

# The Jewish Post & Opinion

National Edition

Presenting a broad spectrum of Jewish News and Opinions since 1935.

Volume 81, Number 6 • September 9, 2015 • 25 Elul 5775  
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## L'Shanah Tovah U'Mitukah



Cover art by Bruce David  
(see About the Cover, p. 3).

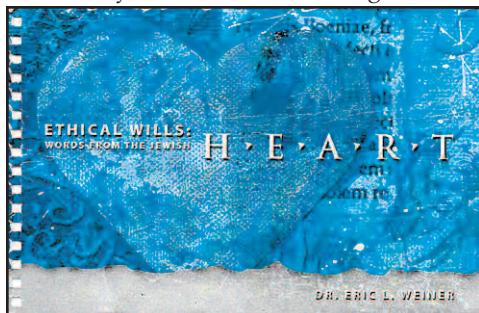
# Editorial

Last year during the Hebrew month of *Elul*, the last month before *Rosh Hashanah*, I wrote that this would be a good time to create an ethical will because the goals of both are similar. The task for the month of Elul and for writing an ethical will require one to think about one's priorities and values.

During *Elul*, the *shofar* is blown every day except *Shabbat* as a wake-up call. We do this so that when we enter the house of worship for *Rosh Hashanah* we are prepared. It would be difficult to examine our missteps over the past year and determine how we are going to improve in the new year if we simply show up for services. To get the most out of any effort worth making, it is helpful to make substantial preparations. One would not expect to run a marathon without serious training.

Unlike a legal will in which one allocates one's accumulated material possessions, for the ethical will – a spiritual legacy – a person must think about what one has learned from years of life experience. Then after much thought, one decides what is so important that it is worth writing down in order to leave a record of "who you are" to those who will live on and those yet unborn.

About the time I was pondering what I hope to learn from the upcoming High Holidays, I received an email about a workbook to help one write an ethical will titled, *Ethical Wills: Words from the Jewish Heart*. The author Dr. Eric L. Weiner had given presentations on this topic for several years but only recently wrote a Jewish version. He says he wrote the workbook because for most people "the writing itself can be intimidating" and some "may not know how to begin."



He writes, "My mission is to help people openly discuss and stay inter-generationally connected around issues of legacy. With ethical wills, people can define what is meaningful and, with some luck, bring healing where healing is needed." He adds one caution: "to avoid writing the 'grudge from the grave.' If your intent is to shame someone, then these are issues that should be worked out elsewhere."

I requested a review copy and the

workbook arrived in a spiral binding with these dimensions: 5-1/2 x 8 inches. Being easy to flip through the pages and to tote, all one needs to get started is a writing implement.

The author uses the word "H.E.A.R.T." from the title as an acronym. With this the "H" stands for Heritage and Hopes for the future; the "E" for Ethics and Experiences in life; "A" is for Atonement and Appreciation; "R" for Religion, spirituality, and core beliefs; and "T" stands for *Tikkun Olam* and Treasures.

The result is five chapters that start with a brief explanation of what the chapter is about, the first one being "Heritage and Hopes for the future". Then on left hand pages he provides interesting quotes on that subject and on the opposite right hand page are not only "challenge" questions to ask oneself, but also several blank lines in which to write the answers. Weiner says there are no "correct" answers only reflections that come from your heart. These chapters end with examples of what others have written on the subject.

An example of a question I did not expect to see in this workbook: "What is your favorite book and why?" Learning ones favorite family recipe, jokes, movies, music and so forth, reveals much about a person.

Here is an example from the chapter on ethics. On the left is a Jewish Proverb: "A bird that you set free may be caught again, but a word that escapes your lips will not return." On the right it says: The words we use and how we use them can be powerful. Can you think of times when you used your words for either good or bad? What would you like others to learn from your experiences?

At the end of the chapter is this example from the book, *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom. *Do the kinds of things that come from the heart. When you do, you won't be dissatisfied, you won't be envious, you won't be longing for somebody else's thing. On the contrary you'll be overwhelmed with what comes back.*

Even if one is not ready to write an ethical will, with so many evocative questions and meaningful quotes to ponder, this workbook could be an ideal adjunct to your High Holiday prayer book and worth having on hand for additional inspiration. In fact, it would be a nice addition to any prayer service or meditative, quiet time alone.

Dr. Weiner gives presentations and facilitates discussions about passing wealth from one generation to the next. Having family legacy conversations about the things that matter most (e.g. values, philanthropy, etc.) can make a huge difference in retaining assets and keeping the family united. Dr. Weiner emphasizes the use of ethical wills as one tool to start a family conversation. Visit his website at [www.jewishlegacyadvisors.com](http://www.jewishlegacyadvisors.com).

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## The Jewish Post & Opinion

Jewish News and Opinion since 1935.

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publisher & editor: Jennie Cohen  
graphic designer: Charlie Bunes

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# High Holidays

BY RABBI BRIAN BESSER

## How we frame our own story

On *Rosh Hashanah*, we stand at the threshold of past and future. Every experience we have ever lived through, every person we have ever encountered, contributes to who we are at this juncture. But our lives are not just a series of random, disjointed events happening to us. Rather, we get to *author* our lives by how we arrange those events into the story we choose to tell about ourselves.

A person who gets laid off can dwell in hurt and resentment, ("After all I've done for them, this is how they repay me?") or can focus on opportunity. ("This is a sign for me to pursue the job of my dreams.") The one who struggles with a longstanding personal challenge or relationship can focus on continued shortcomings, ("I can't believe I still let him/her/it upset me so much.") or view progress over the course of a lifetime. ("I'm so much better at handling this than I used to be.") The way we frame the past determines whether we face the future with optimism or dismay.

Tradition speaks of two books associated with *Rosh Hashanah*: the Book of Remembrances (*Sefer Ha-Zichronot*), and the Book of Life (*Sefer Chayyim*). In the classic interpretation, God records all our deeds in the Book of Remembrances, judges us, and – if we deserve it – inscribes us in the Book of Life for another year. There is another view, introduced and popularized by the *Hasidic* sages.

We write our own remembrances by shaping our past. We can find ways to cast negative experiences in a positive light. For example, "yes, I was angry, but I'm over it now," or "here's the insight that came from my suffering," or simply: "I never thought I would get through it, but I did!" Furthermore, we decree our own destiny in the Book of Life by narrating a forward trajectory that begins with past events and includes our present state, but whose future outcome is still undetermined (and may yet be glorious). The two books are continuous. The Book of Life simply picks up where the Book of Remembrances leaves off.

There is enormous power in storytelling, especially when it comes to telling our own story. Place the episodes of your life into an overall context. Look for deeper significances and hidden benefits in the

## About the Cover

"Jonah's Journey of Discovery"  
(based on a glass mosaic)

By Bruce David

The Book of Jonah contains many lessons that are still extremely relevant. As has always been the case in the Holy Scriptures, even the greatest of the prophets and teachers are portrayed as humans, with flaws in their character.

Jonah was no different. He was at times rebellious and stubborn, even choosing to go so far as to ignore direct instructions from God. Yet, eventually, after many trials and ordeals, Jonah came around.

The nature of Jonah's quest was not only in coming to terms with recognizing the existence of a knowledgeable and compassionate Entity. It also included developing the understanding that even though we are flawed, God accepts us and seeks our well-being.

For these reasons the Book of Jonah is read on *Yom Kippur*, a holiday which emphasizes the themes of repentance, forgiveness, and acceptance. One of the first lessons Jonah learned was that you cannot run away from God.

When God told the prophet to go to Nineveh and warn the people to repent their evil ways or suffer the consequences, Jonah instead boarded a boat to escape to Tarshish. Although the story does not specify the reason for Jonah's actions, here are two possible theories.

Some think Jonah was afraid he would look foolish if the people of Nineveh did listen to him and repented. As such, they would avoid the destruction he had prophesied. If this was the case, then perhaps the lesson here is that we cannot always worry about how others will see us. The most important thing is to do what is right.

A second possibility is that perhaps Jonah was afraid. After all, he would be one man alone facing an evil city of over 100,000 people. Finding the courage to confront our fears is something we all endure at one time or another. Here Jonah should have recognized the power of the One who assigned him this chore and had more faith in the ability of God to give him the means to carry out his mission.



Bruce David

Regardless of the reasoning, Jonah chose to flee. In the lower right section of the design there is a depiction of the boat that Jonah chose for his escape attempt. Here the ship is shown being tossed in an enormous storm that God sent down upon Jonah's vessel. Jonah learned from this that you cannot hide from God.

As the power of the storm increased, the other sailors on the boat with Jonah came to realize that he was the reason for their dilemma. Eventually they were forced to throw Jonah into the raging sea. This led to Jonah's adventure "down under" and was certainly the classic example of the phrase "going overboard."

This, in turn, allowed God to once more display the ability of a magnificent power over nature as a large fish was instructed to swallow Jonah and prevent him from drowning. In the center of the composition, this large fish is depicted as a whale.

Jonah prayed to God seeking forgiveness for his shortcomings. God then decided to give him another chance. Soon the fish found that Jonah was "hard to swallow" and that you "can't keep a good man down," and it deposited Jonah on dry land.

Jonah then proclaims God's word to the people in Nineveh. In the mosaic, Jonah's robes are also the tail of the great fish.

The people of Nineveh repented their wrongdoing and God decided against the destruction of the people. This upset Jonah, who felt that the people of Nineveh should be punished. He went outside the city to watch and see what would happen.

It was extremely hot where Jonah sat, and God made a gourd plant to grow up and provide Jonah some shade. This made Jonah glad, and in the picture he may be seen sitting beneath the gourd and looking on at the city nestled into the plains.

But the next day, when the sun came up, God caused a worm to destroy the gourd, leaving Jonah unprotected from the sweltering temperature. This greatly distressed Jonah, and you could literally say that he was "feeling the heat" as this left him madder than ever.

God uses this opportunity to teach Jonah another important lesson. First, God points out how upset Jonah became over the loss of a single gourd that he had not planted nor had anything to do with its growth. Next, God compares this with the lives of the over 100,000 people in Nineveh that were part of God's life and

(see Cover, page 7)

things that "happen" to you. Celebrate progress. Spur growth with positive messages. *Leshanah tovah tikateivu*. Write yourself into the Book of Life!

*Rabbi Besser has been leading Congregation Beth Shalom in Bloomington, Ind., since 2012. \**

## EDITORIAL

(continued from page 2)

We wish all of our dear readers a rewarding holiday season resulting in a joyful 5776!

Jennie Cohen, August 26, 2015 \*

# Chassidic Rabbi

BY RABBI BENZION COHEN

## The Final Redemption 2

What more does the *Torah* teach us about the final redemption? *Hashem* (G-d) will be revealed in this world. Until our final redemption, *Hashem* is hidden from us to a great extent. Thirty-eight hundred years ago our father Abraham found *Hashem*. This was amazing, when we consider that all of his family and country men were idol worshippers. Since then Abraham and his followers and descendants have helped a large portion of mankind to believe in *Hashem*.

We believe that our final redemption is very close, and if we look around, we see that *Hashem* is already beginning to reveal Himself to us. I grew up in Indianapolis 60 years ago. At that time there was no Jewish Day School, and not much interest in starting one. The only day of the year that I felt *Hashem* was *Yom Kippur*. Religion meant very little to me.

The year 1967 was a big turning point for me and all of Israel. The Six Day War was one great miracle. We were outnumbered 100 to 1, yet we defeated all of our enemies in just 6 days. What are miracles? One way that *Hashem* reveals Himself to us. He makes an amazing thing happen, and we realize that this was the hand of *Hashem*.

At that time began a new movement in Judaism, the Movement of Return. For 100 years Jewish observance had been waning. My great-grandparents were *Chasidic* and ultra Orthodox. My grandparents were Orthodox. My parents were Conservative. I was even less. After the Six Day War the tide turned. Slowly but surely more and more Jews are coming to believe in *Hashem*, learn His *Torah* and fulfill His commandments. Today when you count all of those who have come closer to *Hashem*, and their children and grandchildren, they number in the millions! And each one of them has a story of the miracles they experienced.

A few months after the Six Day War, I, myself, came to believe in *Hashem*. I graduated High School in 1967. The Jewish community of Indianapolis offered me a free trip to Israel. We arrived in Israel two weeks after the Six Day War, and toured the country for two months. Wherever we went we found happy people. I asked them why they were so happy. They told me that for 6 months the Arabs had been threatening to wipe them out, and now they had defeated all of them. I was impressed. In Indiana I didn't know too many happy people. I changed my plans

and decided to stay in Israel. Instead of Indiana University I started attending Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

At the time I didn't know where all this would lead me, but now I realize that this was the first step in the right direction, this was the hand of *Hashem*. *Hashem* had brought me to Jerusalem, His holy city.

Today I am a *Chassidic Rabbi*. I pray to *Hashem* and talk to *Hashem* a few times every day. I witness and hear about miracles all the time. Just last week I was standing outside an army base near *Kfar Chabad*. A soldier passed by. I asked him to come over and put on *tefillin*. He smiled and agreed. Then he told us that he had vowed that if *Hashem* would help him, he would put on *tefillin* every day. Why did he make this vow? He had gotten into trouble with the army, and was worried that they would put him into jail. Sure enough, *Hashem* helped him, and they didn't put him into jail. Now he was going to put on *tefillin*, to keep his side of the deal.

This column that you are reading is also due to many miracles. A few weeks ago my computer that I use to write this column started to make problems. I called our local technician to fix it, but he never showed up. A few days later Tzvi, one of our nephews from Vancouver arrived for a visit. He was able to get my computer started, but it still shuts down sometimes. So every time I want to use it I ask for a miracle that it should work.

Last Thursday was another miracle. I went to bed, but didn't fall asleep. I usually fall asleep in 5 or 10 minutes. An hour passed, and I was still awake. I tried all my tricks to fall asleep, but nothing helped. I thought that maybe *Hashem* is keeping me awake because I have to write a column for the *Jewish Post*. I got up and checked my emails. Sure enough, my sister Jennie had sent me an email that she needs my column by Sunday!

The *Lubavitcher Rebbe* told us that our final redemption is already beginning to happen. *Hashem* is already revealing Himself to us in many ways. We only need to open up our eyes and look around carefully and we will see that this is true. And by learning more *Torah* and doing more *Mitzvahs* (good deeds) we can make it happen faster. We want *Moshiach* now!

What else does the *Torah* tell us about our complete and final redemption? That *Hashem* (G-d) will rebuild Jerusalem and gather into the land of Israel all of the exiles. This is written in the book of Psalms, chapter 147, verse 2.

Is this really happening? It is happening, this very moment. I myself am an example. I was born and raised in exile, in Indianapolis. What is an exile? Someone far from home. Here I was, 7,000 miles away from Jerusalem, our real home.

Materially, our family did rather well, *baruch Hashem*. We had a nice house, a nice car, plenty of food, medical care and nice vacations. But was I happy? Not very much. What did I know about the spiritual aspects of life, about what is really important? Almost nothing. What connection did I have with our Creator, our Father in Heaven? Very little. At times I believed in Him, at other times I didn't.

I was indeed in exile till the age of 18. Not only physical exile, but even worse, spiritual exile, until *Hashem* brought me to the *Yeshiva* in *Kfar Chabad*, in our Holy Land. In *Yeshiva* I learned that *Hashem* is really everything and everywhere. With a little effort I can feel His presence everywhere, any time. He is the source of our life and existence. Without *Hashem* there is absolutely nothing. How can we be close to *Hashem*? By learning His *Torah* and fulfilling His Commandments.

I learned about my soul, which truly is a part of *Hashem*, right here in my brain and in my heart. I learned to love my fellow man. They also have a soul, a part of *Hashem*.

The bottom line? I am leaving exile behind. I am coming home. This took place 48 years ago. At that time 2,000,000 Jews lived in Israel. Today 6,000,000 Jews live in Israel. I am not alone. I am together with millions of my fellow Jews who are coming closer to *Hashem* and to our holy land.

Note: Our Rebbe did not say that everyone should move right now to Israel. Rabbis and teachers in Jewish schools, for example, are doing necessary jobs wherever they live. So wherever you live, do all that you can to be close to *Hashem*, and leave at least your spiritual exile behind.

Jerusalem is close to my heart. I lived there for a year and a half while learning in Hebrew University. Since then I have watched it grow tremendously, and it is now the biggest city in Israel.

For 1,800 years, since the destruction of the Second Temple, Jerusalem remained a small city, less than one square mile. Only recently it began to grow and spread out, especially after the Six Day War.

Why are all of these amazing things happening now? We believe that now our complete and final redemption is really happening. Two hundred seventy years ago the founder of the *Chassidic* movement, the Baal Shem Tov, asked *Moshiach* (the Messiah): "When are you going to come?" *Moshiach* answered him: "When your teachings will spread out to all of the world".

As the *Chassidic* movement began to grow and spread out, more Jews began to move to our holy land. New neighborhoods were built in Jerusalem, for the first time in 1,800 years! Today the Chassidic teachings have reached every corner of the world. Every major city, and many smaller cities,

(see Benzion, page 5)

# Transform lives through acts of justice and kindness

By RABBI DENNIS C. SASSO



Last week I had the good fortune to participate in a "Multi-faith Prayer Service," welcoming new students and families at Butler University. I vividly remember my own first day of college some decades ago. The experience was heightened by the fact that I was a foreign student, coming to the United States for the first time, from Panama, to start a new chapter in my life.

The beginning of college is a time of joy and anxiety, of hope and uncertainty, not only for the student, but for the parents who bring them to campus, help them unpack, attend orientation sessions and then, tearfully depart. It is, in many cases, the first time that a son or daughter will be away from home for a lengthy period of time, on the threshold of adulthood.

The service planned by the Butler Center for Faith and Vocations was a thoughtful, sensitive and reflective opportunity to help ease the transition and give meaning to that life cycle experience. In keeping with the Jewish tradition to teach and pray through story, I began with a story:

"Once, addressing a gathering of students not unlike this one, a beloved teacher said: 'We Americans pride ourselves on having coined the saying: 'Time is money.' This is a false statement that leads to serious mistakes.

"The only case in which time and money are alike is that there are some people who don't know what to do with their time and some who don't know what to do with their money.

"But time is infinitely more precious than money and there is nothing in common between them. You cannot accumulate time; you cannot regain time lost; you cannot borrow time; and you can never tell how much time you have left in the "Bank of Life." Time is Life.

(Dr. Louis Finkelstein, adapted)

Dear students, these college years are often said to be the "time of your life." What you do with this time will make all the difference. Time can be wasted or be of worth; it can be spent learning just how to make a living or spent also discerning how to fashion a life. You can merely use time or sanctify it; you can seize the moment or simply watch it go by.

May you look back upon these years as time you sanctified by opening your minds to new ideas, expanding your relationships through new friendships, and transforming your lives and the lives of others through acts of justice and kindness.

# Planned Parenthood provides vital aid to women

By RABBI SANDY EISENBERG SASSO



What if we could invent an organization that would provide cancer screening, birth control and annual health exams for poor women? What if that organization could test for and treat sexually transmitted diseases and urinary tract infections, provide counseling for ending smoking and obesity and screen people for high blood pressure, anemia and diabetes? What if that organization were to have the ability to impact the lives of 11.4 million people in the United States, to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions and make for healthier adults, especially among women? Wouldn't it make sense to ensure that funds are available for such a group?

But the truth is, we have such an organization, and our government is talking about defunding it. Planned Parenthood is the largest U.S. provider of reproductive health services. The millions of women who are or who have been Planned Parenthood patients attest to its life-saving work. Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky serve 67,000 patients a year.

A series of undercover videos show Planned Parenthood executives discussing the sale of fetal tissue from abortions. In one, a Planned Parenthood official stated that affiliates exist to serve patients and not to make money. An edited version of one of the videos did not include that statement or other pertinent words as its creators sought an end to government funding of Planned Parenthood. Despite the Senate's decision not to proceed with a bill that would stop funding this issue promises to be part of the election year debate and of a government spending bill.

Let us consider the facts. Planned



Today is a time of new beginnings; a time filled with uncertainties and challenges, but also with great hope and promise. For all the experiences that have brought you to this moment, for the hope and the promise yet to be, we give thanks: "Praise to the Holy Source of Blessing, for life, sustenance and the joy of this day. Amen."

I share these hopes and wishes with all students, parents and teachers for a fruitful and fulfilling year.

*Rabbi Sasso has been senior rabbi at Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis since 1977. Reprinted with permission from the Indianapolis Star Sept. 2, 2015. \**

Parenthood receives 41 percent of its funding from the federal government. It does not use that money to provide abortions. It uses those funds to secure the health of millions of women. Only 3 percent of its work involves abortions, legal abortions.

Planned Parenthood services actually reduce the number of abortions. By preventing one million unintended pregnancies a year, 350,000 abortions are potentially averted. Of the abortions that are done, a small number result in the donation of tissue for research. In these cases, Planned Parenthood strictly follows federal guidelines. The mother must give her consent. There is no profit made.

In the early 1990s there was governmental bipartisan support for collection of fetal tissue research. Both Indiana Sen. Dan Coats and Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell, who were leaders in the recent effort to defund Planned Parenthood, voted in favor of that decision. Why? Fetal cells, which otherwise would have been discarded, are used to save lives. Those cells are used to produce vaccines for hepatitis A, rubella, chicken pox and shingles. How many politicians have had one or more of these vaccines and have made certain that their children, grandchildren and parents were protected from these diseases? How many want crucial research into spinal cord injuries, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's and heart disease to continue?

Ultimately, what is at stake in the debate about Planned Parenthood is women's health care and access to contraception. Family planning funding has fallen by two-thirds over the years and is now being threatened by more cuts. It makes no sense. Unfortunately, good sense and science are too often discarded in favor of political expediency and blind ideology.

*Sasso is rabbi emeritus of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck and director of the Religion, Spirituality and the Arts Initiative at Butler University. Reprinted with permission from the Indianapolis Star Aug. 11, 2015. \**



## BENZION

(continued from page 4)

have their own *Chassidic* centers. *Chassidic* teachings are available on line in many languages, and even in Braille!

Each one of us has an important part to play in the process of our redemption. We have to spread the *Chassidic* teachings, by learning them ourselves, and helping others to learn. This will also help to insure that all of us will be inscribed for a good and sweet year. We want *Moshiach* now!

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



# Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

## What if?

What if we felt someone or something tap our shoulder, and we turned around and saw tomorrow? Awesome, as our grandchildren would say. To look into the future can both be adventuresome and at the same time frightening. The unexpected is not necessarily what we need to know. That is the beauty of life. We do not know from one moment to the next what is in store. Even when we think about death, we only dwell on it for a short time because the thought of it gives us chills. How thoughtful God was by not announcing in advance when we conclude this journey and start the next. I guess we would focus all our attention on the end and not enjoy the present.

We hear stories about the soul being the essence of our being and the body the vessel in which is contained the connection to God who breathed life into us. Numerous writings have and continue to be discussed regarding this aspect of creation. The *Talmud* is filled with interpretations of the meaning of life as described in the *Torah*. The *Mishnah* and complementary writings present parables attempting to illustrate the eternalness of the spirit and the inheritance which is everyone's, that of eternal life.

The Prophet Isaiah explains that even though we have never been told by the Author, nor seen evidence, still we know it is our portion or reward for having been born. The Five Books of Moses make no mention of Heaven or Hell in terms of reward and punishment. Heaven is where God resides and the place where we will eventually travel to as our essence winds its way to that blissful destination. We are even told of rebirth. All this is found in the subsequent writings such as the Prophets.

The most amusing thing I learned about returning was told to me by one of rabbis I had the privilege to study with. He would say that it is necessary for us to say blessings over any food we eat. Some in the class wondered why this is so important. He illustrated this by saying that if, for example, we neglect to recite a blessing before we eat chicken, we will return as a chicken.

Then there are those who suggest that references to eternal reward indicate a complete physical return. That is why many Orthodox adherents, after losing a limb, will have it buried where they will be put to rest because you cannot have

physical resurrection if you are not whole. Interesting theory. I would suggest that if God could create why not be able to recreate, even if parts are missing? After all, the organs, and such are no longer viable and have been absorbed by the earth. So what good is the rest if the essential parts are still missing? There again, if one can be recreated, why not all?

These, perhaps are morbid references to the future. The future I am talking about deals with life, not death. We cannot explain the unexplainable, but we can imagine the future because we have frames of reference which include the past. The past is the gateway to the future. There can be no future without a past.

Here we sit, time creeping up on us and we wonder, what future? There is a tendency to become despondent because we cannot imagine a future. Our thoughts revert back to our younger days when we thought about the future and even planned for it. It has arrived. Now what? Are we to stop dreaming? Is there nothing to look forward to? What we used to do all night, now takes us all night.

Today our thoughts certainly include the past. We remember sitting with our parents or grandparents, not understanding, but still part of a glorious experience. We ran around the *shul* getting into mischief, getting scolded, and maybe even punished. No wonder some were turned off and rebelled.

Some of us remember the *cheder* or religious school, and the strict teacher or teachers who would scold or even more. That too turned many away because the essence of those experiences were fear, not love. We asked questions and were told not to ask – just do. Is this any way to teach or encourage faith?

That was yesterday. What about today and tomorrow?

*Rosh Hashanah* is a time to celebrate as well as contemplate. How do we express gratitude to God? How do we appreciate what we have? One way is through prayer, just as we do on that holiday. It reminds me of a story about a father and mother who took their children to a restaurant. The youngest, about 6 years old asked if he could say a prayer before eating. As they bowed their heads and held hands, the boy said, "God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!"

Along with the laughter from the other customers close by, the father heard a woman remark, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!"

Hearing this, the boy burst into tears and asked his father, "Did I do wrong? Is

God mad at me?" As the father held his son to console him and assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him, an older man approached the table. He winked at the boy and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer."

"Really?" the boy asked.

"Cross my heart," the man replied. Then he leaned closer and in a whisper added about the woman who made those remarks, "Too bad she never asked God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

Naturally, the mother bought the boy ice cream at the end of the meal. The boy stared at it for a while and did something the father and mother would long remember. He picked up his ice cream without a word, walked over and placed it in front of that woman. With a big smile he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes; and my soul is good already."

What if we could see the future? We would see that life is good. We would see that extending ourselves to others, not only makes those we reach out to feel good, but we in turn will feel good too. We would see that even with all the difficulties life throws our way, there is tomorrow. We would see that hate and anger hasten the inevitable. We would see that pain is temporary, but joy can last forever. We would see that even though we may feel abandoned by God, God may also feel abandoned by us. We would know that a little ice cream is not only good for the soul, but for the tummy as well.

If you feel a tap on your shoulder do not be afraid to turn around. We certainly may find happiness and want to live for the future, not dread it. And, we can do that by dreaming and imagining, most of all by living.

This is part of what *Rosh Hashanah* says to us. Contemplate and celebrate – the key to the best that is yet to come! *Shanah Tovah*.

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## On this date in Jewish history

On September 9, 1836

Congregation B'né Israel is dedicated as the first synagogue built in Cincinnati, Ohio.

~ From [thisdayinjewishhistory.blogspot.com](http://thisdayinjewishhistory.blogspot.com).



# High Holy Day Message

BY RABBI HERBERT HOROWITZ

## One mitzvah leads to another

The great sage Ben Azzai, writing in the *Pirkei Avot*, (Ethics of the Fathers) states: "Mitzvah goreret mitzvah, averah goreret averah, schar mitzvah mitzvah, schar averah averah." One good deed draws another good deed and one transgression leads to another; for the reward of a good deed is a good deed, and the reward of a transgression is another transgression. This *Mishnah* is an illuminating thought for reflection at the time of *Yizkor* on *Yom Kippur*. The following moving story poignantly illustrates Ben Azzai's insightful message.

Tess went to her bedroom and pulled a jelly jar from its hiding place in the closet. She poured all the change out on the floor and counted it carefully. The total had to be exactly perfect. Carefully placing the coins back in the jar, she slipped out the back door and made her way six blocks to the drug store. She waited patiently for the pharmacist to give her some attention but he was too busy at the moment. Tess cleared her throat, but nothing happened. Finally she took a quarter from her jar and banged it on the glass counter. That did it.

"And what do you want?" the pharmacist asked in an annoyed tone. "I'm talking to my brother from Chicago whom I haven't seen in ages," he said.

"Well, I want to talk to you about my brother," Tess answered back. "He's really, really sick...and I want to buy a miracle."

"I beg your pardon?" asked the pharmacist.

"His name is Andrew and he has something bad growing inside his head and my daddy says that only a miracle can save him now. So how much does a miracle cost?"

"We don't sell miracles here. I'm sorry but I can't help you," the pharmacist said.

"Listen, I have the money to pay for it," said Tess. "If it isn't enough, I will get the rest. Just tell me how much it costs."

The pharmacist's brother, a well-dressed man, stooped down and asked the little girl, "What kind of a miracle does your brother need?"

"I don't know," replied Tess. "I just know he's really sick and Mommy says he needs an operation. But my daddy can't pay for it, so I want to use my money."

"How much do you have?" asked the man from Chicago.

"One dollar and eleven cents," Tess

answered, "and it's all the money I have, but I can get some more if I need to."

"Well, what a coincidence," smiled the man. "A dollar and eleven cents – the exact price of a miracle for little brothers!" He took her money in one hand and with the other hand he grasped her mitten and said, "Take me to where you live. I want to see your brother and meet your parents. Let's see if I have the kind of miracle you need."

That well-dressed man was Dr. Carlton Armstrong, a surgeon specializing in neurosurgery. The operation was completed without charge and it wasn't long until Andrew was home again and doing well. Mom and Dad were happily talking about the chain of events that had led them to this place.

"That surgery," her mom whispered, "was a real miracle. I wonder how much it would have cost." Tess smiled. She knew exactly how much a miracle cost...one dollar and eleven cents. Plus the faith of a little child. *Mitzvah goreret mitzvah*.

Albert Schweitzer wrote, "Not one of us knows what effect his life produces, and what he or she gives to others; that is hidden from us and must remain so, though we are often allowed to see some little fraction of it, so that we may not lose courage."

The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote of this eloquently: "How does one preserve oneself from evil? By each taking upon him or herself the responsibilities of the others. Jewish tradition teaches that the greatest intimacy of me to myself consists in being at every moment responsible for the others. You are not just free; you are also bound to others beyond your freedom. Your liberty is also fraternity."

The poet Kate Robinson wrote: "Grant me that graceful moment in which pain becomes learning and tragedy survivorship. Let my tears be as a river or a mighty sea floating my soul beyond this rocky shore."

Nothing is as primal as a stone. The *Torah* tells us: "Ki tavo el haaretz..." When you come into the land, keep this commandment – pile up large stones and inscribe on them all the words of this teaching." At the holiest moments of the year, during *Yizkor* on *Yom Kippur*, meditate deeply. What places in your life have given you lessons to share? Have you experienced tragedy, built a business, come to terms with an illness? Are these thoughts etched in stone?

Don Isaac Abravanel, the great Jewish commentator and Finance Minister in 15th century Spain, said: "Empires erect monuments to boast of what they have conquered. Jews use plain and simple stories to write the lessons of our journey throughout life."

### COVER

(continued from page 3)

creation, and teaches Jonah that he should at least be as concerned with the people as he is with the gourd.

Additionally, this demonstrates God's concern for all people. Since all are part of life, we need to do all that we can to help each other. As God gives those who have done wrong a chance to turn from their inappropriate activities, so we are always being presented with the opportunity to change our ways and improve the direction of our lives.

Because this book is a parable, filled with hidden insight, a second large face of Jonah is concealed within the design to denote the obscured understandings included in the text. This face may be found on the left side of the glass mosaic's design, with the nose of the large face also being the pants of the smaller Jonah form sitting beneath the gourd.

As Jonah found out, his journey was not only to help the people of Nineveh, but to learn his lessons as well. By applying these same understandings to our own lives, we too can come to recognize the importance of Jonah's lessons as a means for supporting us in our own growth and assisting us on our life journey.

*Bruce David is a Judaic artist and heads Light of the Nations, a non-profit Jewish educational outreach organization which uses art, music and other forms of creative expression to share the modern day values of Judaism to our world. He welcomes comments at: davidart@davidart.com.*

*David will be glad to share the link to Light of the Nation's YouTube Playlist, which includes a Jonah animation, for those interested in viewing samples of their art-music videos. David's art may be viewed on his own Web site at www.davidart.com. \**



In life, nothing matters more than the lessons we learned from our mothers and fathers, grandparents and elders. At the time of *Yizkor*, let us remember that this eternal moment conveys the extraordinary importance of every ordinary life. Wherever we are, wherever we have come from, we are obliged to leave behind a "pile of stones" inscribed with what we have learned and what we and our loved ones have bequeathed for future generations.

Let us remember: *Mitzvah goreret mitzvah* – one good deed that leads to another saves the world. *Shana Tova Umetukah.*

*Herbert Horowitz is Rabbi Emeritus of Shore Parkway Jewish Center, Brooklyn, NY. He is a popular lecturer and scholar-in-residence. He can be reached at rabhh18@gmail.com. \**



## Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

### Preparing for the next world – A High Holiday story

On the High Holidays my mind turns to a *Talmudic* legend – a story that offers a solution to the puzzle of why we are here and where's our next stop. What happens when we get off the bus? The gloom of the grave or a new world of sweet dreams? I interpret the legend loosely as follows:

A rich and benevolent Master is highly pleased with his slave. He releases him. But wait, that's not all. There's more. He gives him a ship loaded with precious goods, accompanies him to the dock and waves a hardy farewell. But, alas, soon after leaving port the ship strikes a reef and all is lost. Due to heavenly intervention the ex-slave survives the wreck and swims to a nearby island – this guy could win the aquatic Olympics – where he is lavishly greeted by the inhabitants. Riches are thrown at him. He is even declared King.

David, let's call him, the former slave, doesn't get it. Maybe he's dizzy and hallucinating from his Olympic Gold Medal swim. Why this generous and enthusiastic reception? One of the islanders gives him the background. The Islanders prayed with passion to the Lord. "Send us annually a king," they pleaded. (That word "annually" is the key to the puzzle.) And so it was.

Every year the Lord blesses them with a King. For one year the new King reigns luxuriously. But at the end of his one-year term, he is deprived of all his possessions – his ermine robes stripped from his back – shoved in a boat with a one-way ticket in his pocket, if he's lucky enough to be left with a shirt with a pocket. Naked you came and naked you shall go. This boat that seems to have a mind of its own takes him to a desert island. No friends, no subjects. Misery and loneliness are his only companions.

"But if you're smart," says the island advisor to this newly crowned King, "you'll prepare for that day of departure." The temporary king had a one-word answer, "How?"

The advisor pointed out that he could prepare for his sojourn on the Island of Banishment while he still had his imperial resources. Beautify this second island with luxurious landscaping. Colonize it



## Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

### To Regret or Not to Regret: That is the High Holiday Question

When my husband, Ray, was diagnosed with cancer almost four years ago, we became a team, determined to face the challenge of living with cancer head on. From the onset, we talked openly about risks and probabilities as we aggressively researched and pursued treatments and clinical trials. We sought counsel from oncologists, nutritionists, integrative care specialists, loving friends and cancer survivors. And rather than avoid the elephant in the room, we decided to ride it.

"Live with no regrets" became the mantra we used to prioritize our decisions and frame the issues which confronted us daily. Should we take a family cruise to Alaska? Yes, no regrets. Should we remodel our 35 year old bathroom? Do it now. No regrets. Should Ray contact a friend in the hopes of resolving a painful interaction? Definitely. No regrets. Should we make time for each other every day to really talk about what was in our hearts and on our minds? Absolutely. No regrets.

Living with no regrets is one of the themes of the Jewish High Holidays. Our liturgy inspires us to stop and think about living a meaningful life, a life where we will have no regrets for what we do and say, and for how we relate to ourselves,



with fascinating people. Send workmen. Make it a civilized paradise. Fertilize the fields. "Thou wilt have established a new kingdom for thyself with subjects to welcome thee in gladness."

David enthusiastically took this advice and even looked forward to the day when he would lose his kingship. He knew a paradise awaited him. Like all *Midrashim*, there's a lesson entangled in the words. Prepare for the life to come. Build your second home while you're enjoying the first.

*The humor of Ted, The Scribbler on the Roof, appears in newspapers around the US, on National Public Radio, and numerous web sites. Check out his Web site: [www.wonderwordworks.com](http://www.wonderwordworks.com). Blogsite: [www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com](http://www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com). His collected works The Scribbler on The Roof can be bought at Amazon.com or lulu.com/content/127641. \**

others and God. We get a jumpstart on this process 30 days before *Rosh Hashanah* begins during the Jewish month of *Elul*. This is the time when we are challenged as Jews to take stock of our lives, to review the things we are proud of as well as acknowledge when we have let ourselves and others down. We are beckoned to take a hard look at our relationships and interactions, our commitments and goals, our successes and failures. This type of personal introspection is called *Heshbon Ha Nefesh*, which in Hebrew literally means "an accounting of the soul."

It's not easy and often uncomfortable to admit the simple truth that we have made mistakes. We aren't perfect and have done things that have betrayed the best person we know we can be. We have let our ego rule our decisions, hurt and disappointed others, said and done things we deeply regret. And we have done these things not in spite of being human but *because* we are human. Because being human means being flawed, imperfect, a work in progress. And being Jewish means recognizing that it's up to us, each and every day, to choose what to do and how to do it.

Acknowledging regret is also a major theme of the High Holidays. Maimonides, the Medieval philosopher, taught that there are three stages of regret; repentance, rejection and resolution. First, we feel remorse and apologize for our wrongdoings. Second, we don't repeat the act when faced with it again, showing that we truly have repented and changed. And finally, we commit to living a better, more righteous life with the intent of becoming a better person in the days ahead.

Acknowledging and responding to feelings of regret plays a big part in helping us become our best selves. But setting an intention to live life with NO REGRETS can inspire us to do the same. In this way, *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* remind us of the interplay of opposites that is often required for us to evolve and reach our highest potential.

When it became clear that the final months of Ray's life were at hand, "no regrets" was the compass that directed us in our interaction with others. We attempted to do all we could to ensure that our children, family and friends would have no regrets after Ray was gone. He was able to tell people what he wanted them to know and hear what they needed to say. It was a gift of time, honesty and truth, for Ray and for all of those who knew him. Living with no regrets takes a great deal of intentional living. Dying with no regrets takes a life well-lived and well-loved.

It goes without saying that I deeply regret that Ray's life ended too soon. But I (see Lederman, page 11)



# Shabbat Shalom

BY RABBI JON ADLAND

*Pirke Avot 4:2 – Ben Azzai said: Be eager to fulfill the smallest duty and flee from transgression; for one mitzvah induces another and one transgression induces another transgression. The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, the reward of one transgression is another transgression.*

**September 4, 2015, Ki Tavo**  
**Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8, 20 Elul 5775**

We have Rabbi Andy Vogel to thank for putting the above verse to song. Just like last week's "Eizeh Hu," this week it is "*Mitzvah goreret mitzvah.*" (Some of you may know Rabbi Vogel who grew up in Cleveland, was a NELFTY president and went to GUCL.) The idea behind this verse at the top is that by doing a *mitzvah* it will lead you to do more *mitzvot*, but violating a *mitzvah* (or doing an *aveira* or transgression) will lead someone down the path of doing even more *aveirot*.

Rabbis and teachers and leaders across the spectrum of Judaism so often use the simplicity of this verse without even quoting it. We say to you that you might want to try lighting *Shabbat* candles on a weekly basis, even before you go out for whatever evening activity you have, and then maybe at some point add reciting the *Kiddush* over the wine. Eating a bit of *challah* never hurts either.

Maybe this year try putting up a *sukkah* or at *Chanukah* light the *chanukiyyah* every night. Make *tzedakkah* a regular part of your life and then maybe add in some study to go along with it. *Mitzvah goreret mitzvah!* I can't make you do more Jewish things or embrace Jewish practice more fervently, but I can urge you to never stop thinking about how to embrace Judaism more passionately in your life.

Sometimes I just can't pass up the connection between the verse I cite from *Pirke Avot* and the weekly *Torah* portion, and this is one of those times. I put these verses up in the order they come in the text and the fact that this week talks about *mitzvot* and *aveirot* is quite apropos for *Parashat Ki Tavo*.

About half way through the *parashah*, Moses begins with a list of curses for which the people respond with amen. They include not worshipping idols or insulting your parents or subverting the rights of the stranger. It is hard to argue with these *aveirot* in chapter 27. To balance it out, the next chapter begins

with a series of blessings. And then the chapter turns to one of the most difficult sections in *Torah*, the curses connected with terrible *aveirot* in Deut. 28. These are so terrible to read, and when they are read in the synagogue on *Shabbat*, they are said in a whisper. (*This is one of the Torah sections that isn't taught in religious school and if you don't read the Torah on your own or go to Torah study or attend weekly Shabbat services you may never know this section exists unless your rabbi writes about it in Shabbat Shalom.*)

Moses, in this frightening section lists all the things that will happen or could happen if you don't follow God's commandments. You will just have to read this on your own as I can't or won't put it in this week's message. Suffice it to say, I don't think these curses would motivate me to be a better Jew today. The opposite may be true and I'd have to turn away from living a Jewish life.

Judaism should not be lived in fear of what happens if you don't follow God's laws. I believe that we should encourage *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*. By holding up the beauty of living a Jewish life and the inner peace that can come from living in Judaism this way, I truly believe that one's life can be enhanced and deepened. Sometimes it is hard to know which door to open into this beautiful Jewish world. How does one take the first step?

A little knowledge and education doesn't hurt, but there is no better place to start in Judaism than with *Shabbat*. It is there every week. It is so beautiful to see the lit *Shabbat* candles standing next to a beautiful *Kiddush* cup with a *challah* nearby. Participating and observing Jewish holidays and holy days is the next door and we are just about to begin the season of beautiful, meaningful holy days: *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Simchat Torah*. And from here, there are countless doors to open and step through.

This is done out of love and beauty, not from the fear of punishment as spoken in Deut. 28. Yes, one transgression may lead one down the wrong path, but let's focus on what can happen when you engage in the *mitzvot*.

When you light your *Shabbat* candles this week, light one for the opportunity to live a positive Jewish life that is filled with hopes for tomorrow and the memories of yesterday. Light the other candle for the wisdom of Ben Azzai who understood that we need to walk down the right path on our journey.

*Rabbi Adland has been a Reform rabbi for more than 30 years with pulpits in Lexington, Ky., Indianapolis, Ind., and currently at Temple Israel in Canton, Ohio. Email: j.adland@gmail.com. ♦*



# Kabbalah of the Month

BY MELINDA RIBNER

## Yom Kippur – our slate is wiped clean

*Yom Kippur* is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The *Torah* says, "On the tenth day of the month (*Tishrei*) it is a day of atonement, a holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves." (Lev. 23:27) And the *Torah* tells us that on *Yom Kippur*, "You shall be purified from all your sins." (Lev. 16:30) This purification is the awesome gift of the day.

On the external, outside, level, *Yom Kippur* is a day of affliction, not eating, not washing, confessing all our sins, feeling sad, and remorseful for all the mistakes we have made individually and collectively. There is much pain and suffering on micro and macro levels in the world today that if we are not mindful and do not understand the essence of the *Yom Kippur*, we can be easily disheartened on this day.

But on the internal level, on the inside of the inside, *Yom Kippur* is the most joyous and awesome day of the year. By being in spiritual community and uniting with the Community of Israel on this most awesome of days, that was established thousands of years ago, we are given the opportunity as well as the support, both divine and communal, to liberate ourselves from the stifling hold that materialism and physicality have held in defining who we are. We release ourselves from the tyranny of the ego self that inflicts us and others with its fragmented, narrow, self-serving limiting conversation.

On *Kol Nidre*, we release all such vows taken consciously and unconsciously that have blocked the flow of goodness in our lives in a way that we could not do at another time.

Though we do not eat or wash and we pray all day, we are happy for we experience paradoxically that the restrictions of *Yom Kippur* do not make us enslaved or limited. They actually make us free, enabling us to become the kind of vessel able to receive the transmission of holiness, love and forgiveness of the day. On *Yom Kippur*, we do not eat physical food but rather we are fed heavenly manna of love. We do not wash for we are bathed in divine compassion. On *Yom Kippur*, our slate is wiped clean. We are like new born babes, ready to be ushered into the *succah* for seven days of coddling and fun with *Hashem* and each other.

(see Ribner, page 18)

# Gather the People



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

## Let's look for a way out together

Every year, like clockwork, the Jewish people – even those of us who insist we're not "religious" – reemerges, reconvenes, and restores itself for the High Holy Days.

But why should this occur so predictably? What motivates so many of us to make this occasion a priority on our calendar again and again, year after year? What do we expect to find in the synagogue during these few days?

We come for as many reasons as there are individuals, of course. But notwithstanding that each of us has a somewhat unique motivation for coming to services on the High Holy Days, the list of reasons may not be very long: We come to work on our self, to work at becoming better people. We come to reaffirm our Jewish identity. We come to renew our membership in the Jewish community. We come to see old friends and acquaintances. We come because someone arm-twisted or guilt-tripped us. And we come for reasons we may not even really understand.

No matter what the initial motivation, most of us will spend several hours at services on High Holy Days. Since in our day-to-day life we rarely have the luxury of wasting hours in a day, maybe we should consider this time in the same light: it's valuable and not to be wasted.

How can we productively use this time, even if we're full of doubt or cynicism about the usefulness of congregational prayer, Judaism, or God?

Since both of us grew into our adulthood without a Jewish education, we know personally how difficult it is to ascribe to God, Judaism, or a congregation, the power to make a difference in our day-to-day pressures and hopes.

Entering middle age we may find ourselves living with a 12-year-old's ideas of God, prayer, repentance, ritual, etc. Imagine trying in middle age to live your business or professional life, your sex life, even your hobby, or any other part of your life, on what you knew at 12 – but that's what many of us do with religion.

But if we're not going to believe in childish nonsense, what are we to believe in?

While there are no simple answers, one

way we can begin as adults to know God, Judaism, and congregational life is to search for and act out the highest and best parts of ourselves in a more disciplined way, based on the tradition of wisdom that has sustained our people for thousands of years. We can take the time we're going to spend in synagogue to examine ourselves, to see if we're carrying around dead parts that depress us and drag us down throughout the year, parts that cause pain to ourselves and the people we love and care about. And we can use the time to see if Judaism offers any practical help to leave behind those parts of ourselves that are dead and destructive, and to lift up the parts that are alive and loving.

Using the time this way is sometimes very difficult. Self-assessment in the harsh light of truth can be very painful.

So why do it?

Because like all investments in which gratification is deferred, *teshuvah* – turning our lives for the purpose of healing ourselves – leads to exceptional rewards, both for those we love and for us. And when guided by Torah, evaluating and turning ourselves according to the attributes that our tradition ascribes to God, our pain is lessened by the goodness of realizing our highest potential.

What prevents us, then, from doing *teshuva*h?

In a word, fear. We fear not being in control. We fear admitting to ourselves that we are not the greatest power in our lives. We fear being judged by others with our defenses down. We fear that the realities upon which we have built our lives, the fictions we've told others and ourselves, if we don't hold onto them tightly, will destroy us somehow. We fear that we'll have to give up all the sensual and material pleasures in our lives. We fear admitting our fear.

Yet, ironically, we have little or no fear of God, thinking that we alone, among all creatures, can escape the consequences of our actions. Some of us reject God and *Torah* by rejecting our own childish notions of reward and punishment, that punishment is designed expressly to correct our bad behavior. In this way we avoid the reality that so-called punishment is a natural result of our behavior – part and parcel of the universal educative consequences for misbehavior, built into the creation, as unavoidable as drowning if we jump into the deep end of the pool and fail to move our arms and legs.

How are we to overcome our fears?

The requirements for overcoming fear are always the same when the conditions of our lives demand courage. We have to act on our faith – that is, do what's right, despite our reason and experience. That's the essential definition of faith, the *doing*

of what we know to be right despite reason and experience that argue for the immobilization which follows from despair, futility, and powerlessness to do good.

And we have to find others, those with whom we can ally ourselves, to do what we're called upon to do. Judaism has no expectation that as individuals we can discern the will of God and manage our lives to meet it. Throughout our lives we require teachers and, in turn, we are obligated to teach others what we have learned. There is no more compelling purpose for the establishment of a congregational community than to support and sustain its members in their efforts to learn how to live their lives every day in moral spiritual faithfulness to the vision and path of *Torah*.

Why is it that sometimes we seem to have the needed faith and at other times we don't?

Faith is a function of hope. The more hope, the more faith. Hope grows in proportion to the possibilities we see for goodness in the world. Hope increases if we see others stand up for what is right, if we see others tell the truth, if we see others combat injustice, if we see others fight for freedom, if we see others work to make peace, and if we see others show kindness. If we see others increase goodness in the world, our hope is enlarged, and we will have the faith we need to overcome our fear.

But who are these *others*? They are none other than *us* when we choose and commit ourselves to do these things as a congregational *community*. Then we potentiate hope and faith far beyond our own personal power.

We may choose to remain alone and isolated, lacking in hope and faith, fearful of turning our lives; or we may choose to join with others, build community together, increasing our hope and faith, allowing us to overcome our fear and do the *teshuva*h necessary to change our world.

In one respect we're right not to fear God. The judgment that will be levied upon us will be a consequence, most of all, of our *communal* failure to take advantage of this precious time, which has been designed and arranged for us together to turn our lives. Mostly what we have to fear is our own failures.

Where do we start if we want to turn, if we want to forsake that which is dead within ourselves?

Somewhere, somehow, we must want to find within ourselves at least a small voice of regret. That requires some moments of silence, when we are neither talking nor listening to others, which is a legitimate function of prayer.

(see Ben Ashe/Bat Sarah, page 11)



# A Playful Path

BY BERNIE DE KOVEN

## The Planetary Jew

In my previous column in the July edition with the headline "The Homegrown Jew" I wrote: Though we're vegetarians, mostly, every now and then we eat a piece of fish – because, you know, it jails our free radicals or something. And there it is on our plates, this piece of a beautiful, powerful animal. And we have to say something. So we started saying "Thank you, Fish." And that was pretty much as far as we got.

Most recently, though, I've been trying it out, thanking the planet for my food and stuff – though my sacred wife still wants to thank the fish personally. I've been not so much trying it out as thinking about trying it out – especially about the planet-God connection. I don't know how *kosher* it is to thank the planet. It's not exactly idolatry. And it's hard enough thinking about the planet – the whole planet – as one single thing, something I could personally thank for anything.

Now that I've seen pictures of it from space, I can imagine it as just one thing, small, huggable even, compared to some of its neighbors. I can even think of it as a living being because this is where I find my life and all the lives I encounter. But to think of it as listening to me, as appreciating my gratitude, as something like God, as even wanting my gratitude... I might as well thank a dead fish.

No, it doesn't seem to work for me, thanking the planet, or praying to it either. I can love it, though. I can't hold it in my imagined embrace but I can appreciate its beauty, its complexity, its life-givingness.

There's a thing we Jews call *Tikkun Olam*. It means to repair the world. As a practice, even picking up a piece of litter is *Tikkun Olam*. Or reusing a plastic bag, or repurposing, or conserving energy, or planting a garden, or designing a little toy or game or playground that makes things a little more fun. And so is visiting the sick, bringing a nice *nosh* at a *shiva*, celebrating life events with family, community and strangers. Traditionally, it is all a *mitzvah* – a commandment, a good thing to do, holy even, just in the doing. It's what I might call "active prayer", like celebrating, serving, enriching, healing, and loving. So if there were such a thing as a Planetary Jew, that's the kind of thing we'd be doing a lot of.

Jew? You ask. Call this Jewish? You scoff. Well, see, I have to approach my planet as

### LEDERMAN

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am aware that a certain burden has been lifted from my heart as I walk through the complex grieving process. I believe this is a result of having made the effort to live and love with no regrets as we faced the last years of our life together.

*Amy Hirshberg Lederman is an author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney who lives in Tucson. Her columns in the AJP have won awards from the American Jewish Press Association, the Arizona Newspapers Association and the Arizona Press Club for excellence in commentary. Visit her website at amyhirshberglederman.com.* \*



a Jew would, because, that's me, Jewish, by birth, by blood. Judaism is in the DNA of my spiritual genetics. And if I were a Christian, I would have to approach it as a Christian would; a Buddhist, a Muslim, Hindu, Taoist...as they would. And yet, no matter through what lens we see it all, we would all be worshipping together. Despite our differences, we're all on the same planet, if you know what I mean.

And then there's a *mitzvah* called *Bal Taschit* – another commandment which says, basically, Agent Orange is not *kosher*. Don't destroy what you don't have to. In fact, don't destroy unless you have absolutely no alternative. This extends to the whole plant, naturally; as in conservation of life, of the planet.

And *Tzedakah*, which has something to do with being just and charitable and that, too, can be extended to all life. And even more important: *Gemilut Hasadim* – the "gift of lovingkindness." All are commandments, straight from the hand of God and the heart of the planet.

As a Jewish, um, Planetarian, some of the books of my conceptual *Talmud* would be written by the poets and authors and artists and scientists whose works enrich my understanding of the world, widen and deepen my embrace of the whole of family, the whole of community, of humanity, of life, of the planet I live in and serve. Other books would be by geologists, geographers, geophysicists, ecologists, hydrologists, physicists, biologists, astronomers, and cosmologists – the legions of researchers, experimenters, explorers, and scholars who help me perceive the world more clearly, perceive the whole of it. Still others would be by playwrights, musicians, dancers, and artists who help me love it more deeply, more widely. Finally others would be by players, lovers, children, and mystics who help me open my soul to it.

As a Jewish Planetarian, it is my *mitzvah* (see De Koven, page 18)

### BEN ASHER/BAT SARAH

(continued from page 10)

We can ask ourselves: What have I done this past year that was self-destructive of the goodness in me – and do I want to choose to forsake that part of myself yet?

We can ask those we love: How have I hurt you this past year? We can listen carefully to what they tell us. And then we can take responsibility for our wrongdoing and do all within our power to make things right.

We can ask ourselves: What have I done this past year that lessened hope in my congregation and thus undermined the faith of its members – and do I want to forsake that part of myself yet?

We can choose *not* to allow the pain others have caused us to rule our lives, to define who we are and how we will react, but instead to forgive those who express a genuine regret and a desire to be reconciled.

We can support each other by joining in communal confession to sins that we, personally, have not committed, so none of us have to experience the shame of confessing our wrongdoing alone.

We can accept and support the *teshuva* of our family, friends, and congregation members, instead of automatically pigeonholing those whom we've summed up and judged in the past.

We can affirm by how we treat other people in our congregation that all of us have the capacity to change, accepting them and ourselves as we seek to be, not as we have been.

Rabbi Hayyim of Zans, who lived in the nineteenth century, told a parable that comes to teach us about the role of congregational community in *teshuva*:

A man had been wandering about in a forest for several days, unable to find his way out. Suddenly he sees another man approaching him. His heart is filled with joy. "Now I'll get out of here," he thinks to himself.

When they come face to face, he asks the other man, "Brother, tell me which is the way out of this forest. I've been wandering about here lost for several days."

The other man says to him, "Brother, I do not know the way out either – I've also been wandering here for many days. I can tell you this: don't take the way I've been taking, for you'll surely stay lost. But let's look for a way out together."

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Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Magidah Khulda bat Sarah are the Co-Directors of Gather the People, a nonprofit organization that provides Internet-based resources for congregational community organizing and development ([www.gatherthepeople.org](http://www.gatherthepeople.org)). \*



# Holocaust Educator

REVIEWED BY MIRIAM L. ZIMMERMAN

## New Holocaust films – one fiction, one documentary

"It's a beautiful film," promised Jay Rosenblatt, Program Director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF). All the more reason not to see *In Silence*. The SFJFF program brochure described a "poetic and hypnotic exploration of a troubling history: the expulsion and expunging of brilliant Jewish composers and performers following the Nazi invasion.

"Five artists are profiled in a stylized, beautifully crafted fictionalization that conveys the promise of the 1930s, when classical music and popular jazz were sites of innovation and seduction. Then came the camps, a place of 'unbearable silence.'"

I agree with Holocaust activist and survivor Elie Wiesel who would discourage fictionalizing the Holocaust. Google easily found his eloquent article, "Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory," published in the *NY Times* on June 11, 1989.

Mr. Wiesel pointed out, "Auschwitz represents the negation and failure of human progress; it negates the human design and casts doubts on its validity. Then, it defeated culture; later, it defeated art, because just as no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz." To continue reading Mr. Wiesel's thoughts, browse to [www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html?pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html?pagewanted=1).

I strongly endorse Mr. Wiesel's admonition not to use artistic form to depict the Holocaust. By definition, art selects, transforms, teases, and entertains. It also beautifies. The Holocaust should not be beautified nor should it be used for entertainment.

If life imitates art, as some philosophers theorize, then Auschwitz has interrupted this progression. If no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, as Elie Wiesel pointed out, then Auschwitz requires that we rethink the relationship between art and life. No doubt Mr. Wiesel would agree; his statement that Auschwitz defeated culture and art supports this idea. Perhaps that is why there is so much reality television. Art has lost the capacity to invent. Only the nonfictional moment has meaning.



Sidney Bernstein (left) the Producer of German Concentration Camps Factual Survey, on a visit to North Africa in 1943. Next to Bernstein is Lt Cdr Anthony Kimmins (Admiralty Public Relations) and Major Hugh Stewart (Commander of the British Army Film and Photographic Units [AFPU] in North Africa and North West Europe). At the time of this visit, Bernstein was head of the Liberated Territories Section, Films Division in the British Ministry of Information. Note also, it was Major Stewart who ordered that the AFPU cameramen should provide full coverage of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp after its liberation. © Imperial War Museums (HU 38069)

Similarly, philosopher Theodor Adorno teaches that fiction died in crematoria of Auschwitz, in keeping with this aesthetic discussion. For an in depth analysis by this renown German sociologist, critic, and philosopher, browse to [www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/#4](http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/#4). Specifically, read his section entitled, "Ethics and Metaphysics after Auschwitz." His erudite discussion exceeds the limitations provided by this column and perhaps requires a degree in philosophy to explain fully, something this author lacks.

When the program director of the SFJFF promised a beautiful fictional film about the Holocaust, I felt like running as far away as I could. But I saw *In Silence* anyway, feeling an imperative to do so as a Holocaust educator.

Directed by Zdeněk Jiráský, *In Silence*, from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, is a mash up of the concentration camp experience. I kept trying to figure out whether the characters were in Auschwitz-Birkenau or someplace else. I recognized scenes from Terezin (Theresienstadt), the "model concentration camp," used by Hitler for propaganda purposes. From having been to both Auschwitz-Birkenau and Terezin, I found myself wanting to interrupt the narrative loudly, "That could not have happened there," or "That is not how it was."

The filmmakers evidently used Terezin as the backdrop for events that happened at Auschwitz and at other concentration camps including a slave labor camp, which, to this Holocaust educator, under-

mined the credibility of the whole film. To me, it was not beautiful but a fiction that did not do justice to its subject matter.

Never mind that I could not keep the couplets of five musicians and their romantic interests apart. Cutting back and forth among stories of a composer, jazz performers, singer, and a ballet dancer and their romantic interests, felt rushed. There was not enough time to establish an ethos for everyone, other than their commonality as subjects persecuted by the rising Nazi tide.

Once they were deported and reduced to concentration camp garb, I was unable to distinguish musician from singer from ballet dancer. I would file *In Silence* under the category, "Do Not See," along with *Jakob the Liar* (starring Robin Williams, 1999) and Quentin Tarantino's 2009 *Inglourious Basterds*. The latter is my all time favorite Holocaust-themed movie to discourage students from seeing. (See my earlier review on page 10 in the P&O at: [www.jewishpostopinion.com/pdf/NAT\\_9-9-09\\_LR.pdf](http://www.jewishpostopinion.com/pdf/NAT_9-9-09_LR.pdf).) My list of do-not-see Holocaust movies is long – perhaps the subject of a future column.

The Festival's organizers encouraged moviegoers to watch both a documentary and a narrative film on the same subject, to contrast and compare how the different genres treat the same subject. The unwieldy but descriptive title, *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, is a documentary that accomplished so much more than *In Silence*.

Using footage taken by British, U.S.,

French, and Russian cameramen who accompanied the Allied troops as they liberated concentration camps in 1944–1945, the yet to be completed film was shelved for over 60 years. The Imperial War Museums' website relates the story of its recent restoration and completion. In a way no fictional film can, this documentary film vividly depicts atrocity that defies language to describe it. Pictures below were provided by the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, used with permission, courtesy of the Imperial War Museums (UK). Commentary is from an email to me from SFJFF when I requested more than just a number to identify the pictures provided in the press packet.

*German Concentration Camps Factual Survey* had its North American premiere on July 26, 2015, at the SFJFF. No one under the age of 18 was allowed to view this film, per edict of the Imperial War Museums (or the British Ministry of Information). I agree with this decision. The images are too stark, too close to the unspeakable reality Mr. Wiesel described for young people to be able to process without a context of the Holocaust experience.

After the screening, a facilitated discussion at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, led by Morgan Blum Schneider, the Director of Education of the Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center in San Francisco, helped audience members make sense of what they had just seen. About 50 audience members made the 15 minute trek from the Castro Theatre to Sha'ar Zahav. It was an opportunity to process the images revealed after the gates of con-

centration camps opened for the first time.

Jay Rosenblatt welcomed the audience members and pointed out that it was fitting to view such a film now, for "today is *Tisha b'Av*." He originally saw the film in Berlin with a packed German audience. The audience was riveted throughout the screening and remained for a very long Q&A.

Many of the images have never been seen before, Rosenblatt explained. The Imperial War Museum added a prologue and a short epilogue to give the film some context. A decision was made to include the flaws and historical discrepancies within the film, even though subsequent historiography proved otherwise. The epilogue at the end explained some of these discrepancies, including the prominent omission of the word "Jew" throughout the narration.

Rosenblatt introduced Morgan Blum Schneider who indicated that producer Sidney Bernstein was well known at the time. He came from a large Orthodox British family and assembled an international crew of filmmakers, including Alfred Hitchcock, who worked on the film for less than a month as a treatment adviser. Hitchcock did not direct this film.

Hitchcock wanted large standing shots without much zooming in so that the audience could see everything. It was important to Hitchcock to fight Holocaust denial, to provide evidence of atrocities in the camps. This, in contrast to *In Silence*, which depicted close up after close up of actors feigning the pain of the concentration camp experience. There are so many powerful individual Holocaust memoirs, I

have to ask, why is it necessary to concoct an amalgamation of many? The movie created its own truth, but it was not a truth of the Holocaust experience.

According to Blum Schneider, originally three versions of the documentary were planned: one for German audiences in Germany, a version for German POWs in captivity, and a third for Allied audiences.

The film shut down because it missed its moment, taking too long to be completed. A year after the war, the Allies now wanted a good relationship with Germany. The Marshall Plan and rebuilding Germany replaced de-Nazification and war crimes trials. The leadership of the Allies evidently felt there was enough guilt from the Nuremberg Trials; Germany and the rest of the world were ready to move on.

Also, the plight of Jewish refugees going to Palestine had become a difficult international issue. Allied leaders did not need powerful visual justification of the refugees' right to emigrate to the Holy Land. After the film was shut down, producer Bernstein went to Hollywood with Hitchcock where both enjoyed successful film careers.

The question arises for me as a Holocaust educator, is it necessary for the generations after Auschwitz to see such footage before they can understand the reality of the concentration camps? The film accurately and horrifically underscored the "what" of Auschwitz in terms of its impact on people. But even after viewing this film, I came no closer to understanding the "why" of Auschwitz.

As someone who has grappled with the implications of Auschwitz for a lifetime, I no longer believe that understanding the why of Auschwitz is the primary goal. Instead, I would rather students ponder, what does humanity need to learn so that Auschwitz never happens again? What does humanity need to do so that Auschwitz never happens again? How can humanity ensure that Auschwitz will never happen again?

In my opinion, *In Silence* has the capacity to entertain for 86 minutes. Six weeks later, my husband and I barely remembered the film. *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey* will remain with us for the rest of our lives.

To read more about *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, browse to: [www.iwm.org.uk/research/german-concentration-camps-factual-survey-film](http://www.iwm.org.uk/research/german-concentration-camps-factual-survey-film). It may not be a film everyone wants to see, but everyone is affected by what happened at Auschwitz.

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The still of the distressed young woman watching a burial at Belsen (right), is described in the shot sheet as, 'Reaction of girl.' Sergeant Lewis, 17 April 1945. © Imperial War Museums (IWM FLM 1002).



# Media Watch

BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

## Cristela

In *Cristela*, TV's first series produced and written by a Latina performer, Cristela Alonzo played the title character with charm, pathos and aplomb. The ABC show was a sweet, creditable effort. While it didn't win a large enough audience, it was a warm, winsome sitcom that challenged stereotypes, with integrity and earnestness, even if sometimes exploiting those very stereotypes.

Cristela Hernandez is a bright law school graduate anxious to break into any firm of note, even without pay. It is no secret to her or to anyone else that she is hired by Dallas Attorney Trent Culpepper (Sam McMurray) because, though somewhat bigoted and even more clueless or, better, oblivious, he decides that a Hispanic employee would be good for business. The other ambitious young lawyer clerking at the firm is Josh (Andrew Leeds), who happens to be Jewish, and Culpepper's "legally blond" daughter, Maddie (Justine Lupe), who enjoys coming across as, but probably isn't, shallow. As Trent jokes in the pilot episode, "A blond, a Jew and a Latina come into an office..."

Cristela lives in the home of her attractive working mother sister, Daniela (Roxana Ortega) and Daniela's vain contractor husband, Felix (Carlos Ponce), their young son and daughter, and the family matriarch, "Ama" Natalia (Terri Hoyos), who is overbearing, disparaging, and unrelenting in her old village mentality.

Family members can't comprehend Cristela's sacrifice of personal life and livelihood for the promise of a career. They bring up her being a non-paying boarder and they want her to lose weight and to find a husband. While it seems that Ama will not change her way of thinking, there are glimmers of understanding from Cristela's sister and, surprisingly, from the seemingly antagonistic brother-in-law. One could not find a more likable or expressive cast, including the children, and the writing was generally quite good.

Through the male Jewish character, Josh, the show attempted to strike a balance between parodying stereotypes and promoting self-awareness and respect for others. From the pilot episode (10-10-2014, Alonzo with Kevin Hench), Josh was depicted as an apple polisher whose desire to please the boss sometimes borders on obnoxiousness. He will

research kinds of coffee when given the task of providing the boss's daily cup. From the start Cristela tries to tell truth to power, though she must do her share of holding back. She has had to overcome poverty and prejudices.

The first episode emphasized that Josh has been sheltered. When Cristela asks him what his toughest job was, he responds that his parents felt that work would interfere with his education. But then again, he has applied himself and is working hard without pay to find his niche in a law firm. He has been raised to please parents and bosses, which is no sin or crime. In the season finale (4-17-15, Kevin Abbott), Josh will ask: "Why couldn't I have had parents who made me feel I was a failure?" Cristela will respond: "Trust me, it's not as great as it sounds."

Is Josh too unwavering? He admits half-jokingly (but only half), "I kinda like to be the last person to leave. You know, that way I don't feel like anyone's getting ahead of me." (3-27-15, Daley Haggar). Josh is indeed reluctant to leave the office before anyone else does, whether because of obsession or paranoia or both, even when Cristela requires some after work privacy to try to improve Maddie's job performance. But he is sympathetic and helpful.

Indeed, Josh is no mere apple polisher. He is good-natured. He has a good sense of humor, and appreciates Cristela's intelligence and humor. Josh is also accepting and encouraging of the success of others, and eminently fair-minded. Uncomfortable with being chosen by Trent as a court intern because she is Latina (Peter Murrieta, 3-27-15), Cristela chides Josh for being delighted for her, "O my God, can you just be a sore loser?" Josh, who suggested that a Latina presence would help an employer being sued for discrimination, conjures up the comforting after-thought that Cristela "won because of something I have no control over. You can't study to be Mexican, can you? I was discriminated against because of the color of my skin, by me."

Like Cristela, Josh has moral scruples. When Cristela is dropped from that case, Josh refuses to take her spot, insisting, "She didn't do anything wrong." Josh will observe (1-9-15, Alonzo and Hench), "Believe it or not, I didn't go to law school so that some day I could...desecrate sacred grounds [by manipulating zoning laws so that a client can demolish an historic church]."

Josh's manhood offers an alternative to Felix's and Culpepper's stylized swagger. Though ambitious and competitive enough, Josh can also be sensitive and understanding. But he is aware that his sensitivity and single-mindedness can isolate him from clients and from his boss,

who calls Josh out for his disinterest in football: "You're all substance over style." (Alonzo with Kevin Hench, 11-7-14). Josh wants Cristela to teach him the basics of sports talk so that he won't look foolish to client Mark Cuban. (Josh is capable, by the way, of giving Cristela some basics of physics when she jokes about it, and knows Broadway plays.)

The theme of manhood was explored nicely in an episode (12-5-14, Julius Sharpe) in which Cristela helps Felix to find work in a difficult off season when Culpepper decides to remodel the firm's offices. Sensing her nervousness regarding family at the workplace, Josh observes, "We're all oversensitive when it comes to our families. They're never as bad as we think." Of course, Felix and employee Alberto, Cristela's cousin with a big crush on her, bond with Culpepper, and all impose menial errands on Cristela.

Amidst all the construction turmoil and family nonsense, Cristela does manage to come up with the best way to prosecute a case. Felix comes to appreciate what she does, and Josh hopes for at least a little credit by association. But when the heavy-set and working class Alberto sees Cristela sharing laughs with Josh, he becomes competitive with the slim white collar Jewish lawyer. "I work with my hands, bro," he boasts. Josh responds with his own boast, "Me, too. Ninety words a minute on the computer," and does reps with folder files. Alberto retorts that he uses his whole, "real" hand, and impresses Josh by recognizing a reference to *Of Mice and Men*.

The implication is that men will compete, but that they are multi-faceted creatures. At times both Alberto and Felix will show great sensitivity to Cristela and to others. The series will make the point that Josh is not the only man who is Josh-like, and that when Josh is being Josh he can do some very nice things for people.

Alonzo's respect and affection for her Josh character was evident in two moving, memorable episodes that she penned. In the Christmas episode (12-12-14) Cristela jokes about inviting Josh to her family's 4:00 a.m. tamale-making ritual to experience their "living, laughing, loving." Taking her seriously, Josh shows up for a Christmas conflict precipitated by Cristela's invitation to her brother Eddie, resented for being Ama's favorite. The family squabbles cause Cristela to joke in frustration, "Tell me about Chanukah." But Josh responds kindly, "I kinda like seeing you outside work. I like seeing how much you like your family to be happy." He gives her helpful insight into how she is like her mother, at least in one good way, in welcoming the floundering Eddie, and on why Ama is attached to some strange

ritual objects. Josh says that Cristela's mom reminds him of his grandmother, that both are "set in their ways, both love tradition."

In another touching episode by Alonso (3-20-15), Ama wants Josh to be Cristela's date to a quinceanera (coming out) party, so that Ma can show off her daughter's "white trophy." When Cristela declines, admitting that she might want to go out with Josh "in the far distant future," Ma threatens to torpedo that possibility if she does not appear with him now. Josh fits in well and even dances creditably. Just by being himself, he enables a rather dysfunctional situation to iron itself out to everyone's benefit. "Don't tell my mom," he says, "but this is way better than a *bar mitzvah*." He adds: "I guess I was the right guy at the right time." In this episode, Alonso managed to make her characters (with the exception of Ama) look good, and most rose to the occasion.

Did the series hint at the inevitability of a budding romance between Josh and Cristela? Josh is treated as a gold – or at least admirable – standard. In the Halloween episode Cristela observes: "If even a guy like Josh goes for one of these [good-looking but superficial women], what chance does a girl like me have?" (10-21-14, Kay Cannon) In an episode about a dating service (10-17-14, Alonso with Kevin Abbott) Josh does observe: "With our schedules we'll only be able to meet people that we work with."

Some of the jokes about Jews required commentary. In the episode just cited, Josh says that he has had ten and twenty year plans that started in junior high school to which he has stuck, culminating in trying his first Supreme Court Case at age 50. Cristela shares a similar plan, adding that she wants to retire at age 65 to run a non-profit to help Latin immigrants. Josh continues, "I was going to say, 'underprivileged Jewish kids.'" Cristela asks: "Is that even a thing?" Maybe it was necessary to say that, unfortunately, in all too many cases, there is.

Despite the likability of this show, or maybe because of it, I was wary of where it would have headed. It did, after all, dismiss tradition as the bailiwick of grandmothers, one very bitter; and suggested that a romance between Josh and Cristela would do wonders for her family and enable him to resolve some of his issues. In the finale, Josh fails the bar exam and Cristela rescues him from returning home by appointing him her assistant until the next exam. That didn't bode well for the depiction of Josh or his family or of his loyalty to Judaism and to Jewish life.

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# Travel

BY HAROLD JACOBSON AND ROSE KLEINER

## Niagara-on-the-Lake Canada Theatre: rest, recreation, music, and wineries

PRINCE OF WALES HOTEL NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONTARIO CANADA – In 1812, the Americans launched a massive invasion of Canada centered on the rich farm lands in the Niagara region of Ontario. Judging from the license plates seen in the area today New York, Ohio, Michigan, Florida, (even California) Maryland and Kentucky there now is a new American invasion.

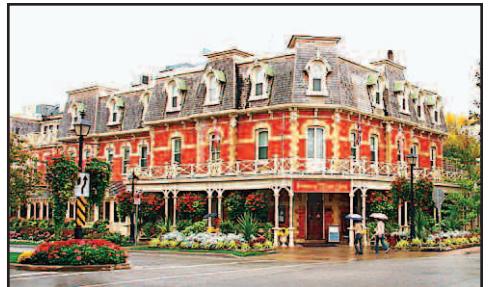
Two centuries later, this is a different kind of invasion bringing Americans to the Niagara region and especially to Niagara-on-the-Lake – hereinafter referred to as (NOTL). A small town it is sui generis for its cultural attractions, architecture, floral beauty, orchards, wineries and the world famous Shaw Festival. A repertory theatre, The Shaw Festival, with four venues which offer a selection of great 19th century and modern plays in addition to George Bernard Shaw's eloquent reconstructions of English society of his day. (It should be noted that Shaw, unlike many of his contemporaries, never expressed intolerance towards minority groups, preferring to target primarily the English aristocracy and its Victorian ways.)

NOTL is unique among small towns in Ontario. In general the latter do not contain hotels of great distinction but NOTL is the exception. Since its founding in the late 19th century and renovated to the most exacting luxury hotel standards today, The Prince of Wales Hotel (pictured above), provides guests with rich mahogany interiors in the public rooms, original oil paintings (the 19th century's Prince of Wales himself is pictured in one), an indoor swimming pool, elegant rooms and suites, ultra modern bathroom and other facilities and amenities – and staff members who are gracious and efficient. High tea is offered in late afternoon in its glass enclosed tea room, which faces a street ablaze in flower bedecked sidewalks.

Most of the guests at the Prince Wales



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. ♦



The Prince of Wales Hotel.

come for the ambience, the comfort, the excellent restaurant facilities and the spa. But mostly The Shaw Festival draws them. This season, which continues through November, has a dazzling array of entertaining vehicles including Neil Simon's *Sweet Charity*, Moss Hart's *Light Up the Sky*, Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, J.M. Barrie's *The Twelve-Pound Look*, and Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*, as well as, the prose predecessor of *My Fair Lady*, *Pygmalion*.

One of the most popular shows is Moss Hart's *Light Up the Sky*, a portrait of the New York City theatre crowd and its cuddling of a young playwright whose reputation is challenged by his play. His supporters desert him until his work is recognized for its truth and originality – whereupon his former boosters return to their previous accolades. Hart is at his best here.

A thematic thread runs through several of the plays this year – the plight of women and their struggle to attain freedom, independence and dignity. Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, set in today's England, presents the dilemma of an accomplished executive manager battling anti-feminist bias (even from women) as she struggles to confront unresolved family problems. A slightly different dilemma is found in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, in which a beleaguered second wife has to contend with two step children, a husband and a former lover who mysteriously turns up to claim his paramour. The resolution of this dilemma proposed by Ibsen is unlike what we find in his other plays.

There is some tension but a lot more comedic flavor in J.M. Barrie's delightful one act play, *The Twelve Pound Look*. The title refers to monetary values rather than weight gain. In this short masterpiece a soon-to-be knighted gentleman hires a secretary to answer his voluminous congratulatory mail. The female secretary-typist who shows up turns out to be his first wife. Their verbal exchanges pivot on the reason for the divorce – which she advances to explain her decision. The twelve English pounds she pays for a new fangled piece of technology – a typewriter – in order to gain her independence, gives the play its curious title and the last line uttered by his

(see Travel, page 18)



# Book Review

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

## Children's book on Genesis

*Retelling Genesis.* By Barry Louis Polisar. Illustrations by Roni Lynn Polisar. Rainbow Morning Music. Silver Spring, Maryland. Pp.32. \$7.95

Author, recording artist, and musician Barry Louis Polisar was born in Brooklyn, and grew up in the Washington DC area. Through the years, his children's books have already made a difference. His contribution to the song "All I Want is You" in the movie *Juno* have made him well-known, and he continues to delight us in his latest literary adventure, *Retelling Genesis*.

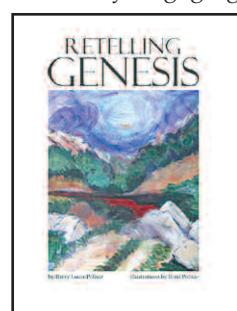
Though slim in size – which can be an asset – it is a thoughtfully sensitive, poetically touching. It is a creatively engaging rendition of 13 famous stories in the Biblical Book of Genesis, the wondrous book of relationships, divine and human. The accompanying colorful and striking illustrations by the author's wife, Roni Lynn Polisar, who grew up in Portsmouth, Va., immeasurably add to the carefully crafted words. This fruitful collaboration by a gifted family team is bound to be an appreciated addition to one's Jewish library as well as a catalyst for much needed conversation among Jews of all ages.

The book's attractive format from within and without reflects well on a religious tradition that bids us to ever probe, renew and enlarge our sacred texts. It enhances the rich Midrashic literature which is the hallmark of the fertile rabbinic mind and heart that searches deep into our people's foundational stories. Barry Polisar's wise choice to have the characters address us in the first person, allows for the reader's immediate, intimate and intertwined encounter in a fresh way with an account that may not be as familiar as in past generations.

This unique collection of timeless and timely lessons for Jews and Gentiles is the proud culmination of the author's own uneven Jewish journey humbly beginning in an uninvolved Jewish home environ-

ment, and gradually moving toward deep immersion in synagogue life and learning. Instructively, the book's project originated in a school assignment for the author and illustrator's daughter, Sierra, who chose to "resurrect" Noah's wife who is absent in the Bible.

The author's following penetrating voice for Noah's wife captures the book's special spirit, "And through it all, I labored on, doing the hard work and never complaining...I cleaned up after those animals, watched the signs and shared the journey with him as we replanted and our sons repopulated the earth. At night I think of all that was lost forever in those dark waters; the memories come flooding back to me in a torrent of tears." The author can be reached at [www.Barrylou.com](http://www.Barrylou.com).



### A clip of history

*Three Minutes in Poland (Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film).* By Glenn Kurtz. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 2014. Pp.415. Hardcover \$33.

It began on July 23, 1938, almost a year before the outbreak of WWII in the European theater, when David and Liza Kurtz from Brooklyn, author Glenn Kurtz's grandparents, boarded the New Amsterdam on a vacation journey with friends to England, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany and Poland. Grandpa David, whom the author never knew, brought along his color 16mm movie camera. Three minutes out of fourteen in the film are from the visit to Nasielsk, Poland, David's hometown, which he had left for the United States 45 years earlier.

No one could predict when the three minutes were shot on Aug. 5, 1938, that the world they captured would so soon face its demise. They fortunately piqued the author's curiosity enough to devote four years of his life to painstakingly explore what those three minutes implied for his family's roots, and a community so cruelly destroyed among many others during the Holocaust.

Glenn Kurtz, who grew up in Roslyn, Long Island, miraculously found the damaged film in an aluminum can in his parents' house in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., in 1999. (The restored film is available now for viewing in the Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. as well as at Poland's Auschwitz Museum and Memorial,

Jewish Pavilion.)

The film is a significant witness of a rare kind to the very life of a small Jewish population of 3,000 out of 7,000 residents. It salvages from the jaws of merciless death, Holocaust deniers and time's forgetfulness, irreplaceable memories of what once was a lively Jewish community only 35 miles northwest of Warsaw, Poland's capital.

On Dec. 3, 1939, unsuspecting Nasielsk's Jews were placed on cattle cars without basic provisions. Following days of inhumane travel they ended up in the Lublin district's towns of Lukow and Miedzyrzec. (This writer's father's family is from that area.) All but 80 were murdered upon arrival in Treblinka in the fall of 1942.

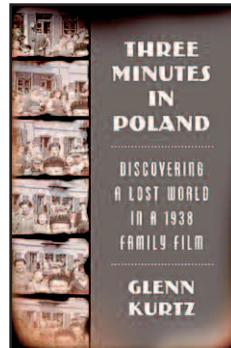
The author's keen and observing eye was intrigued by the film's brief yet rich three minutes of images of people of all ages, fascinated no doubt by the well-groomed visitors from distant America, and the various buildings in the background. He probingly asked himself, "Who are these people? What brought them to be on the street in view of my grandfather's lens, on that day, in that moment? What relation, if any, do they have to my grandparents? And what became of them, each one, individually?"

Glenn Kurtz's own journey of the film's discovery and reconstruction by a faithful grandson – who admits to coming from a non-active though affiliated Jewish family – took him to multiple places and personalities in the United States, Canada, England, Poland and Israel. He dug into archives and left no stone unturned, figuratively as well as literally. By 2012 he found eight living survivors of Nasielsk's one hundred survivors in 1945, and was able to identify twenty of the people in the film.

A key person proved to be 87-year-old Morry Chandler from Boca Raton, Fla., who in the film is 13-year-old Moszik Tuchandler of a prominent family, with DNA testing confirming his relationship to the author's family. Chandler's sharp mind and memory, despite his age and elapsing time, critically assisted the detective-like work with a web of unfolding pertinent relations which the author doggedly pursued. A point of light in much darkness was Morry's protection by Gentiles near Treblinka during the war.

The author movingly shares, "My grandfather's film preserves the few moments of Nasielsk's life that survive. We must be grateful for this precious record which adds nuance to the broad strokes of history, preserving the identities of individuals and the few slender facts about their lives...For the survivors, Nasielsk is preserved only in mourning,

(see Zoberman, page 18)





# My Kosher Kitchen

REVIEWED BY SYBIL KAPLAN

## Recipes for Rosh Hashanah

*Modern Jewish Cooking.* By Leah Koenig. Chronicle Books. 350 pp. \$35 hardcover.

When my husband happened to open the package with this book, he remarked, this one you're going to like! And he was right because when I review a cookbook, the three things that are important to me are anecdotes or stories about each recipe, ingredients in bold or standing out in some way, and directions numbered. *Modern Jewish Cooking* has all of these and more.

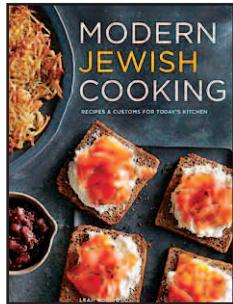
Leah Koenig is a writer and author of *The Hadassah Everyday Cookbook*. When she is not living in Brooklyn, she is traveling around the country leading cooking demonstrations.

Her philosophy is keeping a "loving eye on tradition," infusing history with "a sense of innovation," "making the Jewish kitchen vibrant, exciting and ever evolving." She has written this cookbook "for the next generation of Jewish cooks."

After an introduction on Jewish cuisine and keeping *kosher*, she tells you how to stock your kitchen and some "how tos". Then she dives in with 11 chapters – breakfast, salads and spreads, soups, vegetables, noodles-*matzos*-grains-beans, fish-chicken-meat, vegetarian mains, breads and pastries, cookies-cakes and other sweets, fillings and extras, and holiday essays and menus – 167 recipes. These are enhanced by 57 color photographs and 11 essays.

The subtitle is "Recipes and Customs for Today's Kitchen." This is indicated in the wide variety of origins including: North Africa, Morocco, Spain, Eastern Europe (including Ashkenazi), Ethiopia, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Bukharia, Romania, Egypt, Israel, Sweden, Iraq, Persia and the Mediterranean plus Sephardic.

For example, savory French toast with seared tomatoes and *za'atar* butter; mango ginger *tzimmes*, pumpkin-apple *challah*, sugar citrus gravlax, roasted eggplant and *tahini* crostini. Looking for special *Rosh Hashanah* recipes, I found three.



### Apple and Honey Granola

(6–8 servings)

- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 2 Tbsp. light brown sugar
- 2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 2-1/2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 cup roughly chopped walnuts
- 1/2 cup roughly chopped unsalted almonds
- cup chopped dried apples
- 1/2 cup golden raisins

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a large rimmed cookie sheet with parchment paper. Whisk together the honey, vegetable oil, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger and salt in a small bowl. Combine the oats, walnuts and almonds in a large bowl. Drizzle with the honey mixture and stir to completely coat. Spread the granola on the prepared baking sheet. Bake, stirring occasionally until deep golden brown and tasty smelling, 20–25 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven, add the apples and raisins and stir to combine. Set the baking sheet on a wire rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container for up to one week.

The following recipe is suggested for an Ashkenazic menu.

### Red Wine and Honey Brisket

(Serves 8–10)

- 4–5 pound brisket
- salt and ground black pepper
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 3 large thinly sliced yellow onions
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme
- 8 thinly sliced garlic cloves
- 2 bay leaves
- 1-1/2 cups dry red wine
- 3 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 tsp. onion powder
- tsp. garlic powder
- cup chicken broth

Preheat oven to 325°F. Generously sprinkle both sides of brisket with salt and pepper. Heat vegetable oil in Dutch oven or large pot. Add brisket and cook over medium heat, turning once until browned on both sides, 8–10 minutes total. Remove brisket and set aside. Add onions, thyme, garlic, bay leaves, 1/2 wine and vinegar. Cook until onions soften slightly, about 5 minutes. Whisk together 1 cup wine, honey, onion powder, garlic powder, broth, and 1 tsp. salt in a bowl. If using a Dutch oven, lay brisket atop onions. If using a pot, transfer onion mixture to a roasting pan and top with brisket. Pour wine mixture over the top. Cover tightly with foil and transfer to the oven. Cook

for 2 hours. Remove from oven, uncover and turn meat to other side. Recover and continue cooking 2 to 2-1/2 hours more until meat is fork tender. Remove from oven, transfer to cutting board. Cover with foil and let rest 10–15 minutes. Slice brisket, remove thyme and bay leaves. Remove onions and arrange around brisket. Spoon pan juices over brisket and serve hot.

This following recipe is suggested for a Sephardic menu. Moroccan Jews customarily serve couscous topped with seven vegetables on *Rosh Hashanah* (*Rosh Hashanah* falls on the seventh month of the Jewish calendar).

### Couscous with Winter Squash and Chick Peas

(Serves 6–8)

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 thinly sliced yellow onions
- 4 cored, seeded, chopped ripe plum tomatoes
- 2 finely chopped garlic cloves
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. sweet paprika
- 1/2 tsp. red pepper flakes
- 15 ounces drained chick peas
- 3 cups cubed, peeled butternut squash
- 2 peeled 1/2-inch chunked carrots
- 1/4 cup golden raisins
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2-1/2 cups vegetable broth
- 2-1/2 cups water
- 2 cups couscous
- roughly chopped fresh cilantro or flat leaf parsley

Heat olive oil in saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and cook until lightly browned, 7–10 minutes. Add tomatoes and cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Add garlic, cinnamon, ginger, cumin, coriander, paprika, red pepper flakes and cook 1–2 minutes. Add chickpeas, squash, carrots, raisins, broth and 1 tsp. salt. Turn heat to low, cover and simmer about 15 minutes. Uncover and continue simmering, stirring occasionally until very slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Bring water to boil in saucepan on high heat. Turn off heat and stir in couscous. Cover pan and let stand 5–10 minutes until liquid is absorbed. Uncover couscous and fluff with a fork. Mount couscous onto a large platter. Make a well in the center and fill with vegetables and chickpeas. Spoon generous amount of liquid over couscous and sprinkle with cilantro. Serve immediately.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food and feature writer, and author of nine kosher cookbooks living in Jerusalem. \*

# Redemption Song

By RABBI DAVID WOLPE

A disciple of the Baal Shem Tov yearned to meet Elijah, herald of redemption. The Baal Shem Tov told him it could happen. All he needed to do was to go to the home of a very poor but pious family that lived in the forest, bring them food and wine for *Rosh HaShanah*, eat and pray with them, and at the end of the holiday Elijah would appear.

The *chasid* did as he was told. But at the end of the holiday, Elijah did not arrive. Returning to ask why his request had not been granted, the Baal Shem told him, "It does not happen all at once. Now for each of the 10 days of repentance, bring more food. Then, before *Yom Kippur*, supply them with enough to sustain the family so they can fast. Sit and pray and fast with them, and at *Havdalah* after *Yom Kippur* when you sing to Elijah, you will receive what you wish.

Once more the man did as the Baal Shem instructed; he brought food and fasted and prayed. Yet when *Yom Kippur* ended, Elijah did not appear. He returned dispirited to his teacher. "Why was I not granted a vision?" he asked. "Because," answered the Baal Shem, "it was not important that you see Elijah. It was important that you be Elijah."

All of us have the power to bring hope and help to others in need. We can herald redemption. This year, be Elijah.

*From The New York Jewish Week 10-15-14.*

*Rabbi David Wolpe is spiritual leader of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles. Follow him on Twitter: @RabbiWolpe. His latest book is, David: The Divided Heart.* \*



## RIBNER

(continued from page 9)

In Hebrew, "to sin" means "to miss the mark." In Judaism, human beings are not considered sinful, rather they may think, feel, and do things that are not in keeping with their true nature. This is what is meant by sin. Because sin does not emanate from the true essence of human beings, but rather results from a false identification with our ego, it is easy to relinquish what is not attached to our true essence when we realize who we really are.

Everything on *Yom Kippur* is designed to facilitate this kind of psychological and emotional release which opens us to the clarity of who we really are. Out of our willingness to feel our brokenness and vulnerability, we become stronger and more whole. In essence we are divine holy beings with pure shining loving souls. We simply need to let go of limiting, illusory and false concepts of the self that we have

misidentified as ourselves.

It is a tremendous gift to pray in a congregation on *Yom Kippur* for what we can do together is greater than what we can do alone. To be in the company of people who are strong enough to acknowledge that they are vulnerable and have all made mistakes is a powerful bonding experience. We also receive much more Divine light and grace when we feel responsible for the community than we would as isolated individuals.

*Melinda Ribner L.C.S.W. is also the author of Everyday Kabbalah, Kabbalah Month by Month, New Age Judaism, and The Secret Legacy of Biblical Women: Revealing the Divine Feminine. Internationally known for her pioneering work in kabbalistic meditation and healing, she is also a spiritual psychotherapist and for more than 30 years has used kabbalistic wisdom as part of treatment. She offers a free newsletter on meditation, healing, kabbalistic energies of the months, holidays, and so forth. www.kabbalahoftheheart.com.* \*



## DE KOVEN

(continued from page 11)

to love the world completely, with all my heart and mind and soul. And to fulfill that *mitzvah*, I need to begin with the things and beings I already love so I can learn love from them.

I learn about life from living. I learn from the seasons to celebrate the seasons, from the phases of the moon to celebrate the year, from the sunrise and sunset, the minor miracles of a cool breeze on a clear day, of the rain, and the end of the rain, the change, the variety, the all, the glorious, incomprehensible all of it all.

I learn about love from loving. Forty-nine years with my wife, my primary teacher, and I'm still learning love. Learning to love the children our love brought to us, and the children their love brought to them. Learning that it is impossible to love her so completely without loving everyone that loves her, everyone that she loves, that brings her life, that sustains her, inspires her, appreciates her, helps her find meaning, heals her, makes her whole. Learning what love means. Learning how to bring it into the world. Learning how it can possibly become large enough to embrace all of her, and our children, and theirs, and the communities that sustain them, and the planet that sustains us all.

*Bernie De Koven is the author of The Well-Played Game, A Playful Path and Junkyard Sports. A Playful Path is available at: <http://press/etc.cmu.edu/content/playful-path>. One can also purchase and download the book from <http://aplayfulpath.com> where*

*one can also be entertained and learn more about the author.* \*



## TRAVEL

(continued from page 15)

second wife in this brilliant little denouement ends the play on a high note indeed.

The plangent fate of a luckless girl who works in a dance hall is Neil Simon's story in *Sweet Charity*. A raucous musical which traces her disappointments in love, starts with a cruel boyfriend, continues with a famous movie star and ends with a decent companion she meets on a stalled elevator. Each of these events is backed up by Cy Coleman's music which reflects wonderfully the torrid pace of New York City life.

Of George Bernard Shaw's two plays at the Festival this year, *You Never Can Tell* is a complicated tale of divorce, reunions and female empowerment, wrapped up in his unparalleled comedic style.

But the surprise this season is his *Pygmalion*, an admirable juiced up version of Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins dueling over the mastery of proper English pronunciation in the midst of 21st century electronic technology including smart phones, iPads, wrap around television monitors and other communication devices. Interestingly these modern tools enhance the efforts of Professor Higgins to transform his "guttersnipe" into a perfect lady!

For tickets and accommodations see the Shaw Festival website: [shawfest.com](http://shawfest.com). \*



## ZOBERMAN

(continued from page 16)

in the immediacy of their grief."

*Rabbi Israel Zoberman is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach. He is the son of Polish Holocaust survivors.* \*



## KAPLAN/ISRAEL

(continued from page 20)

*Answer:* "It is vanishing, close to zero. As long as Hamas is in power in Gaza, it is not on the table....Ramallah should cooperate with Israel against mutual enemies because none of the parties to the conflict really want it."

Two issues Israel should be emphasizing: "the non-Arab peoples in the region, including the people of Israel; and the Jewish communities from the Middle East who were driven out, expelled from all of these countries."

*Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, food writer, lecturer and cookbook author. Submitted July 24, 2015.* \*

# In Israel, the siren you have to worry about is the one you haven't heard yet.



Last summer, no one was expecting Operation Protective Edge. But when rockets started flying, Magen David Adom paramedics were ready to rescue injured Israelis every day thanks to donors like you. As we welcome the new year with reports of continued sporadic rocket fire, we don't know when the next major attack will come, but we do know now is the time to prepare.

Help provide MDA with medical supplies for the next emergency and make a gift today.  
Thank you and *shanah tovah*.

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# Seen on the Israel Scene

By SYBIL KAPLAN

PHOTOS BY BARRY A. KAPLAN

## The war in Iraq and Syria and its significance for Israel and the region

London-born Dr. Jonathan Spyer came to Israel 24 years ago. He is director of the Rubin Center for Research in International Affairs at the IDC Herzliya and editor of the *Middle East Review of International Affairs*. He is a regular contributor to a number of publications, guest analyst and author of *Nationalism in the Middle East* and *The Transforming Fire: The Rise of the Israel-Islamist Conflict*.

Honest Reporting was launched in 2000 as a grassroots network of citizen activists to respond to media bias and promote professional and accurate reporting on Israel.

Recently, they sponsored an evening to hear Dr. Jonathan Spyer. He began his talk stating, "the Middle East is undergoing a process of profound change since 2011....the removal of dictatorships has led to the effective collapse of states, specifically Arab states which lacked strong national identity and lacked strong national institutions."

While a revolution brought down Egypt, this led to a return to a military dictatorship. In Tunisia, after the dictatorship, there emerged a new government and survival of the state. In Lebanon, the state institutions are occupied by the Hezbollah. The countries which collapsed are Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya; as a result of their collapse, war among the region is taking place.

In 2012, the Assad regime in Syria decided to pull back from the north and east to a new defensive line, resulting in a partition of Syria. The Sunni rebels created an Islamic state when Syria left. The separation continues and a major eruption between Syria and Iraq occurred which resulted in the main cities of Iraq being taken by June 2014.

"The conflict is raging today, leaving Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Libya was invaded leaving two separate governments; in Yemen, the fighting is going on and the government has effectively collapsed."

In his analysis, Dr. Spyer included the Palestinian Authority where there is division between Hamas and the Gaza Strip and Fatah and the West Bank with

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Dr. Jonathan Spyer.

"no sign of the two reuniting." The collapse of these states is defined by the hegemonic ambitions of Syria; the growing attempt by the Sunni to resist this; and the desire of the US to withdraw from close and active involvement in Middle Eastern affairs.

The Iranian-led bloc is the easiest one to discern; the purpose of which is the proxy para-military forces, a cadre of men whose main purpose is spreading of the Islamic revolution since 1979. The Iranian side of the line is the most coherent, well organized, and centralized. The Assad regime is a clear client of the Iranians. A shortage of men caused the split in 2012; it was saved by the creation of a new force, the revolutionary guard.

In Iraq, the Shiite militias hold the power, while proxy military forces are in control.

Yemen is a direct client of the Iranians; the Palestinian Jihad is also a direct client of the Iranians. Thus, the Iranian proxies and clients are in control of the four already mentioned capitals.

The US is committed to the destruction of the Islamic State, but it is nowhere near being destroyed. The current US administration is seeking rapprochement with former enemies and a piecemeal strategy in the area.

### Good or Bad for Israel?

From an Israeli point of view, it is not all bad. There has been the collapse of powerful old enemies, two large conventional enemies facing Israel – Syria Arab and Iraq republic. Neither really exists any more. The new challenges are Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon which is dangerous and the Iranian nuclear deal which is also worrisome.

Israel is faced with a series of tasks: building fences along its borders, metaphorically and physically – with Egypt, Syria and Jordan; and making new friends" such as United Arab Emirates, Egypt, the Kurdish state, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

### Question: Should Israel reach out to the Druze in Syria?

**Answer:** "It is a "fringe idea, not properly thought out," because they are scattered; the population is not large enough. Even if a Druze state were to be formed, it wouldn't be any use to Israel because of no border with Israel. The Jordanians should be creating it because there is a border. The Druze in Syria are largely loyal to the Assad regime and the Sunni Arab rebels are hostile to the Druze.

### Question: How does the current US president view the Middle East situation?

**Answer:** "He has alienated his friends and his enemies have been the focus of his attention."

### Question: What should the current Israeli government do about the present situation in the Middle East?

**Answer:** "They should look for those who wish to be America's friends, work with them and build with them," for example, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and the Kurds, who all feel America doesn't particularly want their friendship. With regard to Syria and Iraq, "I don't think they are our allies; we shouldn't have an interest in the victory of either."

### Question: What about the two-state solution idea?

(see Kaplan/Israel, page 18)