quotation about pornography: although hard to define, “I know it when I see it.” Her broad concept of Jewish film includes those by or about Jewish culture and topics of interest to Jews even if by a non-Jewish filmmaker. She cited the genocide in Darfur as an example, if they were doing a topic on genocide. Just because a Jewish filmmaker creates a film or just because it is about Judaism, doesn’t automatically qualify it for inclusion in the Festival. The Festival would be “more likely to include a film [that was] not about a Jewish subject if the filmmaker had a prior record with SFJFF.”

As to how the SFJFF is different from all other Jewish Film Festivals, Nancy cited Boston and Toronto as being the closest. The amount of depth of the programming and the value-added components make the SFJFF distinctive. Such components include panel discussions, experts who write articles posted on the web site, and visiting filmmakers and actors.

“Also, [we are] extremely inclusive, risk-taking and intellectually restless; always looking at different ways to look at contemporary Jewish life. The Festival is open to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, interests of women.” She added, “We are open to the anti-religious perspective and we embrace feminism. [We have depicted] participation of Jews in progressive movements: labor, environment, Zionism in its youthful stage, socialism. The Festival is also interested in very traditional Judaism.” Nancy observed that she is “always amazed by how well the films that deal with Orthodoxy are received, how interested people are in Orthodoxy,” despite the secular orientation of many Northern California Jews.

The program director pointed out how the SFJFF has provided leadership for other Jewish film festivals. They have served as consultants for funding and programmatic issues. SFJFF hosted the first conference of Jewish film festivals in U.S. five to eight years ago.

“We have also been a leader in terms of entering Jewish media into the digital world.” She pointed out that Festival Director Peter Stein began the New Media Initiative, some of which is now available on the SFJFF’s expanded web site, launched on June 23 of this year.

The press release used a catchy tagline to describe this initiative: “Bringing films to a new audience; bringing audiences to new films.” The press release detailed the complexity of what will be available on the SFJFF web site, www.sffjff.org.

“The new web resource will offer short films to watch online, easy access to information on hundreds of film titles, downloadable pod casts and videos that add context to film selections, viewer recommendations, educational and curricular materials, social networking opportunities, new tools for audience interactivity in theaters and more....”

This initiative will be “an ongoing effort to build the most comprehensive online resource for Jewish film in the world.”

According to E.D. Peter Stein, “The indispensable role of culturally specific film festivals like SFJFF has always been to provide a trusted platform where audiences can discover films, where filmmakers can discover their audiences, and, just as importantly, where audiences can discover one another. That role of being both a trusted source and bridge-builder is even more critical online today, now that people are making, sharing, viewing and shaping media far beyond the theater space. So our new media offerings are actually a very natural extension of our mission. We’re carrying on the conversation that happens before and after our screenings, and making sure it can happen in the boundless space of the web.”

Seeing so many coming-of-age films in such a short time made me realize that girls and boys experience this rite of passage differently.

Funded by Steven Spielberg’s Righteous Persons Foundation, the Charles H. Revson Foundation, with additional support from the Koret Foundation, I decided to use this exciting resource right away, searching for a film from a previous festival entitled *The Silver Crown* that had moved me considerably. The user-friendly database is searchable by film title, director, country, year, and by tag.

At one of the screenings, Stein announced that Nancy Fishman would be stepping down from her full-time post as program director. I asked Nancy what her next steps would be. “I will be pursuing creative projects: writing and freelancing, curating. [I am] interested in the area of Jewish film.” She explained that she is taking a break after her mom’s nine-year struggle with Alzheimer’s had ended. The film curator feels “sad about leaving; it’s been an honor to work with Peter and all. I will tremendously miss the people.”

Nancy’s ties with SFJFF have not been completely severed. At next year’s 30th SFJFF, she will curate an archival program for the 2010 SFJFF entitled, “Tough Guys: Images of Jewish Gangsters in Film.”

The final press release summed up some of her accomplishments over the

years in her own words: “I am proud of some of the improvements to the SFJFF that occurred during my tenure: implementing the Freedom of Expression Award, Close-up retrospectives on individual directors, and some of the archival series I’ve done; especially *Jews and the Hollywood Blacklist*; *Jewish Boxers: Shtarkers and the Sweet Science*; *Italian Jews during Fascism* and *The Goldbergs* archival episodes.”

Nancy gave me permission to include her email address, in case any readers of the P&O are interested in her talents as a freelance film writer and curator, NancyFishmanpr@aol.com. After viewing so many of the 2009 offerings of the SFJFF and at prior festivals, Nancy has my highest recommendation.

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival is about so much more than watching Jewish films. Its mission is to promote “awareness, appreciation and pride in the diversity of the Jewish people. Festival programs are meant to create community and strengthen consciousness of Jewish identity, history and culture; provide a dynamic and inclusive forum for exploration of and dialogue about the Jewish experience; and encourage independent filmmakers working with Jewish themes.”

I always see old friends whom I might not see from one year to the next, such as Rosyland and Joe. Truly, the SFJFF builds bridges among diverse elements of the Jewish community. By making its archives available online, the dialogue about the Jewish experience can continue with an international audience.

Dr. Miriam L. Zimmerman is professor emerita at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, Calif. She can be reached at mzimmerman@ndnu.edu. ★

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Jewish America

BY HOWARD W. KARSH

Hachnosis Orchim: Welcoming Guests

Most of us learned, in moments of discomfort, how difficult a new situation can be, filled with people who seem to be ignoring you. It happens in meetings, in social events, and sadly in our synagogues and temples. It is never intentional, it simply is something that we forget, a time of insensitiveness.

I was privileged to know Aaron Richt, the *shamus* and caterer at my congregation. He was, by the way superb at both skills – his warm smile and his kishka. Mr. and Mrs. Rich were survivors and like all survivors were trying not to carry their wounds publicly. No guest was ever unwelcomed, not introduced, not inquired about, and then led to a comfortable seat, given prayer books, a *tallis* if asked for, and then had his presence announced to our Rebbe.

It was taken for granted until Mr. Rich died, and then the loss was profound. Up to this day, even with classes devoted to the principles and admonition, our now much larger congregation has never met his standards of warmth, but we certainly have grown, and are mentored by the outstanding behaviors of our Rebbe and his rabbi son.

In one aspect of hospitality, our community excels, that of housing guests. Perhaps it is natural because we have large families and because we are part of a growing community that attracts guests. This kind of hospitality is unique in that 90% of all our guests, those to whom we give lodging and those who eat at our Shabbats table, were strangers when they arrived.

We have regular-irregular weekends with the high school students and Beis Medresh students of the Wisconsin Institute for Torah Study, and with guests who come for bar mitzvahs and weddings. There is no alternative to home hospitality for the Sabbath. We have no hotel or motel within walking distance. It has become part of our lives.

At the time of this writing, two young men from Far Rockaway are staying with us for a week and a half while they participate in a learning program at a suburban outreach center. Shloimy and Moshie put in long hours in the program, and we see them coming and going. In this instance, we are just offering beds and bathrooms, homemade cookies and drinks.

While we have never kept count, informally I would think that over the 32 years of our marriage, the total is over 2,000. When I discussed the number with my wife, she was incredulous, but when we did the math, it was a solid "ballgame figure."

Whenever we travel, we are often greeted by someone who stayed with us. Unfortunately, we never kept a guest-book. There were hundreds of offers of reciprocal hosting, and just recently, the neighbor our children in Illinois did host us, and having stayed with us some years ago were grateful for the opportunity to repay the "kindness." We have never considered it "going out of our way," just sometimes when the arrangements are made late in the week, or changed after the work has been done, but that is only in the moment.

My sister and sisters-in-law who are all wonderful people gasp at the numbers. They can count on their fingers the times anyone even asked them to house anyone they didn't know. They can't imagine why we are so comfortable with the practice. I cannot speak for my wife, who bears more than half of the effort, but as for me, I am a strong believer that people demonstrate the truth of who they are, not in their words, but in their acts, and I feel good about any opportunity to carry out my beliefs in my life.

The recent national news has not been kind to the image of Jews. The light we were expected to hold up to the nations has sprung some leaks. We have governors resigning in shameful circumstances, Jews who bilked Jews and non-Jews out of their life savings and institutions out of their endowments, and now religious-looking people who are alleged to be rabbis caught in a corruption sting with the aid of an undercover religious-looking man identified as a rabbi, who was working to get time off from *his own in-judicial acts*. No one was killed, and that was good, but it takes thousands of good deeds by thousands of well-intentioned Jews to erase the headlines.

Many years ago when I was on Ulpan in Israel, there was a horrific incidence of immoral behavior. I was using the incident as my presentation in easy Hebrew language, but my outrage was obviously physically demonstrated in the loudness of my voice and the redness of my face. I still remember my teacher shaking her head, telling me that my presentation was acceptable, but not my demand that every Israeli live up to my high expectations. They were, she opined, entitled to a small number of sinners among a nation of saints.

Since then the level of anyone's expectation of Jewish behavior has been battered about. Whenever a Jew behaves badly, financially, politically, or in the entertainment field, I still remember the look of disgust on my great aunt's face and her Yiddish expression *si pasht nisht*, loosely translated, while shrugging your shoulders and moving your head from side to side, "it is so unbecoming."

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



Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

The inner work of Teshuva: Returning to who you really are

In marking the beginning of a new year, Rosh Hashanah offers us the opportunity to begin our lives anew. On Rosh Hashanah, we are told that we receive a new contract for the next year of our lives. Our lives do not have to continue as they have been. We can change. Our lives can change. We can be the people we want to be and have lives that reflect who we really are.

The time period before the High Holidays and during the ten day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is considered the most auspicious time for self-transformation. It is generally believed that a person's destiny is decided on the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Others believe that it extends even to Hanukkah.

In order to grow,
we need to look at
ourselves honestly and
take responsibility...

The month before Rosh Hashanah (Elul) is a designated time for introspection, healing, forgiving and completing unfinished business. On the remaining days of Elul, take some time to review the accomplishments, the challenges, the highlights of this last year. It may be helpful to use your appointment book to refresh your memory.

As if you were watching a movie of your life, review, reflect and reexperience the highlights of this last year. Record the events of the last year in your journal. As you look at the last year from your current, hopefully more objective vantage point of having almost finished the year and preparing to enter into a new year, a new contract, what would you like to have done differently in this last year of your life? What would you like to change within yourself? Where are you now? Evaluate the quality of your life on the physical level – your health, your diet, your living situation, your livelihood. Evaluate your emotional well-being – your relationships with friends, colleagues, family, your general disposition. Evaluate yourself spiritually – your inner prayer life, your connection to God.

What would you like to do better? What lessons did you learn last year? What relationships with people were strengthened during this past year? What

relationships were difficult or ended? Are there people you have hurt or been hurt by in this last year? Make a list of people you need to forgive or be forgiven by.

In order to grow we need to look at ourselves honestly and take responsibility for the suffering that we have caused and endured. We need to look at the choices we have made consciously as well as the more hidden shadow-like motivations that have shaped the quality of our life.

Take some time to write about what the last year was about for you. Begin by writing, "This last year of my life was a time when I _____ and then just continue to write without thinking too much.

Take time to pray to God that you will be able to be a better person in this coming year. You cannot change on your own. It is only by your conscious contact with God who is Free, who is loving, that you will be able to release what has limited you and regain the power to make real choices in your life.

May the gates of *teshuva* open for you. "Blessed are you God who desires repentance – *teshuva*."

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

DeKoven

(continued from page NAT 6)

as belonging only to children unwrapping the one gift they've wanted ever so longingly long – a fun as deep as Yom Kippur fun, a fun that somehow reaches as high as even the highest of holidays.

And Simcha Dick, despite his most profound efforts, despite his most searching introspection, when he tried to determine which fun he thought to be the most meaningful – from the sweet fun of the new renewal of Rosh Hashanah, to the out-of-body fun of Yom Kippur, to the fun of whole-body fun of Sukkot to the sacred dancing fun of Simchat Torah – just couldn't come to a conclusion.

Fortunately, since this is just a story, it can.

DeKoven resides in Indianapolis, Ind. and 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. 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>. ★



Media Watch

BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

The Hangover and In Plain Sight

If you want to regard Todd Phillips's slapstick comedy *The Hangover* as a morality play, you may be rationalizing your compulsion – and most everybody else's – to laugh at the vulgar antics. Director Phillips and writers Jon Lucas and Scott Moore want to inebriate us on silliness.

If anything, *The Hangover* preaches that one needs to let loose in a group with at least one certifiable crazy person in order to truly decide which relationships and responsibilities are worthwhile in life, and which are not.

A soon-to-be groom (Justin Bartha) runs off to Las Vegas with two longtime buddies, a wildish high school teacher (Bradley Cooper) and a reserved dentist (Ed Helms) and with his brother-in-law to be, and a raving maniac (Zach Galifianakis). The writers, by the way, thought it hilarious to depict the future brother-in-law as having been arrested for a crime that is no laughing matter.

After the first night in Vegas, the friends and the maniac awaken without a shred of memory of what transpired the night before. All they know is that their chic hotel room is trashed, there is a real live tiger in the bathroom, and an adorable baby – yes, a real baby – tucked away in their midst. Also, the groom is missing!



In retracing their steps, they encounter, and not necessarily in this order, Mike Tyson (yes, the boxer, playing himself), Asian mobsters, Latino mobsters, vengeful cops, vindictive school children, a rather heartless physician, and the strange proprietor of a wedding chapel.

And speaking about the wedding chapel, I should mention that, in addition to having lost a tooth (poetic justice?), the

dentist finds out that he was just married to a good-hearted and otherwise well-endowed stripper, who is the mother of the baby. He first becomes aware of this by seeing his grandmother's "Holocaust ring" on the woman's finger. The crazed brother-in-law responds to the shocked dentist with the line shown in countless previews of the film, "I didn't know they gave out rings in the Holocaust."

The writers do manage to explain that the ring "made it through the Holocaust." After all, they refer to the ring at least three times. While crass, the joke does not mock the Holocaust as much as those who have silly and inappropriate responses to the Holocaust. So does the film mock itself? It does deal rather shamelessly with the Jewish elderly, both in this reference to a Holocaust survivor grandmother and in parading around a naked old Jewish man in a hospital scene just for gratuitous laughs.

It does deal rather shamelessly with the Jewish elderly...

The "Holocaust" ring is reduced to little more than a good luck charm, or, rather, to a symbol not so much of marriage, but of awareness when not to enter into marriage, for in the end our dentist chooses not to offer it to the overbearing and nasty woman with whom he has "happily" been living. (Is there a veiled assault here on Jewish women, or at least on the "type" of women to whom Jewish men are drawn?) His friends remind him repeatedly that she has abused him and cheated on him with a bar tender. His missing tooth somehow ends up as a reminder that he has been too influenced by others (especially by that woman) and must now think for himself.

All the characters (except perhaps for the lunatic future brother-in-law) learn lessons about self-worth, the importance of family and, in the case of the groom, the redemptive desire to enter into marriage. Maybe those who see the film will ponder over whether it was necessary for the characters to make these "discoveries" by rushing into a reckless getaway that resulted in physical bruises and near-death experiences, risking life and limb and the esteem of others, and irresponsibly destroying property that was precious to the groom's father-in-law-to-be, and almost jeopardizing the wedding ceremony. But, then again, stopping to reflect on these things will make one feel foolish about laughing at all the stuff along the way. Or will it?

Is there a hangover from laughter?

In Plain Sight

In Plain Sight is a rather charming and well-written USA Network program about United States Marshals watching out for individuals and families who end up in witness protection programs. The



Mary Shannon (right) as Marshall Mary McCormack in *In Plain Sight*.

two lead characters are Mary Shannon (Mary McCormack) and another marshal named Marshall Mann (Fred Weller). She is head-strong with some kind of axe to grind. He is easy-going, but prone to tease her.

In an intriguing episode, aired on June 28, about a man who insists that he has a son though there is no public record of the lad, our marshals call in a psychologist Shelley Finkel (Ali Marsh), who, I gather, is intended by writer David Graziano to be a Jewish woman. One of her first official acts is to check out Marshall's derriere as he walks away. It does not require too much prodding for her to reveal that she is "just out of a six-month relationship with a depressed man." Yet, while searching for a witness in danger because of possible delusions, with precious time being lost, Shelley finds the time to hit on Marshall: "I don't know what your situation is. Would you be interested...in getting together for coffee some time?" He appropriately responds: "Well, I'm flattered. I'm in the middle of a man hunt."

At the end of the episode, Shelley, who helps a bit with the search but is not as effective at helping the witness as the two marshals, tells Mary that her ex-boyfriend, the "depressed" one, called and said he wanted to get back together. She rushes into that "reconciliation."

For what reason is the Jewish woman brought into the series to be depicted as a psychologist who bears a torch for an unstable boyfriend, lacks the self-esteem to think twice about returning to such a relationship, and is unprofessional enough to hit on a colleague while she should be focusing all her on-duty efforts at finding someone in physical and psychological danger?

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

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Cinema Review

REVIEWED BY CHARLIE EPSTEIN

Nazi Killers Inglorious

The motion picture *Inglourious Basterds* is a fantastic venture, fantastic in many ways. Writer/director Quentin Tarantino's cinematic screenplay changes history. I was not a fan of Quentin Tarantino until I witnessed this latest film of his. His script has so many tense scenes one right after another, built in the like of a Hitchcock movie. Tarantino knew what he was doing every step of this violent and terrific film.

The violence is not as much as one would think even though the "Basterds," all eight of them promised their non-Jewish leader Brad Pitt that they would scalp 100 Nazis, much like the Apaches. The scalping was graphic but not abundant. Brad Pitt, an American soldier, selected eight Jewish volunteer soldiers to go to German occupied France to savagely kill Nazis because of their cruel treatment of the Jews.

The cast of this film was extraordinary as each performer other than Pitt must speak several languages fluently: English, French, and German. There was some Italian thrown in for good measure. Obviously there were subtitles, which helped immensely. One actor stood out above the rest – Christoph Waltz, as a Nazi colonel who is suave and treacherous. He won the best actor award at Canne and it was well deserved. Tarantino also was nominated for a Golden Palm Award at this film festival.

The film title comes from a 1978 Italian movie *The Inglorious Bastards*, whose title was altered many times. The best one was *Counterfeit Commandos*. Tarantino's film is rather long, around 150 minutes of enjoyable entertainment. There was not enough Jewishness as I expected but enough to keep me interested.

It keeps you guessing with all its surprises. This is a fine film, expertly directed and constructed.

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

On this date in Jewish history

On September 23, 1737

New York's General assembly resolved that Jews should not vote for representatives.

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



As I Heard It

REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

More music composed in concentration camps

This will be the second column devoted to a CD in the first series of CDs known as *KZ Musik: Encyclopedia of Music composed in Concentration Camps (1933 – 1945)*. This CD No.5 has the number 231788. (KZ stands for concentration camp. For a fuller description please refer to the column that appeared in this space two weeks ago.)

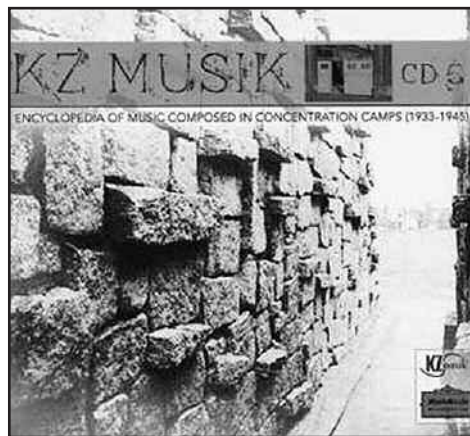
This CD contains music by two composers, Ervin Schulhoff and Karel Berman. With regard to Schulhoff, he was born in Prague, June 8, 1894 and perished on Aug. 18, 1942 in Wulzberg from tuberculosis. He is represented by an unfinished eighth symphony, completed by Francesco Lotoro, the pianist who was the moving force behind this entire project. Schulhoff studied piano and composition initially at the conservatory in Prague, and later in Vienna and Leipzig. Among his teachers were Max Reger and Claude Debussy.

His musical language included elements of expressionism, neo-classicism as well as jazz elements. It may as well be noted up front, that he was an adherent of communism and that his 8th symphony includes an extended poem written by himself that extolled its virtues and was written for a male chorus in the first movement. In the first of the four movements, there is a relentless ostinato (repeated rhythmic pattern) in the left hand with dissonant march-like sonorities above. Begun on March 16, the first movement was completed on April 29.

The second movement presents the listener with a calm, even lyrical as well as introspective piece that is in stark contrast to the restless first movement. This was completed on April 30. The third movement, completed on April 7, is an energetic piece with another ostinato in the left hand. It may be characterized as a nervous, restless piece in the style of a scherzo. The last movement was not completed by the composer but by Mr. Lotoro as noted.

Truth to tell, it is hard for me to tell where Schulhoff leaves off and Lotoro begins. My ear detects influences of Reger, Martinu as well as Ravel in Schulhoff's music. Politics aside, Schulhoff was a major talent whose life and creativity were cut short too soon. He was arrested in Prague before being deported to Wulzberg. He was able to save the score of an oratorio and his 7th Symphony before his arrest.

The tension he must have felt is apparent in all but the second movement, whose



beauty and tranquility is all the more remarkable. One can quibble if one would prefer to describe this work as a sonata or even a suite for piano rather than a symphony. No matter. Whatever one may want to call it, it remains a documentary in music to the horror of his arrest and imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp.

The other composer whose music is represented on this disc is Karel Berman (April 1, 1919 – Aug. 11, 1995) who survived Dachau. He was a singer (bass), theatre director, conductor, composer and pianist. He is represented here by a Suite for Piano (Terezin) written while in that concentration camp. Like the music by Schulhoff, it is full of frenetic energy. It is not pretty.

The first movement features a relentless triplet in the left hand. In the second movement, one can readily picture moonlight illuminating the barbed wire, even though there are brief tender moments as well. In the third movement, the horror and tension return, while in the concluding movement, one finds a quiet resignation.

(As the Days of Awe are almost upon us, with many a sermon being unleashed by various speakers on a variety of subjects, many even relevant to the season, I feel my own mini-sermon to be in order.)

Epilogue. For many of you, the idea of music, especially Jewish music means either a lively tune of dubious Hassidic provenance, or a saccharin, sentimental one, of course in unison and probably accompanied by guitar (*ugh*), then you will probably be unhappy with the music of this disc and probably with the other CDs in this series. (A second set of six has just been released.) After all, the brutal, ugly circumstances of the composers are reflected in their music.

You may prefer to dismiss the music on these discs with the epithet that they are all *goyish*. If you do, what experience with Western art music (aka classical music) do you bring to the table? You may dismiss all instrumental and choral (especially if the chorus includes women singing *with* men) as simply *goyish* (not Jewish; ho-boy, the next thing the women will want is to be called to the Torah for an aliyah!) If you do, however, this is what has occurred and will continue to occur. Your children and/or grandchildren will have no sense of key or pitch.

(see Gold, page NAT 15)

Book Review

REVIEWED BY EDWARD HOFFMAN

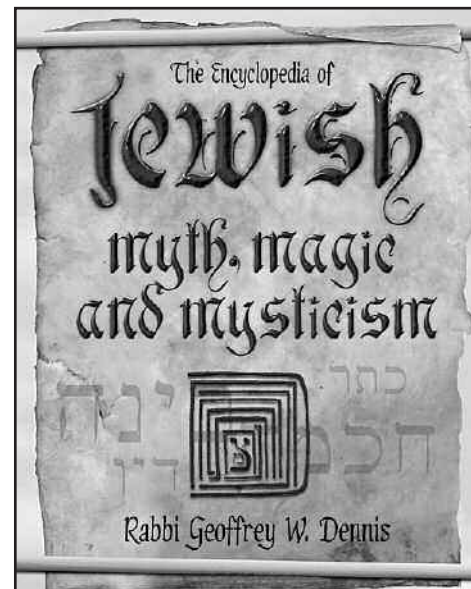
The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism by Geoffrey Dennis. Llewellyn Publications, 2007, 384 pp., \$26.95.

In recent years, the Kabbalah has experienced a global resurgence that would have seemed unthinkable not long ago. Throughout the United States and Western Europe, as well as South America and even Southeast Asia, men and women of all faiths and backgrounds are finding Jewish esoteric ideas a potent source of meaning and inspiration. And yet, this tremendous and undeniable growth of interest in the Kabbalistic tradition comes at a costly price – namely, massive distortion and confusion about authentic Judaic teachings. This problem has become even more acute with the influence of the Internet, when erroneous writing can reach an audience of millions overnight.

As a result, there has been an increasing need for an accurate and reliable textbook to “set the record straight” on Jewish Kabbalah – and *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism* has now amply fulfilled it. Written in a warm, engaging style by Rabbi Geoffrey Dennis of Congregation Kol Ami in Flower Mound, Texas, it represents the first and only comprehensive one-volume reference guide to the lore of the Jewish esoteric tradition. There are over a 1,000 A to Z entries, running from a single sentence to article length, on virtually every aspect of Kabbalah and related Jewish historical currents. Rabbi Dennis is to be especially commended for cross-referencing every entry to multiple related topics elsewhere in the *Encyclopedia* – which admirably and effectively shows the interconnectedness of Jewish esoteric beliefs and practices. Also provided is a thorough glossary to help readers with the Hebrew and historical terms frequently used in the *Encyclopedia*.

If you think that such extensive scholarly production inevitably leads to dullness, think again. Rabbi Dennis, who also teaches Jewish studies at the University of North Texas, has a lively yet informative style – admirably avoiding the twin dangers of “talking over the heads” of readers and “talking down” to them. I found the material so fascinating that I read this *Encyclopedia* cover-to-cover in just a few consecutive sittings; admittedly, I was on vacation in Brazil at the time and most readers will probably adopt a slower pace, dipping here-and there for mystical enlightenment. To be specific, here are two sample brief entries:

Atzilut: “Emanation.” *The highest of the Four Worlds created by the divine emanation, a realm of pure spirit and intellect. The world of Atzilut is closest to the Infinite Light of Ein Sof, even though it is not united and identified with it. Atzilut is the first plane or*



world of immanence, of structure separable from or “outside” God.

Bells: *Bells appear in a significant role only once during biblical times, when the High Priest was required to wear them on the hem of his ephod (72 of them according to the Talmud). Whether they were merely aesthetic or also served a protective function is a matter of speculation. Unlike Christian-based theurgic practice, bells do not appear to have been used much by Jewish practitioners.*

Rabbi Dennis is to be commended for providing this wonderfully accessible entrance-way to learning about Jewish mystics and sages, mythic beings and mysterious texts, metaphysical and theological concepts. More than just a well-researched reference work, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism* is an invaluable aid to everyone interested in spiritual growth through the Kabbalah.

Edward Hoffman, Ph.D. is an adjunct associate psychology professor at Yeshiva University and author of numerous books including *The Wisdom of Maimonides* (Trumpeter, 2008). ★

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Elie Wiesel might have become Rabbi Wiesel

BY PROFESSOR ARNOLD AGES

New York – In an interview conducted recently in the offices of the Elie Wiesel Foundation on Madison Avenue, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel noted, in a conversation about his new book, *Rashi* (translated by Catherine Temerson and published by Schocken) that during a 17-year learning experience with the late Saul Lieberman, professor of Talmud at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the eminent scholar offered to give Wiesel *semicha*, or rabbinic ordination. Wiesel smiled when he recounted this story but added that he declined Lieberman's gracious offer.

Wiesel also related that in late May of 1967, while he was engaged in regular Talmudic studies with Lieberman, the professor seemed unperturbed by the war clouds that were gathering in the Middle East. While Wiesel himself was so concerned that he was preparing to fly to Israel to be with "my people" at that epoch-making moment.

Wiesel was so curious about Lieberman's sanguine attitude that he asked him to explain. "Elie," he said you know a lot about literature but you don't know much about the business world. When banks invest huge amounts of capital in a company, they want to do everything to guarantee that the firm remains solvent. God has been making huge investments in the Jewish people for more than 3,000 years. He is going to make sure that the investment is secure."

That kind of granitic faith in the God of Israel was also the hallmark of Rashi, Judaism's greatest Bible and Talmud commentator and the subject of Elie Wiesel's latest book, *Rashi*. Wiesel is obviously proud of this achievement as he can personally trace his family lineage

through a long line of distinguished rabbinic scholars – back to Rashi himself. This book is the product of a series of lectures that Wiesel gave in Paris and at New York City's 92nd St. Y. Like all of Wiesel's novels and nonfiction works, *Rashi* was written in French (Wiesel's first Western language) and translated into English. However, unlike his previous books, *Rashi* was published in English first; the French version will appear shortly.

Wiesel's essay is neither a comprehensive biography nor a scholarly analytical study of the great Jewish exegete but rather a beautifully written compact layman's overview of the subject with more than a few dollops of historical insights and comments, some of which are slightly revisionist in their contours. Wiesel notes, for example, that conventional accounts of Rashi's trade as a vintner are not backed up by evidence. Rashi certainly knew a great deal about wine and wrote about the subject, but doubt exists as to whether that knowledge came from an involvement in the wine business itself.

Another insight offered by Wiesel pivots on Rashi's tendency to put the most positive interpretations on Biblical heroes, whose conduct might, under contemporary lenses, appear to be morally problematic. Whether it is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac in the Akedah, or Jacob's questionable deception of his ailing father, Isaac, Rashi always presents a plausible if somewhat imaginative defense dossier to explain their ambiguous acts.

Why this imperative to explain away seemingly inexcusable behavior? Wiesel says that Rashi, who was born in 1040 and lived most of his life in Troyes (a city which today celebrates Rashi's legacy in myriad ways), knew about and experienced the worst aspect of the First Crusade. While the Crusaders' aim was the liberation of Jerusalem from the Muslims in Palestine, pogroms against Jews were a regular ancillary activity in France and along the Rhine River where small Jewish agglomerations flourished.

Rashi lived during a period when insensate hatred was being directed against Jews both in the Christian theological discourse against Jews and Judaism and in the rapaciousness of the Crusader assaults against Jewish communities. He felt no obligation to interpret the Torah text in a way that might be used by mischievous and malevolent minds to be turned against the Jewish people – which was precisely the tack used by some Christian exegetes in their tendentious attacks against Hebrew Scripture.

Wiesel's originality in exploring Rashi's work may also be seen in his observations about Rashi's poetry. Poetry? Yes, few people are aware of the fact Rashi composed "kinot" liturgical poems on the themes of sin, suffering and atonement, but Wiesel suggests that Rashi's poetry is not, from the esthetic point of view, of a very high order.

(see Ages, page NAT 15)



Book Review

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

Amos Oz – Masterful storyteller

Scenes from a Village Life by Amos Oz. Keter Books. Pp. 217. In Hebrew.

Amos Oz is the best known and admired Israeli author worldwide. His books have been translated into 37 languages. His latest work of exquisite art reflects both his talent, which is of Nobel Prize stature, and his commitment to placing the Israeli individual in the context of a demanding society with unique dilemmas and tensions.

The interaction among the book's characters takes place in the imaginary village of Tel Llan. This village's landscapes and people would fit common Israeli villages that were once agriculturally based but in time gave way to providing the city folks who flock there on Shabbat with local cheeses and wines as well as Far East furnishings.

There is a good deal of overlapping between individual concerns and the collective agenda. Elderly Pesach, a former Knesset member who's Labor Party was once the dominant political power, is in pain over its deterioration and at the same time is critical of the damaging internal squabbles and of not being heard. He also bemoans a bygone past where relationships were trustworthy, yet he is suspicious of Adal, the Arab student who temporarily lives in the backyard of his widowed daughter Rachel with whom Pesach now shares the house.

Adal, who is referred to by Pesach as the "Arab Goy," was allowed to be the only Arab in a Jewish village due to his father's good relations with Rachel's late husband who died suddenly at age 50. Interestingly, Adal is engaged in writing a book comparing the Arab village with its Jewish counterpart. However, the Jewish residents are antagonistic to Adal's presence, with Pesach believing that he is digging at night underneath Rachel's house in hopes to prove that it belonged to his Palestinian family.

Pesach is convinced that the Arabs would never give up what they regard as their own land, and that he would have done the same were he in their shoes. After all, he admits to hating even his own people. "He is searching under our basement because he simply does not love us. And why should he? For what reason? For all our ugly acts? For our cruelty and arrogance? For our self-righteousness?" (p.84 My translation). Oz's center-left orientation is coming through. Pesach, who represents the old generation, cannot give up his fear of anti-Semites musing that "the last of the anti-Semites was not yet born and never will be" (p.84. My translation).



Throughout the book, we find Oz's special touch of delicate humor soothing the thorny issues, which back clear resolution. The last story, which stands on its own, seems to be a satire on a world gone mad. It is not obvious to me if the author has a particular place in mind. Perhaps it reflects the human potential for low descent. Though brief in size, each crafted work fits so well in the hands of a masterful story teller.

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

Bit of Wit

A Sukkah on Park Avenue

An observant Jew who lived on Park Avenue built a sukkah on his balcony. Some of his "high society" non-Jewish neighbors brought him to court. They claimed that the sukkah on his balcony was an eyesore and was having a negative impact on the value of their homes in this posh neighborhood.

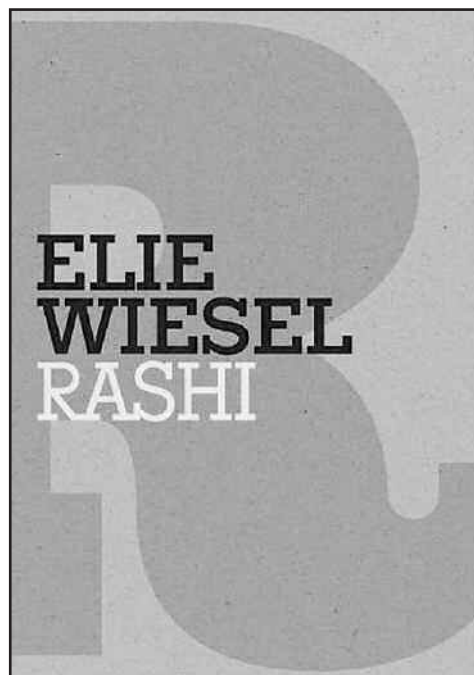
In court, the man was very worried about the outcome. It was the eve of the eight-day holiday, leaving him no time to make alternative arrangements in case the judge ordered him to take down the sukkah. He prayed for help.

And Hashem listened.

Judge Ginsburg, who was Jewish himself, had a reputation of being a very wise man. After hearing both sides, he turned around to the observant Jew and scolded him, "Don't you realize that you live on Park Avenue, and not in Brooklyn? There is a certain decorum which is expected on Park Avenue. You have no right to be putting up an ugly hut on this lovely street without a building permit authorizing it. I hereby rule that either you remove the hut, or I will fine you \$1,000."

"You have exactly eight days to do so! Next case!"

Submitted by Arnold Parris, Louisville. ★



Jewish Calendars: Aesthetic link to past and present

BY ROSE KLEINER

Marking time with a Jewish calendar is always more than checking the date. Almost every monthly page of such a calendar is laden with so much history and tradition that one is constantly in touch with the past of the Jewish experience, as well as with its present. This link with past and present is even more enriching when the Jewish calendar comes with illustrations of extraordinary works of art.

From Universe publishers come two attractive calendars, one for the wall and one for the desk. The wall calendar's illustrations are from the collection of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. Its holdings consist of about 30,000 objects, documents and photos. Some of the finest examples are included in this calendar.

Accompanying each of the illustrated objects is a short, but precise, description of the custom, or ritual, or purpose, for which the particular item is used.

The aesthetic dimension of the objects is seen in the materials used to create the various ceremonial items – silver, brass, bone, wood, glass, parchment and luxurious textiles are just a few examples.

The Universe calendar's illustrated Torah mantle, the Torah ark curtain, or the Torah reader's desk cover are all made of intricately woven fabrics, from the 18th century, including wool, leather, silk, velvet and metal threads. There is a silk and cotton tapestry marked with scenes that all represent different aspects of Jerusalem. A beautiful illustration depicts a wall calendar for counting the Omer. This Omer calendar is made of wood, parchment and glass.

The Universe Jewish Calendar for the desk is illustrated with a rich variety of magnificent art and Jewish ceremonial objects from the collection of the Jewish Museum in New York.

A unique feature found only in this calendar is the chart of all holidays, festivals and fast days, including Rosh Chodesh (the New Moon, a semi-holiday for women), Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), and Yom HaAtzmaut (Israel Independence Day).

This handy chart classifies these special days according to ten different categories, among them are the Hebrew date, Biblical readings, theme or major element, Biblical, Historical and Seasonal Significance, the Mood or Setting, and Selected Customs. For today's busy households, this chart can be most helpful as a quick reference.

Of the works of art depicted in this calendar, one can truly say that they're a feast for the eyes, and rich in texture and variety. There is an elegant Portrait of Mrs. Israel Mintz (artist unknown) from 1844 Warsaw. Equally elegant is the self-

portrait of the well known German Jewish artist, Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (1814–1816).

There are also paintings by Israeli artist, Reuven Rubin; American artists, Lee Krasner, Max Weber, and Robert Indiana. There are ceremonial objects made of silver, pewter, brass, copper and other materials. The Samaritan Torah Case is made of copper, inlaid with silver. It comes from Damascus, 1568.

Pomegranate publishers have no less than four wall calendars, and one desk calendar, which also serves as a weekly planner. The themes of each of these calendars are so diverse, they will suit the interests and tastes of many, from book lovers to nature lovers.

Pomegranate's Illuminations calendar has as its theme, this year, the Book of Esther, which is traditionally recited on Purim, from a handwritten parchment scroll. The calendar showcases 13 beautifully ornamented scrolls.

The illustrations are from the collection of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.

These scrolls are all part of the collection of the Library at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York. The scrolls span a period from the 17th to the 19th centuries. All of them show fine artistic talent, and a majority of them come from Italy.

The 18th century is represented by scrolls from Germany and Italy. Scrolls from Morocco, Austria, Turkey, as well as Italy, date back to the 19th century.

Pomegranate's Jewish Museum (New York) Calendar 2010 features works that range from an embroidered Torah cover, dating from 1600 Prague, to a 1988 ultra-modern seder plate, by Kerry Feldman, of Marina del Rey, Calif.

Other antique Judaica pieces illustrated in this calendar are an 18th-century work titled The Chastity of Joseph, by Joseph Ottinger; a Marriage Contract from 1836 Florence, and an 1870 papercut Mizrah by American artist, Joseph A. Michael.

Besides the seder plate from Marina del Rey, the 20th century is represented by such modern works as Stefan Hirsch's Portrait of A.M. Liebman (1927); Robert Indiana's ultra-modern Purim: Four Facets of Esther; Frank Stella's The Butcher Came and Slew the Ox (1984); Joan Snyder's Hard Sweetness (1971); and Avraham Ofek's Silent Conversation (1970).

Colorful reproductions of paintings by Malchah Zeldis decorate Pomegranate's Jewish Celebrations calendar. Zeldis' vibrant folk art focuses on the observances, festivals, rituals and traditions that give shape and meaning to Jewish life.

Her works joyfully illustrate the union of the spiritual and the domestic that characterizes Judaism. Each of the calendar's

colorful images is accompanied by an explanation of the Jewish tradition portrayed.

Pomegranate's The Jewish Woman's Weekly Planner (plus creative ideas for inspired Jewish living) is the perfect hostess gift for the holidays. This compact, lovely weekly planner comes with 32 kosher recipes for Jewish holidays, and everyday, and shopping, guest, and menu lists.

Devorah Rosen Goldman, the author of this calendar, says she created this planner "to bring order and a sense of well-being to the lives of Jewish women everywhere."

The recipes are simple and tempting. There is Pomegranate Apricot Chicken, just in time for the New Year. And how can one resist the poached salmon recipe, with its only two ingredients – just pour a 750-ml bottle of Moscato d'Asti sparkling wine into a fish poacher. Add the salmon filet, cook for 16 minutes, and voila, an appetizer for 10.

The changing beauty of trees, as seen throughout the different seasons is the theme of a smaller size wall calendar also from Pomegranate. A Celebration of Time and Trees Through the Seasons, A Jewish Calendar, comes with illustrations by Sandra Felzen.

It captures the magic that trees, universal symbols of life, exude in their seasonal incarnations, throughout the year. Trees are accorded special reverence in Jewish thought, and each of Felzen's illustrations is accompanied by a Biblical passage relating to trees or the natural world.

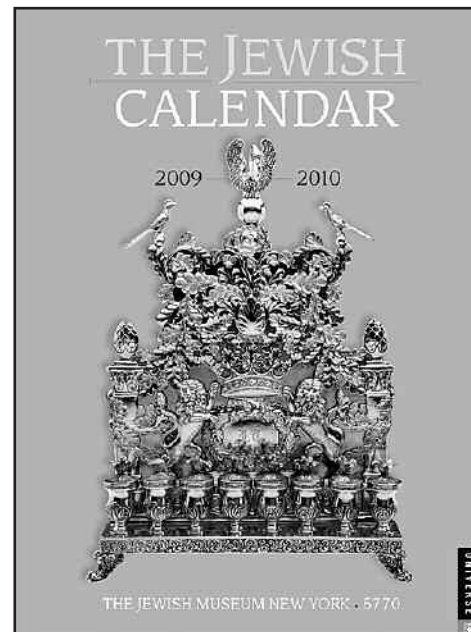
For the younger set My Very Own Jewish Calendar (Kar-Ben Publishing) makes for a fun, and educational, back-to-school gift. This calendar can be enjoyed by persons of any age, which means that parents, and grandparents, will find it interesting as well.

Compiled by Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler, this calendar is filled with facts and trivia, anecdotes, recipes and activities to challenge, occupy, and inspire the youngster in all of us. It helps children feel as much at home in their Jewish culture, as they feel at home in their secular culture.

Among the nutritious, easy recipes, which youngsters can manage to follow, there is a chocolate honey cake (just put all ingredients in a bowl and mix). Equally simple are the pumpkin soup, the cheese latkes, or the broccoli salad.

The various entries on each monthly page, besides the recipes and illustrations, include all sorts of information about community, environmental issues, Jewish living and history, that will broaden any child's horizon and will help make them a more informed member of both the Jewish people, and society at large.

One example is the entries on the September page. Speaking of Israel the Land of Milk and Honey, the calendar describes the magnitude of the honey industry in Israel. The country has 100,000 beehives and 700 beekeepers. They produce 3,000 tons of honey annually. There are flavored honeys, and those made from citrus flowers, wildflowers



and eucalyptus. Several other products also come from Israel's apiaries.

The explanation why we wear running shoes, or sneakers, on Yom Kippur concludes with the "green" suggestion, that old, or used sneakers, can be recycled, through Nike's Reuse-a-Shoe program. These shoes are ground up and used for creating sports fields (soccer, football, baseball, running tracks, or playground surfaces). About 2,500 pairs of recycled shoes will cover one basketball court.

Among the inspiring stories in the calendar is one about Abraham Nemeth, who was born blind, and was the inventor of a code of mathematical notation, the Nemeth Code, which is now the standard in the United States. Nemeth also transcribed prayer books into Braille, and tutored blind students for bar mitzvah.

Speaking about Chanukah and the crucial jug of oil, the calendar turns to the subject of conserving energy, fighting global warming, avoiding the waste of resources and more.

Purim: The Green Way encourages youngsters to make Purim environmentally friendly, sending healthy snacks (as *shalach manot*), in reusable containers, recycling/swapping costumes, donating food to shelters or foodbanks.

Youngsters are introduced before Passover to a book, *Why Is This Night Different From All Other Nights: The Four Questions Around the World*, by Ilana Kurshan.

This book gives the Four Questions in 23 other languages. Along with the translated questions, the book gives capsule histories, and *seder* customs, of the communities from the 23 countries represented.

Among the myriad other anecdotes, data, photos, tips, activities and trivia, there is a charming photograph of Israel's National bird, which was crowned relatively recently, during Israel's 60th anniversary.

Called the long-billed hoopoe, the bird has a black-tipped orange crest. Its Hebrew name is "duchifat," and it was a well-known character in rabbinic lore. ✨



Kosher Kuisine

BY SYBIL KAPLAN

Breaking the fast or for the *sukkah* with fish dishes

Many people break fast with cake and a drink then eat dairy foods such as bagels and lox and cream cheese, herring, blintzes or other fish dishes. If you don't make these for breaking fast, the following week Sukkot presents challenges for those who eat in the *sukkah*. So the food preparer doesn't have to make many trips carrying food, here are dishes that will work for Sukkot.

All can be made the day before serving, refrigerated and then baked before serving.

Salmon Loaf with Cucumber Dressing (8 servings)

2 pounds salmon
1/2 grated onion
4 eggs
1 cup sour cream
1 1/2 cups crushed corn flakes

Dressing

1 chopped cucumber
1/2 tsp. dried dill
2 cups sour cream
4 chopped green onions

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a loaf size baking dish. In a mixing bowl, combine salmon, onion, eggs, sour cream and corn flakes. Fit into loaf baking dish. Bake in preheated 350°F. oven one hour. Combine cucumber, dill, sour cream and onions. Serve slices of loaf with dressing.

Baked Fish with Cream Sauce (8 servings)

Someone who lived in Alaska gave this to me 35 years ago.

2 pound frozen fish, cut in pieces
salt
dry white wine
bread crumbs

2 Tbsp. sour cream
1 Tbsp. mayonnaise
1 Tbsp. finely chopped onions
Paprika

Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease a rectangular baking dish. Place fish in a bowl in layers and salt. Pour wine over to cover. Cover bowl with wax paper and set aside in cool place for two hours. In a bowl, combine sour cream, mayonnaise and onions. Drain and pat fish dry. Roll fish pieces in bread crumbs. Place in greased baking dish. Cover with

sauce. Sprinkle with paprika. Bake in preheated 400°F. oven 15–20 minutes or until light brown and bubbly.

Fish, Spinach and Noodle Casserole (8 servings)

2 Tbsp. margarine
8 fish filets
3 Tbsp. chopped scallions
salt and pepper to taste
2/3 cup dry white wine
1 1/2 lbs. spinach
3 cups noodles
6 Tbsp. margarine
6 Tbsp. flour
3 cups milk
2 egg yolks
3 Tbsp. Parmesan cheese

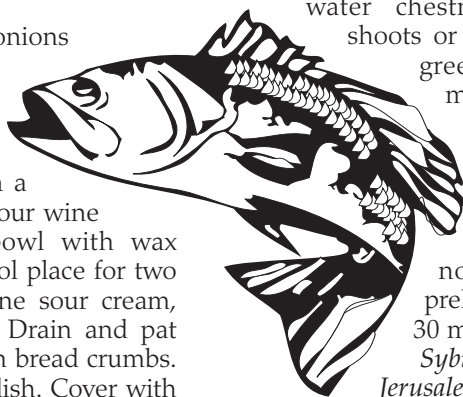
Grease a large baking dish. Preheat oven to 400°F. Melt 2 Tbsp. margarine in frying pan. Add fish. Sprinkle with scallions, salt and pepper. Add wine, cover and cook 10 minutes. Boil water in a saucepan. Add spinach, cover and cook 2 minutes. Drain. Boil water in a saucepan. Add noodles and cook 7 minutes. Drain. Melt 6 Tbsp margarine in a pan. Add flour and stir. Gradually add milk and cook until thick. Add liquid from fish pan. Cook 5 minutes. Add egg yolks. Spoon noodles into baking dish. Add spinach. Arrange fish and scallions on top. Spoon cream sauce on top. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake in preheated 400°F. oven 15 minutes or in 350°F. oven 25 minutes.

Chinese-Style Tuna Casserole (8 servings)

1 cup Chinese noodles
2 1/2 cups water
3 1/3 Tbsp. cream of mushroom soup powder
2 cans tuna
1 cup chopped celery
1/2 cup chopped water chestnuts or bamboo shoots or 1/4 cup of each
1/2 cup chopped onions
1/2 cup chopped green peppers
2 tsp. soy sauce
2 tsp. sherry
1/2 cup Chinese noodles

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a casserole. In a saucepan, combine water and mushroom soup powder and cook until mixed. In a mixing bowl, combine 1 cup Chinese noodles, tuna, celery, water chestnuts or bamboo shoots or both, onions, and green peppers. Add mushroom soup, soy sauce and sherry. Mix then spoon into casserole. Top with 1/2 cup Chinese noodles. Bake in preheated 350°F. oven 30 minutes.

Sybil Kaplan lives in Jerusalem. ★



WIENER

(continued from page NAT 5)

Everyone exclaimed that if he continued to drill the hole, the boat would fill with water and everyone would drown.

We are responsible to others for our actions and for the consequences that will result. We are responsible to G-d for those things that relate to our spiritual well being. We are responsible to ourselves to ensure that our lives have meaning and purpose.

Our lives are tenuous, our existence indeed fragile, and the gift of life so temporary that we must take the time to celebrate, rejoice, and give thanks. Then the ultimate blessing of the season – *sukkat shalom* – peace, in our homes, which translates into peace in our lives, will be our reward.

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

SILVER

(continued from page NAT 5)

Thursday, a day when people of all faiths could celebrate.

Sukkot and Thanksgiving remind us that we prove how mature we are by our readiness to say thanks and by the ways we show our gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy.

Rabbi Sam Silver, z"l, had written for the P-O for more than 50 years. This article was published in previous issues at this time of year. His wife Elaine may be reached at 2730 NW Timberlake Circle, Boca Raton, FL 33431. ★

GOLD

(continued from page NAT 12)

Listen to any bar/bat mitzvah trying to chant either the blessings or the haftorah. ("What a wonderful job," the rabbis will say, meaning thank G-d, they got through it!) Few if any of the kids can or do sing or play a musical instrument. (Drums or guitar do not count!) Few can or do participate in band, orchestra or chorus while in or out of school. Music in the temple or synagogue will be of poor quality and consist of questionable unison singing and that usually in the lowest key possible and not be pleasing either to G-d or to one's fellows. All of this has and will continue to occur because you dismiss all western music as being non-Jewish. This is the same mindset as the Taliban have.

Musically speaking you would prefer to keep things as they were umpteen years ago. Is it progress for the use of a mixed choir and an organ, commonplace in Conservative congregations not too long ago to be regarded as illegal? Why in the name of congregational participation has the musical baby been tossed out with the proverbial bath water?

Getting back to the music composed

during the Shoah, this is your music even if it is strange and not pleasing to your ears. It was meant to be. Just because the style or content may be unfamiliar to you, you have no taste for it, does not mean that it is not Jewish. It may be that it is and you simply do not recognize that it just might be! After all, *moshiach*, whenever *he* (?) comes just might not have a beard and be wearing a kittle!

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AGES

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On the other hand, some of his Biblical commentary, extracted in part from Midrashic sources, is astonishingly refreshing and provocative. On the punishment meted out to the snake for tempting Eve, Rashi invokes a quasi Darwinian-oriented explanation when he says that the snake previously had legs, but they were removed to force it to slither along the ground to forage for food.

This reviewer found one minor lacuna in Wiesel's delightful book on Rashi. Although he mentions the many French (and Germanic) words in Rashi's glosses – the "la'az," Wiesel does not expatiate on the importance of this vocabulary for the study of pronunciation patterns in the Picard dialect of Old French that Rashi transliterates with Hebrew letters.

Wiesel noted that he was quite aware of this, but that limited space precluded a lengthier treatment of the subject. Wiesel also acknowledged that while Rashi lived during a period of great literary and intellectual fermentation in France, there is no hint of that phenomenon in his work – which is devoted exclusively to the world of Torah.

Among the many vignettes in Rashi's Biblical orchard, Wiesel plucks some of the most beautiful and charming. Thus he quotes Rashi's depiction of Rebecca's unilateral decision to leave hearth and home – *Eilech* – "I shall go," she says, as a statement from one of the world's first women's liberation spokespeople, and as a Halakhic pronouncement that a woman can make up her own mind and cannot be forced to marry against her will. Joseph's behavior in Potiphar's household in Egypt, says Rashi, exhibited the same narcissism he showed back home. And when he rebuffed Potiphar's wife, she revealed the false allegation about the alleged rape during moments of sexual intimacy with her husband.

Rashi's great commentary on the Torah is surpassed only by his commentary on most of the Babylonian Talmud. Wiesel alludes to this in his present work but does not deal with the subject. "Perhaps in volume two?" this reviewer asked.

"Perhaps," replied Eli Wiesel.

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Musings from Shiloh

BY BATYA MEDAD

Seder Rosh Hashanah and other expanding Jewish traditions

I grew up in a Jewish home of minimal Jewish traditions. I discovered Torah Judaism when modern Orthodoxy was beginning to shake off the “new immigrant” mentality where the priority was to fit into American society. That was about 45 years ago, and since then Jewish learning and delving into the *Halakhic* (Jewish Law) literature has grown amazingly.



Just take the Rosh Hashanah meal for example. Honey with apple and challah were all that many Jews had to signify that *Yihi ratzon*... It should be G-d's will that we have a sweet year. Many families also had some sort of animal head on the table... “...to be a head not a tail.”



Those two sufficed even in the religious homes a generation or two ago. But now, like the “bragging” about how late one was up expounding Torah and *yitziat Mitzrayim*, the Exodus from Egypt, at the Passover *seder*, now on Rosh Hashanah there's competition *l'shaim Shamayim*, of course in the Name of G-d, for the number of foods and blessings, in many cases no more than Hebrew puns, to bless the new year.

Another Jewish Holiday that has seen a boom, unexpected increase in the observance of a once minor aspect, is Shavuot. Outside of Israel, Shavuot was a

pretty-much unknown, ignored and forgotten holiday, except by those who were seriously religious. So, unlike wine and matzah on Passover and honey on Rosh Hashanah, there certainly weren't many Jews studying Torah all Shavuot night.

In recent years, the study of Jewish texts on Shavuot night can be found all over the world and not only in strictly Orthodox frameworks. In Israel, there's an amazing variety of learning, lectures and discussion groups throughout the night open to Jews of all observance, all stripes and styles. Many Jews who don't fit the mold, or don't wear the uniform, are taking their Judaism very seriously. Thank G-d. No doubt Moshiah Ben David is on His Way! Shannah Tovah, Gmar Chatimah Tovah!

The empty chair

It seems like forever since Jay Jonathan Pollard has been imprisoned by the United States government. His entire case, from beginning to the present, is totally unprecedented in American judicial, security, and such. Periodically, his wife, lawyers and so forth protest anew with some PR statements or campaigns.

When he was first arrested, he had a wife named Anne, and my husband was then working as an aid to then MK (Knesset Member) Geula Cohen. As I remember, Geula, one of Israel's most sincere, dedicated, honest and idealistic public figures, and was the first to adopt the Pollard cause. Geula and my husband were in contact with his family, and my husband even visited him in jail.

The basic story is (from my memory) of an idealistic American Jew, who was working in a sensitive position in the American government, saw/was purposely allowed to see documents proving that the United States was ignoring signed promises to Israel concerning Israel's security. In response, Pollard began feeding information to Israel. When he was caught, he tried escaping to the Israeli Embassy. The Israelis turned him over to the Americans.

Pollard's family hired lawyers who made a deal with the Americans in which Pollard would confess and get a “lighter punishment.” Instead the Americans reneged and gave him the heaviest punishment, short of execution, much, much worse than any Communist or enemy spy ever got for anything even worse. That is, besides the Rosenbergs... who were also Jewish.

I left out a very basic element of the story. The charge against Pollard was spying for an ally, a friendly country, not for an enemy and not to destroy/damage American security.

Our family custom used to be to set extra places at our Passover seder for missing and imprisoned “Prisoners of Zion” Jews. I can't remember all the names, but I do remember Ida Nudel and Natan Sharansky and of course Jay Jonathan Pollard. We're not the only people who did that, and I'm happy to say that it proved a positive experience for

almost all. Almost everyone has been released, freed. The one exception is Pollard. Pollard's chair is still empty.

I needed today

Today I stayed home. I needed it. You just can't imagine how much. Yesterday when I got to work, I felt like I had too much caffeine in my system, but I hadn't had more coffee than usual. I just hadn't had enough sleep this week.

I forced myself to relax and ate a few walnuts that I now keep in my bag for when I need some food. And then I went to teach and felt fine, even though it was a long day.

Luckily I hadn't made any plans for today, other than to be home and relax. I even turned off my alarm. But strangely I dreamt that I was awake. There are people who think they're insomniacs who do that all the time, but it's rare for me.

My big plans for today involved cooking for Rosh Hashanah. I cooked chicken, which is now already in the freezer, and I made some gefilte fish, a little differently from my usual. When the fish cools, I'll freeze it, too. It's really very easy. The ground fish has been in the freezer since before Passover. We always get extra.

I defrosted it and added shredded/grated onions and carrots, a couple of eggs, matzah meal, salt, pepper, sugar and dehydrated parsley.

While it “sat,” I boiled water with sliced onions, salt, pepper and sugar. When it was boiling hard, I “double-spoon” dropped the fish mix into the water. I added sliced carrots, covered and let it all cook for an hour or so.

Yes, that's it! It's really that easy to make gefilte fish. For basic quantities per half kilo or one pound ground fish (whatever is available): a medium onion, an egg or two (depending on size), enough matzah meal, so it sticks together, not runny.

The calm before the storm, or last chance to live it up

The day before meeting my students, I was at the Mamilla Mall. It's a photographer's dream there.



I'll be busy with teaching and lesson planning and grading papers, so I really won't have all that much time for the computer now. Unfortunately, I committed to a few jblog carnivals this month, actually all three! Yes, insane, isn't it? I'll have to cut back on my daily blogging to do the big stuff and the teaching.

Shavua Tov, Have a Good Week!



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. ★



ADLAND

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empty, but we never forget these special moments. We mark time as we remember.

On behalf of Sandy and my family, let me wish all of you a *Shana Tova u'm'tukah*, a happy and sweet New Year.

As you light your Shabbat candles this week and your Shabbat/Yom Tov candles next week, light one set for the beauty of our Torah, the wisdom it offers, and the guidance it gives our lives. Light the other set for the memories we have and the memories we share.

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