

american

\$3.95
Winter 2005

JEWISH SPIRIT

Special Chanukah Issue

Being Jewish in America

A Look at Campus,
Sports and
Entertainment

8 Gifts of Value
to **Give Your**
Children

The Hiddur Mitzvah
Project: Art that
Makes a Difference

A New Celebration:
Jewish Unity Live!

inspired living
www.ajspirit.com



The Direct Line for **ALL**

- ☞ Tefillin
- ☞ Mezuzos
- ☞ Sifrei Torah
- ☞ Mantels
- ☞ Paroches
- ☞ Silver Torah Ornaments
- ☞ Books

We Specialize in
Sefer Torah
Fund-raising
Campaigns

View our
catalog online at:
www.tiferes.com



1664 Coney Island Ave.
800-45-TORAH

your Judaica Needs



ALL YOUR SIMCHA NEEDS:

- Custom Ketubot
- Bentchers
- Kippot
- Talit / Tefillin Bags
- Unique Silver Gifts



Brooklyn, New York

www.tiferes.com



When I was a little girl, my mom always asked me before Chanukah if I wanted 1 big gift, 4 medium presents or 8 little toys. We lit the menorah and I focused on my presents. Some years, Chanukah was in late December, coinciding with December 25th and blurring the distinction between Christmas and Chanukah. We'd decorate the house with blue ribbons and a Chanukah bush laden with candies. I was excited and grateful for the fun ideas my mom would prepare. I had some idea that we lit candles for 8 days because oil lasted eight days a long time ago - and, for some reason, we now get presents because of that. Some years I chose 4 medium sized presents but most years I chose 8 little ones!

Today, I'm blessed with three beautiful young children of my own, with number four due during Chanukah. This year, my kid's winter break is during Chanukah and my husband's company shuts down at this time as well, so we'll all be home together.

We begin our preparations for Chanukah on Rosh Chodesh Kislev, the first of the Jewish month. We search the house looking for Chanukah items and decorations we've accumulated from previous years. I guess this comes from my mom's blue ribbons around the house but it's also the little bit of Martha Stewart in me that likes to make the home "Chanukah-ish."

When Chanukah arrives, we set a table in the front window with each of our personal menorahs. My husband and I share his mothers, my eldest daughter Raina uses a menorah that was a gift from *my* mother, my son Rory's uses one he got for Chanukah last year and my 2-year old Henna will now use her great grandmother's menorah. Each of us light candles and recites the blessings. It's a beautiful sight to see all the menorahs in the window.

Next, we round up dreidels and scatter them around the house on book shelves and window sills. We hang a cloth menorah in the kitchen and display blue and white hand towels in the bathroom. The kids have saved school Chanukah projects over the years and we pin them to the kitchen bulletin board. And yes, we even tie little blue satin ribbons I have from my mom on some lamps and door knobs.

Finally, and most important to all our Chanukah preparations, my kids run through the bedrooms and the family room to find all our Chanukah books - including *Winnie the Poob and the Hanukkah Dreidel*, *Melly's Menorah* and many more. For us, the books are the centerpiece of Chanukah.

My children each have different understandings of Chanukah. My two-year-old knows the symbols of the Menorah, dreidel and candles. My four-year-old son knows about the Maccabees who fought the Greeks and he watches the Jewish superheroes in the Sherry Lewis Chanukah video. But my eight-year-old already knows about Chanukah's deeper meaning. She knows about Hannah and her 7 sons being summoned by the Greek King and choosing to die rather than give up being Jewish. She knows the Greeks tried to take away our Jewish mitzvahs of bris milah, Shabbat and Jewish holidays. I'm inspired by my children's appreciation of Chanukah.

I'm blessed to be surrounded by my three little Jewish neshamas who understand and appreciate Chanukah's light and beauty so much. As for presents - maybe this year I'll ask if they want 1 big gift, 4 medium presents or 8 little ones. Have a beautiful Chanukah.

Robin Davina Meyerson
rmeyerson@ajpsirit.com

Robin is the author of *A Son Returns; True Stories of Serendipity and Divine Intervention*, available at 1.888.280.7715.

What's in a Box?



If it's a Yad Eliezer box...

Rice, pasta, baby formula, crackers, pretzels, sugar, flour, oil –
Enough food to supply a family with much of their basic needs for a full month.

Yad Eliezer was founded on the premise that no Jew in Israel should ever have to go hungry. Today, we have become the largest anti-hunger agency in Israel. Each month, we provide boxes – filled with nourishing food – for over 9,000 families throughout the country.

But thousands more parents in Israel worry about what to feed their children each day.



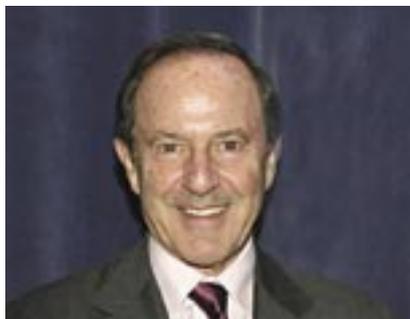
As Chanukah approaches, all that stands between these hungry families and an empty Yom Tov table is the Yad Eliezer box.

This box of Yom Tov essentials costs only \$40. Ten boxes cost just \$400. Every dollar you give will go directly to filling another box. Your contribution will onve more hungry family a holiday filled with joy. ***Make your contribution today.***

American Friends of Yad Eliezer is a tax-deductible organization registered within the United States.

Please send your contribution to: American Friends of Yad Eliezer – 1102 East 26th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11210 • Tel: 718-258-1580 • www.yadeliezer.org

features



12 Inspired People

Mortimer Zuckerman is one of the most recognized names in Jewish leadership. This year, he launches a project of inspiration, celebration and Jewish unity.



28 What a Beautiful Mitzva! The Hiddur Mitzva Project *by Gaby Friedman*

Gary Rosenthal, a Judaica artist, adds a whole new dimension of beauty to his art - using it to create community across time and oceans, to educate and inspire and to give passionately.



33 Cover Feature: Being Jewish in America *by AJS Staff*

The Maccabees fought to protect Jewish culture as well as Jewish religion, for the two go hand-in-hand. In this special feature, we explore how the three legacies of the Greeks - Philosophy, Sports and Entertainment - influence us today.



42 Our People: Jewish Unity Live: A New Celebration *by AJS Staff*

After a memorable, star-filled night in March, 2005, the Jewish Unity Live celebration looks to 2006 and launches a revolutionary program to share the joy of Jewish learning and the power of Jewish togetherness with every Jew.



46 A Jewish Child on Christmas *by Sarah Shapiro*

Growing up in an assimilated home in Connecticut, the author cherished her family's December 25th celebrations... for a while. As her childhood progressed, it came to feel more and more wrong. As a young adult, she finally discovered the beauties of her own heritage.

JEWISH SPIRIT is published quarterly for \$14.95 per year by Phoenix Community Kollel, 6516 N. 7th St, Suite 104, Phoenix, AZ 85014. December 2005 - Volume 1, Issue 3. Application to mail at periodical postage rates is pending at Phoenix, AZ and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Jewish Spirit Media, PO Box 16051, Phoenix, AZ 85011-6051.

16 Wisdom from the Torah

Eight Gifts of Value to Give Your Children This Chanukah
by Lori Palatnik

The word *Chanukah* is related to the word *Chinuch*, which means raising children. The best gifts we can give our children are those that will serve them, and their children, forever.



20

52 Small Miracles

Miracle at the Wall
by Yitza Halberstam and
Judith Levinthal

The unbelievable story of two very different single women searching for their mates whose paths cross during a summer in Jerusalem....

20 Jewish Family Corner

A Parent's Guide to Chanukah
by Doron Kornbluth

Don't miss these great insights and ideas to make this Chanukah uplifting and memorable for your entire family.



40

24 Know Thyself

Let's Go To The Video!
by Yaakov Salomon, MSW

Thoughts about the highlights of sporting events provide an opportunity to consider the great moments of our own lives we want to be known for.

40 Candle Lighting

Everything you need to know to follow the traditions for a beautiful and meaningful Chanukah evening of candle lighting.

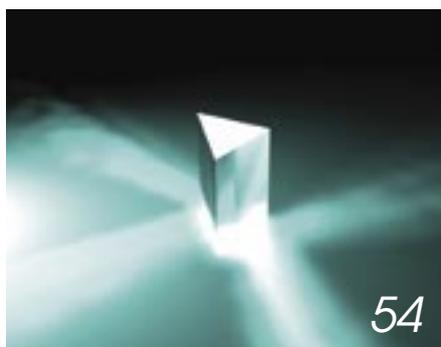


50

50 Food

Kosher by Design - Kids in the Kitchen

Susie Fishbein has done it again! Her latest book is called Kids in the Kitchen. It is sure to inspire a whole generation of kids to the excitement of creating the colorful and delectable dishes that have made her famous.



54

56 Book Review

Gateway to Judaism: The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life

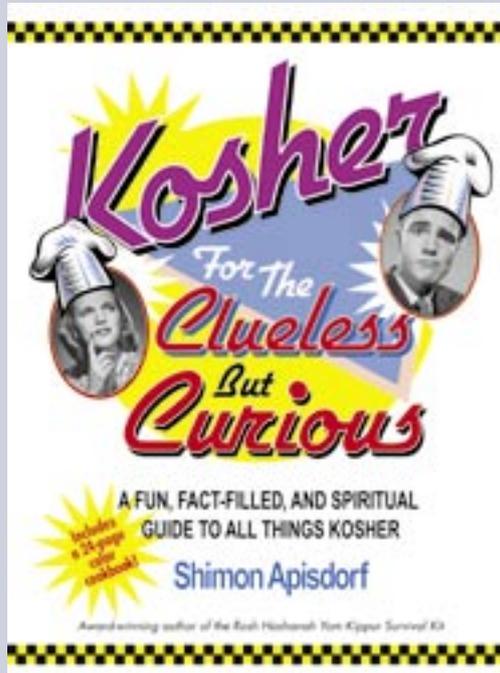
A new book about Judaism appeals to the intellect, cultivates the spirit, anchors meaningfully to the past, and conveys a compelling burden of proof to inquisitive skeptics.

64 From The Editor

The Hero of My Life

There is a symbolism in the candles of the Menorah about the Jewish idea of having, and being, a hero.

Clueless but Curious about Kosher?



Fortunately, this new book is not called, “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Kosher” or “Kosher for Dummies.” We here at *American Jewish Spirit* don’t like to learn from people who call us names. We’re much more comfortable identifying someone as “Clueless but Curious,” award-winning author Shimon Apisdorf’s variation on those nasty titles. His new book, the second in the “Clueless but Curious” series (after the Bible), tackles the entire subject of “Kosher.”

Kosher foods, cooking, and dietary laws are perhaps the most widely known yet least understood areas of Judaism and Jewish life. There are kosher food stands sprouting up in baseball and football stadiums across the Major Leagues and the NFL, and, aided by a huge demand for kosher food products coming from consumers like Muslims, Vegans, Seventh Day

Adventists and people with Lactose intolerance, the kosher food business has mushroomed into a multi-billion dollar industry. Yet, there has never been a comprehensive book about kosher that speaks to people of all backgrounds and interests.

This book covers everything from a glossary of all kosher terms, to a step-by-step guide for people who want to kosher their home, to a clear presentation about the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of kosher. For people who want to get a behind-the-scenes look at how kosher supervision at a factory works, it’s in this book. Want to know how to host a kosher Super Bowl party? It’s there. Curious about the history of kosher in America? It’s right there - from kosher meat in 1782, to matzah in the Civil War to kosher food on the space shuttle. And, for those with an interest in kabbala, that’s there too. A section titled *Mystical Munchies* is a fascinating exploration of the relationship between food and the deepest ideas of Jewish mysticism.

Simply put, this wonderful volume is a fun, easy-to-read, and inspiring answer to the question: What is kosher all about? All the basic questions are answered and more. In *Kosher For The clueless But Curious* we discover that kosher

isn’t only about meat and milk. Kosher is also a discipline brimming with insights designed to promote Jewish spirituality.

The chapter, titled, “I’ll Have the Texas-Style Burger Without the Bacon” includes a six-tiered, one-step-at-a-time approach to kosher.

There is an entire chapter for people who are thinking about keeping kosher. The chapter, titled, “I’ll Have the Texas-Style Burger *Without* the Bacon” includes a six-tiered one-step-at-a-time approach to kosher. The chapter gives the novice who has just begun to dabble in kosher guidance on how to get his or her “feet wet” and also presents a clear map for someone who has decided that kosher is for them.

Another highlight of *Kosher for the Clueless but Curious* is a stunning 24-page full-color cookbook featuring recipes from two world-class chefs—Susie Fishbein, author of the bestselling *Kosher by Design* cookbook series, and Scott Sunshine, a veteran chef of the gourmet cooking industry. This cookbook dispels the myth that kosher places a limitation on cooking creativity.

One of the refreshing elements in the book is the use of quirky icons that put sound bytes of information at the reader's fingertips.

These include:



• **Myths and Facts:** There are a lot of myths floating around about kosher. Whenever this icon appears, it means that one of those myths is about to be clarified. Each "myth & fact" moves you one step closer to becoming the neighborhood kosher expert.



• **It's the Law:** This icon introduces many of the basic kosher laws and provides brief explanations about how they are applied in the real world.



• **Soul Food** Most people who think about kosher think about food, food, and more food. In reality, while kosher is about food, it's not all about food. Kosher is very much about the soul. This icon presents short insights into the deeper realm of kosher.



• **I'd Better Ask:** When it comes to the practical application of kosher laws, there are instances where there is a range of scholarly rabbinic opinion on precisely how to apply certain laws. This can be confusing, particularly for the novice. This icon alerts you to prominent examples of such laws and encourages you to seek the guidance of a rabbi to help you navigate your way.



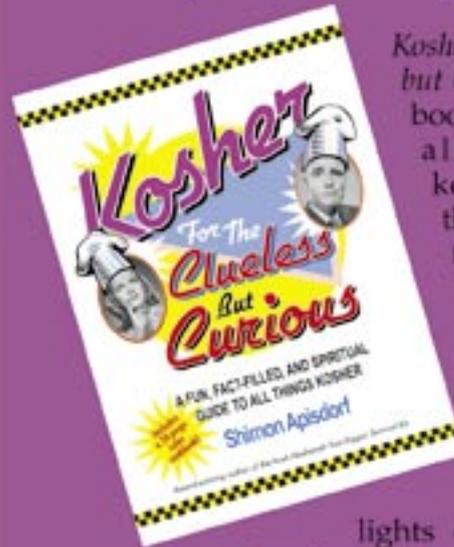
• **That's Not Kosher:** There is a lot of confusion in the world about whether or not certain foods are kosher. This icon briefly explains why some foods that people may think are kosher are not.

NEW FROM LEVIATHAN PRESS

Kosher For The Clueless But Curious

A FUN, FACT-FILLED, & SPIRITUAL
GUIDE TO ALL THINGS KOSHER

by Shimon Apisdorf



Kosher for the Clueless but Curious is the first book to ever present all aspects of kosher—including the kitchen sink—to readers who are filled with curiosity but are hungry for easy-to-understand information.

One of the highlights of the book is a stunning 24-page cookbook featuring recipes from two world-class chefs—Susie Fishbein, author of the bestselling *Kosher by Design* cookbook series, and Scott Sunshine, a veteran chef of the gourmet cooking industry. This cookbook dispels the myth that kosher places a limitation on cooking creativity.



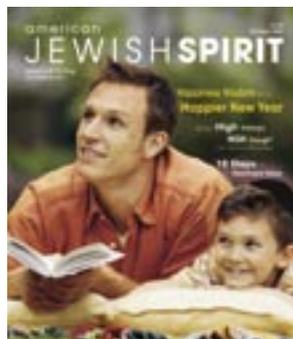
leviathan press
wisdom for the mind, inspiration for the soul™

ORDER NOW!

(410) 653-0300 • orders@leviathanpress.com
www.kosherforthecluelessbutcurious.com

Chanukah Gift Special

Subscribe for \$14.95 (4 issues) before the end of Chanukah and send a gift subscription to a friend for just \$5.95!



Topics include:

- Inspired People
- Holidays and Customs
- Inspirational Stories from Jerusalem
- Wisdom from The Torah
- Jewish Family Corner
- Personal Relationships
- Food by Suzie Fishbein
- And So Much More!

Subscribe by phone at **1-800-289-3732** or online at **www.ajspirit.com**

14 regional issues to choose from!

american JEWISH SPIRIT

Jewish Spirit Media
6516 N 7th St, Suite 201,
Phoenix, AZ 85014
Phone 1-800-289-3732
www.ajspirit.com

Publisher: Robin Davina Meyerson
rmeyerson@ajspirit.com

Editor: Rabbi Dovid Goldman
editor@ajspirit.com

CFO: David Smilovic

Art Direction & Design: Black Spur Design
623-546-3203

Copy Editor: Bayla Neuwirth

Subscription information: Subscriptions are \$14.95 (US), US\$18.95 (Canada) and \$21.95 (International) for one year (four issues).

To subscribe by phone, call 800-289-3732.

To subscribe by mail, send check or money order to:

Jewish Spirit Media

PO Box 16051

Phoenix, AZ 85011-6051

or subscribe online at **www.ajspirit.com**

Retail Bookstore Distribution: Feldheim Publishers
800-237-7149

American Jewish Spirit is published quarterly by Phoenix Community Kollel.

Regional editions are available in over a dozen regions nationwide. Visit www.ajspirit.com for current list or call 800-289-3732.

Send address changes to PO Box 16051, Phoenix, AZ 85011-6051 attention: circulation.

Address letters to the editor to:

Letters to the Editor, Jewish Spirit Media, PO Box 16051, Phoenix, AZ 85011-6051 or via email to editor@ajspirit.com. Please include your full postal address. The editor reserves the right to edit letters as appropriate. Priority will be given to brief letters that relate to articles in the magazine.

Copyright 2004, by Jewish Spirit Media. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part, in any form. No part of this publication may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without permission of the publisher.

Coming next issue...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please Send Us Your Thoughts!

Beginning with our next issue, Passover 2006, we are planning a "letters to the editor" section.

We look forward to including your thoughts about the articles we offer you and how they may have inspired or enlightened you.

Visit us online at

www.ajspirit.com

You Can Also
Mail Your Letter to the Editor to
Editor: Jewish Spirit Media
PO Box 16051
Phoenix, AZ 85011-6051
Or
Send us an Email at
editor@ajspirit.com

Please keep your letters to 50-100 words.
Letters may be edited for style or length.
Please be sure to include your city and state.
Letters become the property of Jewish Spirit Media.

SHOPINISRAEL.COM

A NON-PROFIT SITE
WITH DIRECT ACCESS
TO HUNDREDS OF MERCHANTS
AND MANUFACTURERS OFFERING
THOUSANDS OF THE FINEST QUALITY
ISRAELI PRODUCTS,
SERVICES AND ART
FROM THE LAND THAT
FLOWS WITH MILK AND HONEY...



The Old City Cafe **CONVENIENT FAMILY MEALS!**

Variety Pizzas • Pizza Slices • Burritos • Pizza Bagels
Authentic Cheese Enchiladas • Macaroni & Cheese

Upscale Foods Inc. offers a naturally delicious line of high quality products from
The Old City Cafe

All of our products are Cholov Yisroel Dairy, Glatt Meat, or Parve under the strictest of Kosher standards.



Visit Us On The Web!
www.OldCityCafe.us

Retail • Food Service • Private Label

UPSCALE FOODS INC. Fax. 763-533-0524
4630 Quebec Avenue N. Tel. 763-533-0521
New Hope, MN 55428 www.OldCityCafe.us



ASK FOR THESE GREAT PRODUCTS AT YOUR LOCAL SUPERMARKET!

Traveling to Israel?
Take an Amigo with you.

 Cell Phone  Walkie Talkie  Internet

PERFECT FOR VACATIONS, BUSINESS TRIPS AND SOLIDARITY MISSIONS!
SPECIAL STUDENT AND TOURIST RATES

ONLY 99¢ A DAY
INCLUDES FREE WALKIE-TALKIE & INSURANCE

The only cellphone with **Push-to-Talk™** "instant talk" (similar to Nextel).
Convenient pickup and dropoff locations.
Overnight delivery available.

1-888-AMIGO-US
www.amigo-us.com



amigo
Authorized Distributor U.S.

© 2005 CMG International, Ltd. Ganz/Gross Adv. - NY
Winter 2005 | www.ajspirit.com



The Olive Wars

A Surprising Symbol of the Chanukah Conflict

Olive oil is not as popular today for the Chanukah Menorah as candles are, but the olive and its oil stand as surprisingly expressive symbols of the contrast between the Greeks and the Jews that led our people to war.

The olive was prominently celebrated by both peoples. The Torah describes the Land of Israel not only as “flowing with milk and honey” but also as a “land of olive oil and honey.” It was exclusively olive oil that was permitted for lighting the Temple Menorah each night in Jerusalem - and for use in others areas of the Temple service as well. The olive is also famously used as a measure: if one eats an amount of food equal to the size of an olive, a blessing is required afterwards.

Greek mythology had a special place reserved for the olive as well. The city of Athens was named for the goddess Athena who supposedly brought the olive to the Greeks as a gift. According to their story, Zeus had promised to give Attica to the god or goddess who made the most

useful invention. The finalists were Athena’s gift of the olive and Poseidon’s horse. The olive won since its usefulness for light, heat, food, medicine and perfume was a more peaceful invention than Poseidon’s horse - touted as a rapid and powerful instrument of war. Athena was believed to have planted the original olive tree on a rocky hill which we know today as the Acropolis.

For the Greeks, the olive served as the symbol of victory; their winners were crowned not with gold medals but with a wreath of wild olive. According to historian Will Durant, this was “the only prize given at the Olympic Games, and yet it was the most eagerly contested distinction in Greece.” The Greeks celebrated victory in competition and somehow found in the olive – especially its leaf – an appropriate symbol.

According to the Talmud,
the Jew is compared to
the olive.

The Jew also noted this symbolism. In the Book of Hoshea, one of the later prophets, G-d promises Israel that “his glory shall be as the olive tree.”

But there is a remarkable contrast between the emphasis of the Jew and that of the Greek. The Jews appreciated the oil – the hidden, inner value of the olive. The oil was the symbol of wisdom – a regular diet of olive oil was even said to aid memory, especially of Torah knowledge. The olive itself, however, was not recommended as food. Even the olive-size measure of food did not refer to just any olive; it referred specifically to the size of the olive grown for its oil (known as the “Agurei Olive”). The Talmud teaches that the Jew is compared to the olive because just as effort is required to draw out the inner value of the olive, it is required to draw out the inner-value of the Jew.

The olive leaves worn by Greek victors, however, are already exposed. The Greeks celebrated in competition the development of physical qualities that were already present. The Jews celebrated especially the light hidden in the heart of man.



In Jerusalem today you will find the Mount of Olives, which dates back at least to those years of conflict with Greece. And across the world are Jewish families, still lighting olive oil in their Menorahs to preserve this age-old value.

A Full Line of Kosher Vitamins & Nutritional Products

LIVE WELL, CHOOSE WISELY, TRUST FREEDA

Freeda Vitamins are also:

- Vegetarian • Sugar Free
- Yeast Free • Strictly Kosher
- Free of Artificial Colors
- Free of Artificial Flavors

FREEDA VITAMINS

36 East 41st Street / New York, NY 10017

TEL. 800-777-3737 / FAX 212-685-7297



Call for a free catalog.

www.freedavitamins.com



inspired people

12

to

an interview with

mortimer zuckerman

publisher & editor of US News and World Report



Mortimer Zuckerman is Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of U.S. News & World Report and is the Chairman and co-publisher of the New York Daily News. He served until recently as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and continues to serve as a trustee for New York University, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute, and the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. He is a member of the Harvard Medical School Board of Visitors, the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. We met with Mr. Zuckerman at his office earlier this year to talk about Jewish learning and Jewish unity.

American Jewish Spirit: As chairman of Jewish Unity Live, a celebration of Jewish learning and its role in maintaining Jewish unity, tell us about the relevance of learning in your life and what does it mean to you when you engage in it?

Mortimer Zuckerman: When you ask me about learning you're asking me about my entire life because there is nothing that I do in my life that I enjoy more than learning. It is not limited to Jewish learning, I must say. I write editorials every week and I have to sit down and learn about a different subject. And for me that is the joy of what I do. It is sometimes not easy

do that, you have to read an awful lot but once you get through the reading and understand a subject and have learned about a new subject it is about as satisfying as anything that I do or have done. It has been the central part of my life from the time I was able to read.

My identity with the Jewish community and with Israel is an absolutely uncontrollable passion of my life so, of course, I find that the ability to merge the love of learning with Jewish learning is a unique opportunity for me. So learning in this sense is the absolute core of my life - other than being a father.

AJS: Historically, what do you believe learning has meant to the Jewish people?

MZ: You have to ask yourself, how is it that the Jewish community has survived? As the *only* community that survived through the ages? I would argue that a great part of this is based on a simple foundation and it *is* Jewish learning. I mean this in several ways - it is because the Jewish community has always respected learning and especially Jewish learning that has enabled the yeshiva scholar and the scholar in general to be considered so important within the Jewish community.

Jewish learning has given the Jewish community such a sense of pride and connection to the Jewish people and the tradition that I think it has provided one of the great strengths that has enabled us to survive for the last several thousand years despite the most incredible opposition and discrimination against the Jewish community and the Jewish world.

There is another thing I think has helped the Jewish community flourish in whatever community has been given the opportunity to do so for a generation or two. The Jewish community has always been revitalized by the fact that there has been so much respect for learning and for a scholar that the great Yeshiva scholar, for example, has always been at the very

highest echelons in status and respect within the Jewish community. So you have had the regeneration and rejuvenation and the reenergizing of the Jewish community by the constant influx of talent.

As we have moved in the last hundred or hundred and fifty years into a world of knowledge and information, it has provided once again a new opportunity for the Jewish community to flourish. You see how this has worked out in the countries where it has had a chance. I'll just pick two: the United States, which has become an incredible platform for Jewish talent and Jewish intelligence and Jewish commitment and Jewish contributions to the society, and Israel itself. What has taken place in Israel is almost miraculous - that they have been able to build a society of that robustness and energy and strength in such a short period of time is an absolute tribute to the intellectual and moral strength of the Jewish world.

AJS: Tell us some more about Jewish Unity Live.

MZ: Jewish Unity Live is an occasion to celebrate Jewish study and the study of the Torah in whatever form it takes. Why is this important? Because in some ways this is at the core of what the Jewish community is about and has been about. We are living in a time today when the survival of the Jewish community - as a flourishing community - is being threatened once again in various parts of the world. It is critical that we find the elements that

It is critical that we find the elements that bind us together and give us whatever strengths we can have as a unified community. Nothing is more important in this regard than the study of the Jewish vision and the Jewish religion and the study of the Torah.

bind us together and give us whatever strengths we can have as a unified community. Nothing is more important in this regard than the study of the Jewish vision and the Jewish religion and the study of the Torah.

I myself have taken time out from whatever I've been doing in order to try and immerse myself more and more in the understanding and the wisdom that comes from that study. It is a true privilege to have the opportunity to really merge that wisdom and learning with our day-to-day lives. And so I want to say to everyone to just join in this in any way you can and above all to remain committed to the Jewish community and the unity of the Jewish community as it faces unprecedented challenges going forward.

13

Your **NEW** Friend in the Diamond Business!

Classic
3 Diamond Pendants
Your choice of style
1/4ct \$ 239
1/2ct \$ 499
1ct \$ 1399

Contemporary
Circle Pendants
Your choice of style
1/4ct \$ 159
1/2ct \$ 379
1ct \$ 699

Bold Looking
Diamond Studs
Choice of White or Yellow Gold
1/4ct \$ 149
1/2ct \$ 399
1ct \$ 1499

White and Fiery!

For an Additional **10% DISCOUNT**
Enter promo code: **ajspirit**
during checkout

- Free Shipping
- Guaranteed Chance of Delivery
- 30 Day Money Back Guarantee

ORDER NOW !
www.superjeweler.com/ajspirit

SuperJeweler®
Really nice jewelry Really low prices
Toll Free (877) 888-0175

The poet was once asked if your house was on fire and you could save one thing what would you save? And the poet answered, why I would save the fire. For without the fire we are nothing.

The fire for the Jewish people is the Jewish tradition, Jewish history, Jewish memory, Jewish religion and the things that bind Jews together and have for several thousand years. That, to me, is what we must preserve at all costs. It is a great tradition – and great intellectual tradition, a great religious tradition, a great moral tradition and a great tradition of achievement and without that centerpiece of faith and community we will not be able to do what we should do as a people. And so I am a great believer in saving that fire.

- Mortimer Zuckerman

A day like this is really a symbol – it is a way of expressing in symbolic terms a very important idea which is Jewish unity - a Jewish unity that is connected to the Jewish tradition and the Jewish faith. Why is this important? Why has it always been important? And it is as important today as it has ever been and that is because this is the keystone to Jewish survival - not just in minimal terms but survival as a thriving community in the world.

That freedom is not something that is just given - it is earned, it is fought for. Particularly now for Israel which has to fight for its existence almost on a day-to-day basis, but the Jewish community itself, as we see from the explosion of anti-Semitism in Europe, can never take this freedom for granted and can never lose the strength that comes out of the unity of the Jewish people. So if this is day that brings people back to that concept of how important Jewish unity and Jewish community is then it is worth every bit of it.

AJS: When you sit down with a text or a rabbi, can you describe the emotion, the feeling, the satisfaction? Can you put into words what you come away with that is so different from the everyday world and success in business?

MZ: I have had a passion for the Jewish community all of my life - something which I have to tell you I don't fully understand. It's just there and is something over which I have no control and so I am committed to it in the most fundamental terms. Every time I learn something about Jewish history and Jewish tradition it just adds another layer to this commitment that I feel to the welfare of the Jewish community and of Israel.

And of course religion and the understanding of what the Jewish faith implies is just a wonderful part of that. The more I know about it the stronger I feel about this commitment and the more I understand what its original source is. This faith – this intellectual as well as religious faith, because it is a combination of the two - is an absolutely magnificent source, a wellspring of why it is the Jewish community has survived and *should* survive and flourish. So for me, to get more and more of an understanding of that is just a special joy and an enormous satisfaction and just is something that makes me feel that I'm learning more and more about why this is such a wonderful and unique community.

AJS: You had the opportunity recently to visit the Lakewood Yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey. Can you tell us what that was like?

MZ: It was at the behest of a rabbi I study with that I went and visited the Lakewood Yeshiva. I had never been to a yeshiva before in my life and I sort of did this out of some degree of curiosity but more out of a

14



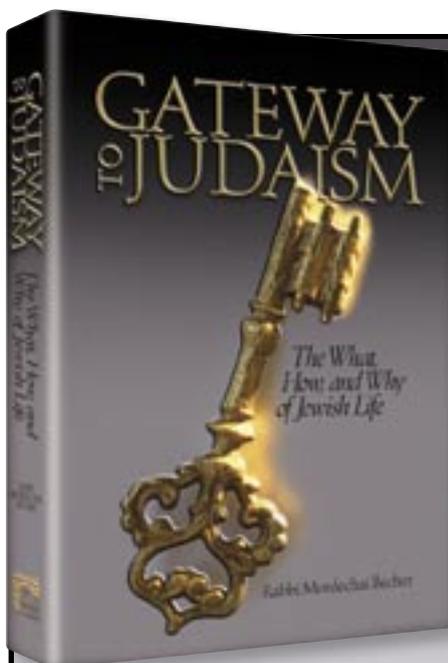
Mortimer Zuckerman addressing the New Jersey audience at Jewish Unity Live 2005.

sense of moral support for what had been such a central part of this rabbi's life but I have to tell you when I got there I was absolutely knocked out by it. I will tell you that it was the single most intellectually active, energetic, fascinating environment I had ever witnessed. There was a sort of buzz and just sheer concentration and joy in the learning process and it was literally *visible* to somebody like myself.

The Lakewood Yeshiva was the single most intellectually active, energetic, fascinating environment I had ever witnessed. I said it afterwards, it made Harvard Law School, which I happen to have attended, look like a kindergarten.

I mean, I said it afterwards, it made Harvard Law School, which I happen to have attended, look like a kindergarten. It was absolutely extraordinary to see so many people - from various walks of life - in there for the sheer joy of learning about their religious tradition. And the sheer intensity and intellectual demands of this place made it such a unique place to visit. So for me, it was absolutely a stunning experience and I wish everybody could have the chance not only to visit it but to have a guide like I did.

Photos courtesy of Torah Links



GATEWAY TO JUDAISM

by Rabbi Mordechai Becher
The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life

Questions are the gateways of knowledge. After years of responding to the full gamut of queries about Judaism, **Rabbi Mordechai Becher** saw the need for a single volume that would explain the fundamentals of Jewish living, its underlying philosophy, and practical portrayals of how Jews actually live. *Gateway to Judaism* offers an engaging look at the mindset, values, and practices of Judaism in the 21st century.

Rabbi Becher opens the door for the newcomer, while providing new insights for those already familiar with the joy of Jewish living.

Rabbi Becher addresses such fascinating questions as:

- ▶ *Do we still need a Sabbath?*
- ▶ *Does God really need my prayers and complaints?*
- ▶ *Can Judaism enhance my marriage? My children?*
- ▶ *What relevance does circumcision have today?*
- ▶ *Is Israel central to Judaism? Does a religion need a land?*
- ▶ *Can I conduct a Passover Seder if I don't read Hebrew?*

Each chapter includes:

- ▶ *An introduction to the topic, including rationale and sources*
- ▶ *Practical laws and instructions*
- ▶ *Extensive endnotes, which provide a valuable reference tool for scholars, teachers and students of Judaism*
- ▶ *Vignettes of the lively Levy family applying Jewish law and values in daily life*

“Gateway to Judaism is a book that will inspire, inform and guide readers in exploring their Jewish heritage. The style is user-friendly and the profound philosophical and ethical teachings of Judaism are clearly presented in an up-to-date, relevant manner. To the question ‘What is Judaism all about?’ this book provides a thoroughly researched, comprehensive and very accessible response.”

—**JOE LIEBERMAN**
U.S. Senator

“In today's challenging world, Jews must understand the how's and why's of our identity. This book gives cogent answers. I recommend it highly.”

—**NATAN SHARANSKY**

*Former Member of Knesset and Minister
Author of Fear No Evil and The Case for Democracy*

“This is what we've been waiting for! Rabbi Becher's masterpiece is thoroughly engaging and comprehensive in scope. His presentation and advocacy of a vibrant and pertinent Judaism will capture your imagination and enhance commitment to the Jewish way of life.”

—**DR. FLORENCE NEUMANN**

Bronfman Center for Jewish Life, 92nd Street Y, New York



Available at your local Hebrew bookstore or call: 1-800-MESORAH
In NYS: (718) 921-9000 • FAX: (718) 680-1875 • www.artscroll.com

eight gifts of value to give your children this chanukah

What is our job as parents? Sometimes we get distracted and think we are the chauffeur, the short order cook, the referee. Our job as parents is to be educators. We are teachers. The Hebrew word for education is *chinuch*, which is directly related to the word *Chanukah*, which means dedication. What is the connection between education and dedication?

When you educate a child, you are giving them more than knowledge. You are giving them values and goals to which they can dedicate their lives. That is the object of childhood education because nothing else will bring out their best like having a vision to live up to. Here are eight of the most central values in Judaism only you can effectively give to your children – precious gifts they will value forever.

1. Honoring Parents

On the tablets of The Ten Commandments, honoring one's parents is on the side of man to G-d, not man to man. Bad editing job? No, it is a clear message that your relationship with your parents has a direct link with your relationship with G-d. I have met many people who grew up observant and left. Most did not leave because they had a problem with G-d, most left because they had a problem with their parents.

Your children need to honor you, for them, not for you. (My rabbi says that if you had kids so that they will serve you, get an English butler, they're cheaper.) They need people to look up to in their lives. You are not your kids' friend. They have friends. They need a parent.

Tools to help you include wisdom from the Torah: they cannot call you by your first name; they should ask your permission before sitting in your designated seat (for example, at the table, in the den); instead of saying "no" to you, teach them to disagree with you by saying something like, "Is it possible..." ("Time to turn off the video and come for dinner" should get, "Is it possible we could watch for a few more minutes?" instead of "why" or "no" or "I don't want to." It is disagreeing with honor.) Keep in mind that this applies to you and your own parents as well (I promise your kids will notice).

2. Tzedaka

What is the difference between the Jewish concept of *tzedaka* and the standard concept of charity? Charity is, "if I feel like giving, I will give." *Tzedaka* is, even if I don't feel like giving, I must give. *Tzedaka* is from the root word that means "just." *Tzedaka* is an obligation and a responsibility.

Have *tzedaka* boxes in your home. Make sure your kids have their own. Teach them the Torah obligation to give 10% of all their money (for you it's after taxes) to others in need. When their box is filled, have them decide where it goes: to your local synagogue, the poor of the community, Israel...

Understand why G-d created a world where there are people in need. Don't you think He would be better at distributing wealth than we are? Having those in need obligates us to give, and that turns us into...givers! And that helps us to become the people we need to be.

by Lori Palatnik

3. Shabbat

The Sabbath is not really a day of “rest.” It is a day that we stop creating to recognize that there is a Creator. We step back from the world to remember that G-d runs it. As the saying goes, “More than the Jewish people have kept the Shabbat, the Shabbat has kept the Jewish people.”

Get the kids into Shabbat. Make challah with them, invite guests and let them make place cards and welcome signs for them. Give them the traditional blessing while resting your hands on their little heads. Light candles with them, sing Shabbat songs with them, and talk about the weekly Torah reading during the Friday night dinner (see the family parsha page at aish.com).

Remember, it’s not all or nothing. But make sure your home and family life are different because it is Shabbat. Perhaps begin with no TV Friday night, so after dinner it’s family board games, charades, story time. Instead of going to the mall on Saturday, push it off until Sunday, and use Saturday for Shabbat family walks, visiting neighbors, checking out your local synagogue Shabbat program. Make it a Shabbat shalom, a Shabbat of connection and peace.



4. Ethical Speech

The Torah teaches us that when someone gossips about others, it’s triple murder. Three people die: the one spoken about, the speaker, and the listeners.

The one spoken about dies in the eyes of all who are listening. Once you speak against someone, what you said is forever in the minds of all who are listening, and they will never look upon

the person you are speaking about in the same way again.

The speaker is also being killed in the eyes of the listener. He may be the center of attention at the moment, but he is committing slow social suicide every time he speaks badly of others. His trust is gone, his stature is lost. He has turned against another Jew.

The listeners are the biggest victims of all because they walk away with their good view of others turned evil and that’s no life. Teach your kids to walk away, change the subject, judge the person being spoken about for the good, tell people they don’t want to hear it...whatever it takes, they simply can’t listen. This may be the greatest gift of all, because you present your children

with a world full of good people whose dignity should be preserved at all costs. What a beautiful place to live!

5. Truth

We are taught that when G-d signs His name, He signs it: “*Emet*”—*Truth*. Yes, we know G-d doesn’t have a hand or a pen, but it teaches us that truth is a very, very important quality.

A Jew is never allowed to lie, except under three circumstances. The first is for *shalom bayit*, for peace between people. If someone asks you how you like their new haircut, or if you like how they redecorated their home, and you don’t like either, you are allowed to lie and tell them that you do. People’s feelings can be more important than truth. If they really wanted your opinion, they would have asked you before they cut their hair or redecorated. They are really asking for approval. Give it to them.

The second is for privacy. If someone asks you if you got a \$10,000 raise, and you did, you can say, “no”. Why? Because it’s none of their business. Your life is not an open book. You are allowed to have privacy and boundaries.

The third is to minimize your accomplishments. If you are praised for running a school fundraiser all by yourself, you can lie and say you were just one of a committee, even though you ran it all by yourself. You know what you did, G-d knows what you did; no one else has to know.



6. Humility

The Torah considers humility to be one of the greatest character traits, but you’ll never see Time Magazine’s “Humblest Man of the Year”.

If I told you that you were going to meet the humblest man who ever lived, you would imagine him to be a small, soft-spoken kind of guy. Our Torah teaches us that Moses was the humblest man who ever lived, and he was no shrinking violet. He stood up to Pharaoh, met G-d on Mount Sinai, and was victorious in war. Humility is not “I’m nothing,” humility is “I’m something, but I know the source of it.” When we use our talents, looks, resources, skills and intelligence, we are simply cashing the check that G-d wrote. Don’t take pride, take pleasure. You are using what G-d gave you for good.

7. Love

There are three aspects to love. The first is knowing that love is the emotion that you feel when you focus in on the virtues of another, and you identify that person with those virtues. Who knows your kid’s virtues better than you? No one. Who knows their challenging qualities better than you? No one. But you choose to focus on their virtues. That brings love.

Love is also, what is important to you is important to me. We don’t have a TV at home. When I travel I watch ESPN in my hotel room so I can come back home and tell my son, Moshie, who is 11 and a big sports fan, about all the players I saw. I don’t love sports, and Moshie knows that. But I love my Moshie.

The Torah teaches us that it’s not loving that leads to giving, it’s giving that leads to loving. If you want to love someone more, be a giver. The more you give. The more you will love.

8. G-d

My rabbi taught us that your kids have to know that you love them, and that G-d loves them.

When you tuck them into bed at night, ask them who loves them. They will name you, your spouse, grandparents, the family dog... and then teach them that G-d loves them the most. They have very few constants in their lives. They will experience loneliness, rejection, failure...and they won't even have you forever. The one constant they have is G-d. Talk about Him, get comfortable with Him; if you're not, they won't be.

Don't say, "Thank goodness..." , say, "Thank G-d..." Don't say, "I was so lucky..." , say, "I was so blessed..."

Ultimately, this whole world is about you and G-d. Give that gift to your kids. Then you will truly know that you are doing your job.



Lori Palatnik is an author and educator with Aish HaTorah in Washington D.C. She is a dynamic and inspiring international speaker, who illuminates traditional Jewish wisdom for our contemporary world. She can be reached at LPalatnik@aish.com.

TorahMedia
listen ^{up}

Preserving Torah Audio for Generations

From the Producers of Torah.org

Enjoy thousands of hours of Torah with more added every day from some of the most outstanding Torah educators of today and yesterday



Where Torah Tapes meet the iPod

Listen & Learn with TorahMedia.com

TORAHMEDIA.COM

a parent's guide to

chanukah

by Doron Kornbluth

Once asked a scientist what prompted him to 'go into science.' He responded that it was not because of any natural inclinations or abilities he had neither - it was because of his sixth grade science teacher. That teacher had made science seem so fascinating that his feelings for science continued to grow until he became 'hooked' for life.

The same goes for us. If we want our kids to grow up into proud and knowledgeable Jews, the key is to present Judaism to them in the most engaging and - yes - fascinating way we can. When you think about it, most Jewish adults who are Jewishly involved trace their commitment back to positive childhood Jewish memories and role models.

CHANUKAH: A TIME FOR PRIORITIES

Chanukah is a great time to make this happen. Kids naturally love the *menorah*, *dreidels*, *latkes*, and *sufganiyot* (filled doughnuts) so it is hard to go wrong. Furthermore, Chanukah comes at a time of year when the society around us is celebrating their own holiday season. For kids surrounded by Christmas, making Chanukah a positive and fun experience is even more crucial, so that the kids don't feel they are 'missing something' by being Jewish.

THE FAMILY MITZVA

And now some Jewish trivia for you:

Question: How many Mitzvot (commandments) in Judaism are supposed to be done as a family?

Answer: One. Although many commandments naturally center around the family, only one mitzvah is actually presented as a 'family Mitzva' - lighting Chanukah candles. Kiddush Friday night, for example, is really a Mitzva for each of us, though one person traditionally represents everyone. The Mitzva



of lighting Chanukah candles is the only one in the entire Torah given to the family as a whole.

Why? The explanation lies in the very reason for the holiday of Chanukah - our physical and philosophical battle with Greek culture. The Greeks cherished politics, philosophy, architecture and physical beauty and competition. They revolutionized man's perspective on himself and the world around him. While our sages appreciated some aspects of these developments, they had quite a few grave misgivings.

Topping their list, though, was the need to preserve the sanctity of the Jewish family. Greek culture - and Western culture follows to this day - places the core of society in the public square, leaving the family in the background. No achievement in the living room will ever impress anyone as much as one that came in the board room. No heart-to-heart talk with a

child matters half as much as a coach's pep-talk with a professional athlete.

We respond by using this time to remind ourselves and teach our children that first and foremost, we are a family. However engaging the world out there is, our primary identification is based on our closest personal relationships at home.

GIVE YOUR KIDS WHAT THEY REALLY WANT - YOU

Chanukah is the perfect time to emphasize the priority of family – to let the kids know that they are your top priority. The kids should certainly get presents, but don't think your Chanukah responsibility is discharged by giving presents your kids will happen to love. The main thing to give the kids over Chanukah is time with you. Make sure to come home early to light the candles as soon as it gets dark. Spend time creating bonds with them surrounding values you can share. While they may not admit it to you (especially if they are teenagers), what kids want most of all from parents is their attention. Chanukah is a great time to build the family bond, and connect it to Jewish life.

GETTING PRACTICAL

How do we make our family time fun and interesting? What to do with the kids? To start with, once they are old enough, let the kids light their own Menorahs. [If they haven't absorbed them yet, build in some fun and effective fire safety lessons to your rituals.] Also, make sure that you and the kids learn the Chanukah songs (Maoz Tzur, Sevivon Sov Sov Sov, etc.). Singing together – even for a few moments – is a beautiful family moment and shouldn't be missed.

Theme Nights

What about after candle-lighting? My favorite idea is to create theme nights. The idea is to find interesting things to do together. Remember, if you have fun, they'll likely have fun. Some ideas include:



YTIUNITNOC HSIWEJ

from a slightly
different perspective

CAMP NAGEELA

excellent summer camping
from a *Jewish perspective*

www.campnageela.org
516-374-1528

"Mock Wedding" Camp Nageela Girls - Summer '05
Making kids happy to be Jewish for 18 years

For best results, read above caption from a Jewish (Hebrew) perspective.
Still having trouble? Log onto our website, www.campnageela.org.

However engaging the world out there is, our primary identification is based on our closest personal relationships at home.

Frying Latke Night: Kids love preparing and cooking latkes. Make traditional potato latkes and/or go 'crazy' and let everyone create their own concoction (my personal favorite is 'peanut-butter and popcorn' latkes). Hanging out in the kitchen is one of the simplest and most effective ways to spend quality time together.

Dreidel World Series: Get down on the floor (or stay at the dining room table if you prefer) and play it out with the kids. You probably know what a dreidel is, but you may not know how to play the game: Each round every player puts a certain amount (of nuts, money, chocolate money, candies, whatever) in the pot, and then players take turns spinning. Make sure to let the kids win! Here is what the letters mean:

Nun means that you neither win nor lose.

Gimmel means you win all.

Hay means you win half of the pot.

Shin means you lose. Better luck next time.

Music Night: Get someone to play live music for the kids. If you play something, great. If you are like me and shouldn't be allowed anywhere near live instruments, perhaps get a few families together and hire a local Jewish musician or talented student to play and sing for the kids. It is not just adults that love concerts - kids are fascinated! Don't leave to use the computer while the kids are 'occupied' - sit with them and experience their enjoyment.

Chesed (Kindness) Night: After lighting, take your kids to visit a Jewish nursing home or Jewish patients in an old-age home. Both places can be especially hard for patients at holiday time - as many will not have many if any visitors - and your visit can literally make their day. And as always, you get what you give: visits like these

are an excellent way to instill core Jewish values of kindness and caring in our kids.

Tzedaka Night: Give your children a set amount to spend and take them to the toy store where they can pick out a gift for a needy child, and let them personally deliver it to a children's hospital, homeless shelter or charity drop-off point. If it makes it easier, let them buy two gifts, one for themselves and one for the needy child.

Crafts Night: Jewish bookstores, Web sites, etc. abound with ideas for Jewish crafts. Here are a few ideas: make Menorahs, whether usable, decorative, or even edible (ie a cupcake Menorah!). Make dreidels. Make a mobile. Some even make their own candles! The list is endless, so start looking around and thinking so that you can find what you and the kids will enjoy.

Doing theme nights every year (although some of the specific themes will change as the kids get older) is a great way to create family Chanukah traditions. Traditions offer stability and a sense of belonging. They reinforce our identity and make us feel good about who we are.

Whatever you choose to do, make Chanukah a happy, fun time in your kids' lives where they get extra time with parents.

Wishing you a Chanukah Sameach!

Doron Kornbluth is a noted speaker and author. His best-selling Why Marry Jewish? Surprising Reasons for Jews to Marry Jews has been recommended by Federations nationwide and helped many thousands of Jews find a Jewish spouse (whether born Jewish or sincerely converted). He also travels extensively, teaching Jewish parents how to effectively transmit Jewish pride to their children. www.jewishanddating.com

22



WHEN A CHILD IS ILL CHAI LIFELINE IS FAMILY



**Two-dozen, free,
year-round programs
and services.**

**The knowledge
and experience of
professionals.**

**The compassion
and love of family.**

WE ALL TURN TO FAMILY for help and support in times of crisis. But when a child is seriously ill the need for support never ends. Who takes care of the family? Who provides emotional and psychosocial support for the parents? Who helps the siblings get through the ordeal? To whom does the family turn?

Chai Lifeline: Hope, *Chizuk* & Service

Chai Lifeline's programs strengthen every member of the family, from the child who is with a life-threatening or lifelong illness to parents and siblings. Our goal is to help everyone in the family live as fully as possible while fighting illness and despair.

For children, the highlight of our year-round services is summer at Camp Simcha or Camp Simcha Special, two extraordinary programs that refresh spirits and renew children's determination to fight the effects of illness.

Chai Family Centers provide the counseling and support each member of the family – child, parents, siblings and grandparents – needs to cope with serious illness.

Community services like Chai House, Project CHAI and programs that help schools understand the needs of chronically ill children offer a multitude of support options for everyone whose lives are severely impacted by the illness.

When illness strikes, we all need a family. Call today and let Chai Lifeline join yours.



A counselor spends quality time with a camper at Camp Simcha.



A parent has a chance to relax and regroup at a family retreat.



Two parents discuss similar experiences at a community event.



Chai Lifeline

Fighting Illness With Love

Helping the child, the family, and the community

INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

151 WEST 30TH STREET | NEW YORK, NY 10001 | 800.CHAI-LIFE | 212.465.1300 | 212.465.0949 FAX

REGIONAL OFFICES

FLORIDA | ILLINOIS | CALIFORNIA | NEW JERSEY | ISRAEL | ENGLAND

CHAI HOUSE

PHILADELPHIA, PA

CHAI FAMILY CENTERS

BROOKLYN, NY | LONG ISLAND, NY | NEW YORK CITY, NY | MONSEY, NY | CHICAGO, IL | N. MIAMI BEACH, FL

WWW.CHAILIFELINE.ORG

LET'S GO TO THE VIDEO!



by Yaakov Salomon

Yaakov Salomon has been a psychotherapist in private practice in Brooklyn, N.Y. for over 20 years. He is a Senior Lecturer and Creative Director at Aish Hatorah's Discovery Productions. He is an editor and author for the Artscroll Publishing Series and a member of the Kollel of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. His most recent book is, What the Angel Taught You; Seven Keys to Life Fulfillment, with Rabbi Noah Weinberg. He shares his life with his wife, Temmy, and their unpredictable family.

WHAT WILL THE HIGHLIGHT FILM OF YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE?

This past Sunday, over 700,000 of your fellow, law-abiding, peace-loving, American citizens left their families, their couches, and their worries behind them to personally witness 15 clashes of the National Football League.

Just a day before, millions...yes, millions more spent most of their Saturday at over 300 different stadiums from Abilene to Zanesville, Ohio, watching NCAA college students play similar games. Many of them sat on narrow wooden slat seats, while incubated by several layers of thermal apparel; only to be stuck in 3-5 hours of post-game gridlock on their way home. And they paid hefty cash for the privilege.



Add to this the tens of millions who, every week, sit glued to their Home Theaters (remember when they were called TV sets?) for the better part of the entire weekend - no matter how beautiful the weather, no matter what else (or who else) is being ignored - fiercely rooting for and against people they have never met, hardly recognize, or even care for.

Here's the scariest part - I'm one of them.

Or *was*.

O.K., I guess I still do *occasionally* suffer for and from the 'other' New York baseball team,

Now, what actually drives us to idolize Iverson, revere Ruth, worship Wilt, emulate Elway, and adore A-Rod, is a study for another season.

but I must painfully admit that in years past I too pretended to care for professional football, basketball, and hockey - with even an occasional peek at tennis, golf, and boxing too.

As you can see, it's not that I am exceptionally proud of it, but with the exception of the aforementioned episodic baseball game - which after all, is our *NATIONAL PASTIME*, for heaven's sake - I am rather...er...cured, shall we say.

Now, what actually drives us to idolize Iverson, revere Ruth, worship Wilt, emulate Elway, and adore A-Rod, is a study for another season and another arena (or stadium). And let's not get into a whole discourse about the relative plusses of spectator sports. Of course there are many - that's not our point here. Suffice it to say that the phenomenon exists, and many millions literally thrive on it.

IT ALL STARTED...

Basically, we have those ancient Greeks to thank for it all. Like so many of our modern-day entertainment vehicles, the concept of competitive and spectator athletics, later popularized by the Romans, began as part of the burgeoning culture of ancient Greece.

Most of us know the story of our Ancestors' encounter with this original Greek culture. At first, the Jews, while physically subservient to the Greeks, rejected it as a misguided celebration of the physical at the expense of the spiritual. They remained steadfast in their beliefs, practices, and ideals.

Experience...

Business Solutions for the 21st Century

Telephony



The Power of Computerized Telephony

- * Advanced features
- * Hosted PBX solutions
- * Interactive response systems
- * Data integration and acquisition

Voip



The Flexibility and Savings of Voice over IP

- * Unified communications
- * Unparalleled customization
- * Clear connections
- * Reduced Costs

Development



The Results of Expert Internet Development

- * Site design
- * Data-driven solutions
- * E-commerce
- * Search engine optimization

Hosting



The Security of Reliable Hosting

- * Colocation
- * Managed Servers
- * Hosted Web Sites
- * Firewalls

www.capalon.com

(888) CAPALON

122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250
Baltimore, MD 21208

capalon

The replays and re-broadcasts of the walk-off homer, breakaway goal, or game-saving interception are sufficient to satisfy our appetite for excitement.

But the allure was too great and some eventually began to succumb to the overwhelming temptations that so contradicted their national spiritual persona. Forming a sect called the Hellenists, these people arranged orgies of licentiousness, built altars for Greek idols, and eschewed the Torah lifestyle for debauchery and entertainment.

While the majority of our people did not follow the ways of the Hellenists, the spiritual damage they wrought was huge. The infamous King Antiochus, dissatisfied with the weakness of the Hellenistic influence on the Jewish soul, lost patience with the tiny, stubborn nation, and sent his powerful armies to subjugate and, if necessary, slaughter them. Some fled and hid, many surrendered and converted, and tens of thousands were murdered in the scourge.

Miraculously, the Jews fought back and triumphed. Led by a small band of pious and courageous Maccabees, they inexplicably defeated the mighty Greeks, re-dedicated the recently defiled Temple, and re-kindled the fractured spiritualism of the masses. And for the last 2,200-plus years, we celebrate Chanukah annually in commemoration of these extraordinary events.

The victory, astonishing as it was, did not endure as we wish it had. The contamination that had punctured the lofty standards of the Holy Nation forged a devastating pollution that would taint the Jewish People for centuries to come. And in many ways, our worship today of sports teams and athletes can be traced back to that era – when the fascination and glorification of physical

beauty and brute strength pierced through our mantle of sanctity. Chanukah, it would seem, would therefore be a most auspicious time to try to re-capture some of that lost holiness.

HIGHLIGHT FILMS

Now that technology dictates our lives, many of us are too lazy or impatient to sit through three whole hours of a ball game, when only a precious few minutes will really make it to the “highlight” reel after the game anyway. It’s just not “cost effective.” The drudgery portions of the game are relegated to the cutting room floor. So...many of us have adopted the custom of simply taking the shortcut - we just watch or listen to the highlights. The replays and re-broadcasts of the walk-off homer, breakaway goal, or game-saving interception are sufficient to satisfy our appetite for excitement.

This year, after we light our candles and perhaps hum a strain or two, maybe we can turn back the clock a couple of thousand years or so. Choose one evening, after dinner (any of the eight nights will do), and go back to your Menorah. Grab a comfortable chair and a doughnut and five minutes of relative quiet in your home (for some, that will be quite a miracle right there). Focus your attention on those tiny, little flames and imagine those brave Maccabees, who understood so clearly that living spiritually was something worth risking your life for.

Now try picturing what *your* highlight film will look like one day. The highlight film of your life.

Touchdown passes? Seven-figure mergers and acquisitions? A hole-in-one? Perfectly manicured nails? A half-court buzzer beater? That dream vacation to Monaco? The softball trophy? The car that ALL your friends envied? Your annual skiing jaunt? The top 500 movies you watched?

Those are all nice things. And they may *even* be highlights. But Chanukah is the perfect opportunity to script your own highlight film and make sure that OTHER scenes and experiences are also featured.

Now try picturing what *your* highlight film will look like one day—the highlight film of your life.

Manicured nails are lovely, but hopefully you chose to leave a respectable tip to the one who provided you that benefit, even though you were in an awful mood that day. Earning lots of money can be enormously pleasurable, but viewers will want to see if you prioritized charity in your newly expanded budget. Who wouldn't be proud of a hole-in-one? But did it lead to arrogance or humility?

You get the point. As producer, writer, director, and main actor you get to customize your very own highlight video.

Why not make it an award-winning film?

*If you often feel tired,
it could be anemia.*

*If you're Jewish,
it could be Gaucher Disease.*

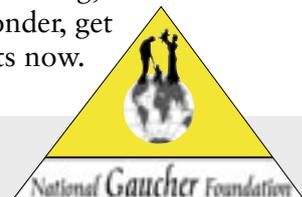


You may never have heard of Gaucher Disease (pronounced "Go-Shay"). It is the most common genetic disease affecting Jews of Eastern and Central European descent. Approximately one out of every 14 carries the Gaucher gene – it is far more prevalent than Tay-Sachs. However, Gaucher Disease can strike anyone, and it is not gender or age specific.

Gaucher warning signs include:

- Fatigue
- Bleeding problems and easy bruising
- Enlarged abdomen
- Bone pain
- Easily fractured bones
- Enlarged liver or spleen
- Low platelet count
- Anemia

Gaucher can be detected early with a simple blood test. Fortunately, effective treatment lets people with Gaucher live full, productive lives. The consequences of the disease can be debilitating, so don't wait and wonder, get the facts now.



For additional information,
testing and treatment, call toll-free: **1-877-246-8452**

©2005 National Gaucher Foundation

5410 Edson Lane
Suite 260
Rockville, MD 20852
www.gaucherdisease.org

what a beautiful mitzvah!

by Gaby Friedman

Sarah Rockford didn't know what to do for the personal Mitzvah project her Denver synagogue insisted all Bat Mitzvah girls take on. Most of her peers were volunteering to do some Hebrew tutoring in the Sunday School. But when she became a Bat Mitzvah last year, Sarah knew in her heart that she wanted to do something different and more meaningful.

Fortunately, Sarah's mom Renee happened upon a magazine ad from celebrated Judaica artist Gary Rosenthal with an idea Sarah loved. The ad described Rosenthal's "Hiddur Mitzvah Project," an opportunity for anyone to develop their own Mitzvah-based art project that would be aimed at making a difference in people's lives.

Together with Gary, Sarah and Renee devised a Hiddur Mitzvah Project whereby their friends and relatives would each make two sets of glass mosaic Shabbat candlesticks. One set everyone would keep for themselves. The others would be sent to the Ukraine, where the Jewish Community Development Fund would distribute them among the burgeoning Jewish communities of Chernigov and Priluki.

"These cities were 400 miles from where my grandfather, who was a Holocaust survivor, was born," said Sarah. "That really made the whole thing special, because I could give back to these people who had been unable to practice their

religion, and who had lost so much of their culture. It means so much to me to give back to these people, and, in a sense, it was giving back to my grandfather."

"That's also where my father saw his family for the last time," Renee added. "It completed a cycle for us to be able to return Judaism to that part of the world."

Now, say both Sarah and Renee, when they use those candlesticks to usher in the Shabbat every week, they feel connected to those Jews, thousands of miles and oceans away, using the same candlesticks to usher in *their* Shabbat.



28

Now, say both Sarah and Renee, when they use those candlesticks to usher in the Shabbat every week, they feel connected to those Jews, thousands of miles and oceans away, using the same candlesticks to usher in their Shabbat.

For Gary Rosenthal, connecting Jews to the beauty of their religion, and connecting Jews to other Jews all over the world, is his life's passion. To him, "Hiddur Mitzvah" (lit. making a mitzvah especially beautiful) is not just beautifying Jewish objects such as a Mezuzah, Menorah or Torah Scroll, but using the entire process to engage, educate and excite people about Judaism – and to share the beauty with those in need.

Under his direction, Jews in Omaha, Nebraska made Purim graggers (noisemakers) which were then distributed to the Abuyadaya Jews in Uganda. Using the money raised from the project, Rosenthal sponsored a Rabbi to fly to Uganda to read Megillat Esther to the congregation, who then used their beautiful American-made artisan graggers to drown out Haman's name in a special ceremony.

In another Hiddur Mitzvah Project, Rosenthal teamed up with Emily Dubois, a high school student in Palo Alto. In 2004, Dubois was so moved by the stories of children who lost their lives in the Holocaust that she collected 1.5 million pennies in their memory (each penny representing a life lost), which she planned to donate to terror victims in Israel. Rosenthal bought 1,000 pennies from her for \$1 each, and together with Dubois, he melted down those pennies and used them to create a Ner Tamid, eternal light, which he sent to a synagogue in the former Soviet Union.

There have been many other Hiddur Mitzvah projects as well. Last year, 150 Bar and Bat Mitzvah aged children paid \$100

each to design a special Yad (Torah pointer). That money was sent to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, and the children themselves decided how to distribute the funds.

Hiddur Mitzvah proceeds have also gone towards creating Shabbat meals for hungry families in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In November, Rosenthal and the Denver Jewish community got together to make dreidels and Chanukah Menorahs to be distributed this month to Jewish victims of Hurricane Katrina in a gala Chanukah party, replete with homemade latkes.



Not simply content with creating works of art that people can use to enhance their own observance of mitzvot, Rosenthal embarked on his inspiring Hiddur Mitzvah Project in hopes of helping Jews use art to help other Jews connect with their Judaism.

The idea for the project grew out of a conversation with a friend from Palo Alto, whose son had made a Tzedakah box in Rosenthal's studio. When the boy brought the Tzedakah box to school, his teacher commented that it would be nice if everyone could make a Tzedakah box

like that. Seeing an inviting challenge, Rosenthal designed a prototype kit of the beautiful colored glass mosaic tiles and the metal bases and sent them to the school. The school supplied the Elmer's glue and the place to sit and sculpt. The finished Tzedakah boxes were sent back to Rosenthal's studio where they were fired in the kiln and then, voila! Each child had custom-made his own, artistic, one-of-a-kind Tzedakah box.

"I had so much fun with the whole concept that I thought, I can create a wonderful program around people making Judaica," said Rosenthal. "And through the project, people can take part in the mitzvah as well as the responsibility of helping others."

It was a lifelong dream for Rosenthal, who has always been interested in Tzedakah.

"My mother says I remind her of her dad, because I just want to give everything away, like he did," said Rosenthal.

Since he became an artist over 30 years ago, Rosenthal has always used his art for mitzvahs.

"It is Hiddur Mitzvah to create Judaica art, but there is no one telling you how to do it, really," he said. "Like when it comes to making a Mezuzah, the Mezuzah case doesn't really matter in Jewish law. The only thing there are rules about is the parchment inside. So, as an artist, [I am] just so

I had so much fun with the whole concept that I thought, I can create a wonderful program around people making Judaica," said Rosenthal.

lucky that I get to make Judaica and no one is telling me whether it is right or wrong. As long as I am making it beautiful, that is the mitzvah."

Rosenthal's evolution as an artist was not a typical one. During the 1970s, as a college student at Cornell University, he spent one summer working with his father as a stove repairman. He learned how to weld things together using a blowtorch on the job. After work, he would return to the shop and just sit there and weld. He found that he enjoyed the process, and he started producing little crafts - mainly, fused metal and glass - which he would show to people and sell. Over time, his skills developed. He sold his sculptures at craft shows across America. He started gaining renown.

Soon, his sculptures were chosen to be presented as gifts to the sitting Presidents in the White House (Both President Carter and President George W. Bush have received Rosenthal sculptures.) His work found a place in fine museums, like the American Craft Museum, the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, and the Corning Museum of Glass.

As his reputation flourished, so did his interest in Judaism. Rosenthal noticed at these craft fairs

Last year, 10,000 Jews across North America participated in a Hiddur Mitzvah project of one kind or another. They came from all denominations and colors of Judaism.

that there was nobody showing Judaica. He started to make Menorahs and Mezuzahs and they sold like hotcakes. He expanded his range, making Tzedakah boxes, Kiddush cups, Shabbat candlesticks and spice boxes for Havdalah, among other things. His work became increasingly popular in Jewish stores and sisterhood gift shops in synagogues across the country.

As an artist working in Judaica, Rosenthal found that his art connected him more and more with his roots.

"My grandfather was the guy at Beth Shalom in Washington, D.C. who always had his pockets full of candy," said Rosenthal. "He was the candy man. I used to go to his synagogue as a child. I wasn't a member of his congregation, but I was always around the synagogue, and through osmosis it went into me. I loved the story of Judaism, and I loved Tzedakah. I loved the whole concept of doing good."

As his reputation as a premier Judaica artist grew, he found himself drawn more and more to Judaism.

"Once I started making Judaica, it took over my life," he said. "Anything that has to do with Judaism inspires me. I can't listen to a sermon without being inspired to do something. Two years ago I heard the Torah portion about Bezalel [the architect of the Tabernacle, Vayakhel, in Exodus] in which Moses asks the Jewish people

to bring their precious metals and precious stones to build the ark. That is one of the first parshas (Torah portions) where the idea of Hiddur Mitzvah comes from."

Last year, 10,000 Jews across North America participated in a Hiddur Mitzvah project of one kind or another. They came from all denominations and colors of Judaism.

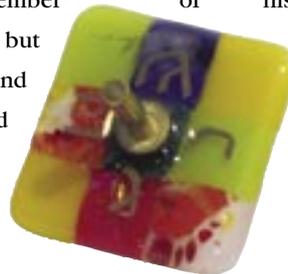
"Hiddur Mitzvah belongs to everyone," said Rosenthal.

For Rosenthal, the concept is a way for him to create a unique type of business model.

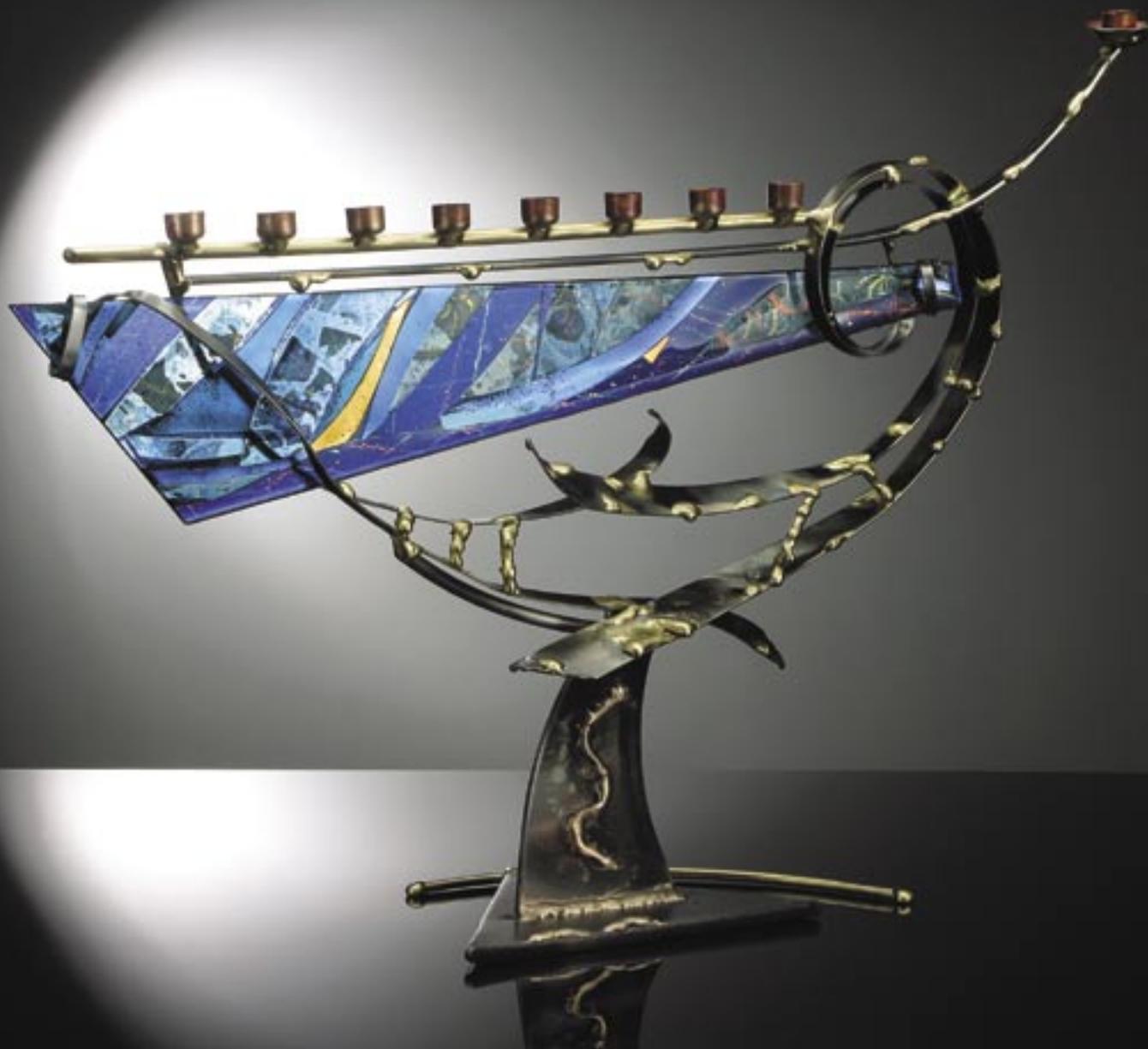
"We take art, we do business where we make money, and we spend that money to do good," he said. "Our business *is* doing good. My hope one day is to make community service part of my business plan. We want to create jobs, do community service projects, and make money. We want people to see that as part of your life and part of your business, you can be creative - and profitable - and do good."

"Last year we gave away a total of \$70,000," said Rosenthal. "And we have barely taken off. I hope one day to give away \$1 million."

For more information about Gary Rosenthal's Judaica, visit www.collectgaryrosenthal.com. For more information on the Hiddur Mitzvah Project, visit www.hiddurmitzvah.org or call 301-493-5577.



Celebrate Hanukkah with America's favorite contemporary judaica.



The *Gary Rosenthal* Collection

www.collectgaryrosenthal.com

Fresh, Fizzy Seltzer for Mere Shekels.

**Save \$20 on a home seltzer maker
when you order online!**

You love seltzer, but hate schlepping home heavy cases. You pay sale prices, but the cost adds up.

With a home seltzer maker from Soda-Club®, you'll enjoy fresh, fizzy seltzer starting as low as 17 cents per liter. Or, make up to 25 great-tasting flavors of soda with OU certified sodamix.

Unlike old-fashioned soda siphons, you can make seltzer as fizzy as you like it. Large Alco₂Jet Carbonaters make up to 10 cases of seltzer and are easily exchanged when empty. Perfect for Shabbos since our machines use no batteries or electricity. Made in Israel.

Save \$20 when you order a new seltzer maker online using the promotion code below with your online order at www.sodaclub.com or call toll free 1-800-SODACLUB. A portion of the proceeds will benefit your local Kollel. Offer expires Dec. 31, 2005.



Seltzer as low as 17 cents per liter.



What's Your Fizz?

promotion code

Shop sodaclub.com

being jewish in america

by AJS Staff

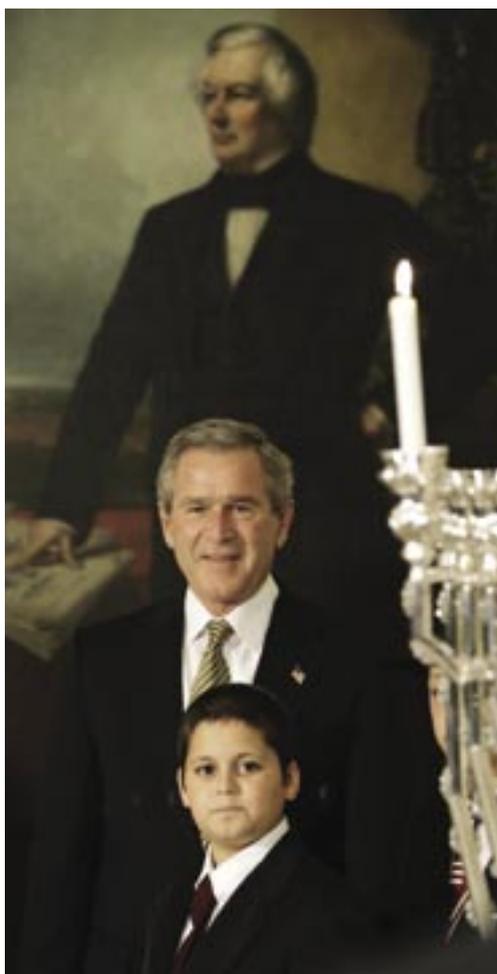
This **SPECIAL FEATURE** Explores the Campus, Entertainment and Sports in America - the Cultural Legacies of Ancient Greece.

I suspect there's more to this than meets the eye but Chanukah always seems to get people thinking about being Jewish in a non-Jewish society. Obviously, the holiday season that surrounds and pretty much smothers us - and that is not ours - makes this topic pretty hard to avoid. Since none of the other Jewish holidays occur at times that force such a pronounced divergence of Jew from non-Jew, we could be tempted to attribute Chanukah's association with this topic to the incidentally parallel schedules of two unrelated celebrations.

Doing some more research into the events we commemorate, though, uncovers a side of Chanukah not often appreciated by the average gift-giving, dreidel-spinning and latke-eating population. To many, Chanukah celebrates religious freedom. Our Maccabean ancestors had finally had enough of the religious intolerance of the Greek-inspired occupiers of their land and they launched an unlikely rebellion that miraculously succeeded.

This snippet of the history, however, leaves on the cutting room floor the true nature of the clash between ancient Greece and ancient Jerusalem. It was, in fact, first and foremost, a clash of cultures. The Greek-inspired armies that

fanned out all over the region did not seek to impose any religion on their conquests. They had already made the surprising discovery that religion really doesn't matter. What makes all the difference, they knew, was *culture*. As long as



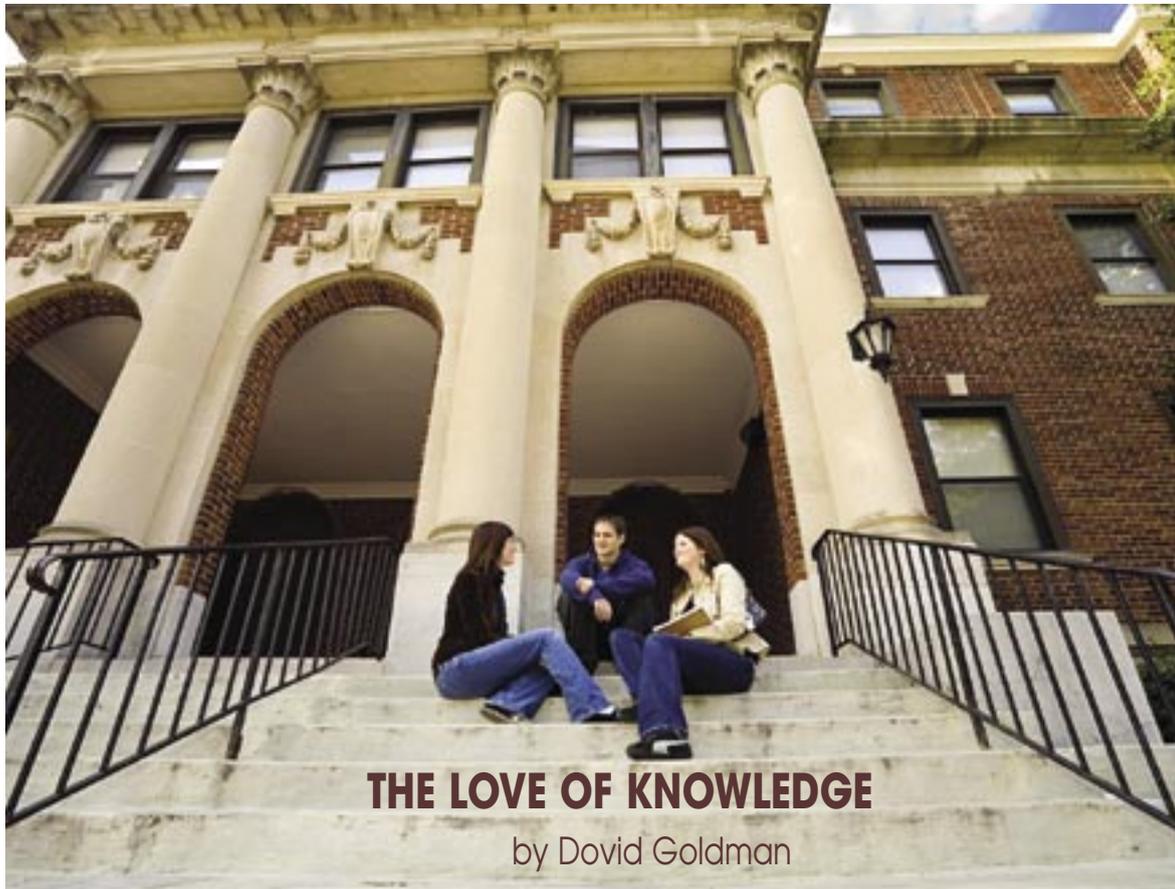
the lands they conquered adopted their culture, they would all be Greeks - whatever particular theology they happened to be into. If they engaged the ideas of the Greek philosophers, participated in the competitions such as the early Olympics, and embraced Greek literature and theater, they could worship whatever or whoever they pleased and it would be irrelevant. They would be Greeks to the core.

As a rule, most countries eventually found the Greek culture to be a welcome improvement and eschewed any real resistance. Not so in the land of Israel. The heroic Maccabees knew that to be Jewish was not just a matter of which religion to check off when filling out a health insurance application. To be Jewish was to be connected to a source of knowledge that puts everything else in perspective. Their connection to the Torah provided them with a world-view that covered every nook and cranny of human existence. And its central message was that every element of life and every resident of this planet - animate or not - plays a meaningful role in a universe designed by a Creator.

The Greeks begged to differ. They glorified a world that was to be studied and engaged on its own terms without seeking any soul or spirit or injecting any meaning. They detested Jewish practices that cast the physical in spiritual terms and singled these out to be forbidden.

We live in a time and a country that exemplifies tolerance and respect for all its citizens. But it is a country whose culture remains heavily influenced by the worldview of ancient Greece.

Chanukah is the time to look at the three great legacies of ancient Greece - the academy, the stadium and the theater - in a Jewish light - a light symbolized by the Chanukah Menorah. It is a time for a "*chanukah*" which means a dedication - to the worldview that is *our* legacy: one of inner meaning, purpose and direction; of a light that, miraculously, for century after century, continues to burn on...



for law school (which apparently requires philosophy-style critical thinking). They are soon relieved to discover that I did, in fact, follow my undergraduate degree in philosophy by attending law school and that they can remain secure in their belief that the study of philosophy is otherwise completely irrelevant.

"Philosophy" means "love of knowledge" and was once synonymous with higher education. Why else would someone study the world if not out of love of knowledge? The philosopher, once upon a time, represented that great human achievement of making sense out of the world. It was he who justified and made possible deep and true human pride. The world, through his work, was no longer merely a place to survive

Whenever I get the question, "What did you study in college?" I anticipate a curious response to my reply. "Philosophy," I answer. Pause. If my answer would be engineering or chemistry or even humanities such as history or literature, I would satisfy the interest of my questioner while revealing something about the kind of person I am and the kind of future I wanted.

the campus

Answering "Philosophy," however, always elicits a certain perplexity. What exactly is covered in philosophy courses today? people seem to wonder. What exactly is its value? Why, really, they would want to know - if they were

honest with themselves - would anyone be moved to devote their college years to, of all things, *philosophy*? They would know *without* wondering that it is quite useless in the job market - with the possible exception of preparing

by figuring out its demands. Now, people were important because they *understood*. Now, the world was in their grasp.

The philosopher, once upon a time, represented that great human achievement of making sense out of the world. It was he who justified and made possible deep and true human pride.

Today, of course, choosing a field of study, just as choosing a university, is predominantly an act of worship directed at a document known not as the Bible but as the Resumé. In our society, “love of knowledge” and “undergraduate degree” have somehow become non sequiturs. The value of knowledge has become primarily technological – what use can we put it to? What material benefits can it offer?

What happened? What wrong turn did philosophy take that relegated it to somewhere behind bowling and basket-weaving as a respected college major?

Having studied philosophy, I can proudly tell you the answer. According to the consensus of the community of philosophers, the rules of philosophy provide that knowledge is either impossible or inexplicable. As hard as it is for many people to believe, the skeptics have in fact won the day and the entire notion of love of knowledge has flitted away into the depths of history. Philosophers have acceded to the explanations of the evolutionary biologists that people’s love of knowledge exists for the survival value it provides and has no meaning in and of itself. Worst of all for philosophy, there is no “next season” to look forward to. It is all over. The university is now a place for the pursuit of a good resumé (and, of course, a good time). If you want meaning and wisdom and understanding, go off to India.

Or, as many young Jews have been discovering in recent years, to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, as you know, was ground zero in the battle of our ancestors *against* the now-bankrupt philosophy that is the legacy of the ancient Greeks. Our leaders knew this was going to happen all along – that man on his own, armed with less than half a dozen physical senses and a fairly small-minded intellect, would fail to validate his hopes for meaning and understanding through observation, analysis and reasoning.

If you’ve ever lit Chanukah candles you celebrated the fact that your ancestor’s stock-broker told him that philosophy was a bad investment. It’s useless to you, he would have said, because you have the Menorah in the Temple of Jerusalem. What do you mean? your ancestor would have asked. The Menorah stands in the Temple, he would have explained, because when

there is no light, it means that no one is home. The light of the Menorah symbolizes Presence. When you visit the Temple, Someone is home. To the Greek philosophers, the physical universe is an empty house to be explored, classified and described. To the Jew, it is a home that shines with Presence – with meaning and purpose and knowledge. Reject this philosophy, the stockbroker said. Hold on to your Menorah – even at the risk of your life.

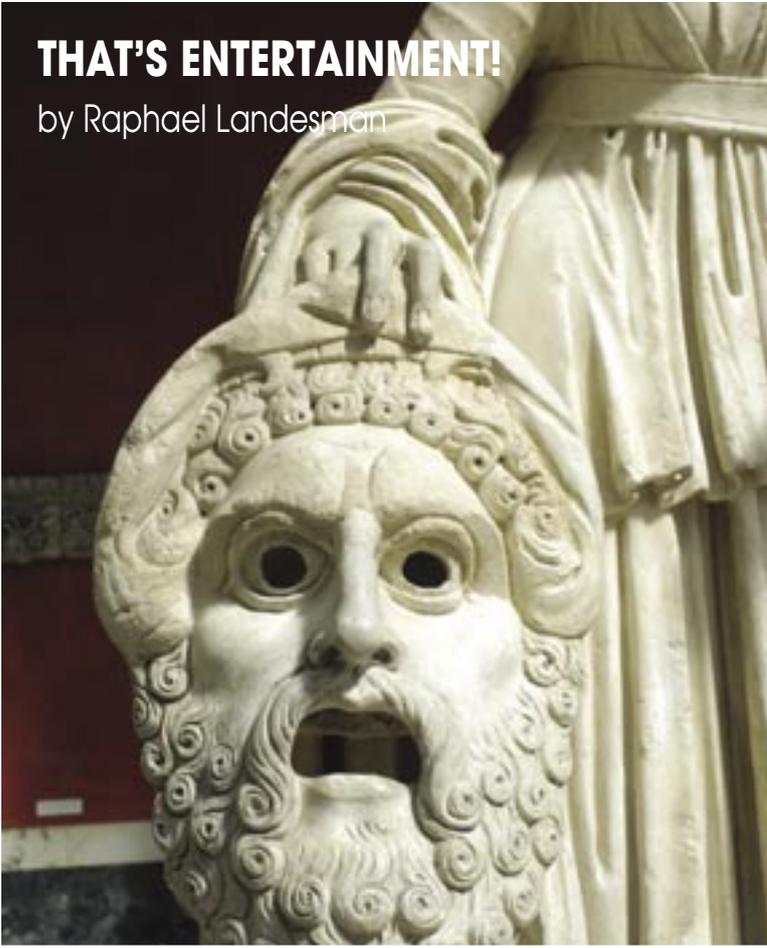
For the Jew, nothing remains more central than “philosophy” – the love of knowledge. For us, life is a journey of intensely grappling with and ultimately discovering the world’s meaning. It begins with the awe of our own “presence” – our consciousness and awareness, our being. When we see our reflection in the mirror, we know that someone is home. We must know that there is a Presence in the world as well.

For us, life is a journey of intensely grappling with and ultimately discovering the world’s meaning. It begins with the awe of our own “presence” – our consciousness and awareness, our being.

Chanukah is the perfect time to gaze into the light of the candles and sense G-d’s Presence as we recall His miracle of the Menorah. The Jews fought for that presence and He rewarded them by being even more present, smiling at them from the brightness of the Menorah’s miraculous flames. He smiles at us still today, a knowing smile – confident that we will one day, driven by a fierce love of knowledge, come to know what He is smiling about.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

by Raphael Landesman



One of the most unifying bonding-activities in American society today is the recounting of the best lines of a good movie. It's no fun if the people you're talking to haven't seen it because you're not retelling the movie, you're reliving it. If your friends haven't seen it, they can't heartily agree with you that, yes, that was an awesome line! It's amazing how enjoyable this ritual is, and also how really pointless - we all already saw the flick, for goodness sakes!

The reason we enjoy swapping bits of movie so much is because of the vividness of every plot detail, the calculated subtlety of each turn of phrase, the sometimes hilarious absurdity of the sticky situations and the equally improbable resolutions found for them. Entertainment productions are life intensified, an exciting contrast to our own often-mundane existence.

That vividness can be very valuable. If a picture is worth a thousand words, one can only imagine the value of a whole video clip. A movie can illustrate the depth of the human condition like nothing else and can provide powerful opportunity to explore our attitudes and feelings about scenes, storylines and characters. A movie can also bring an idea to life in very dramatic fashion. The film *The Matrix*, for example, formed the basis of an entire series of classes from Aish.com about the concept of the Afterlife and the soul.

The film *The Matrix*, for example, formed the basis of an entire series of classes from Aish.com about the Afterlife and the soul.

If not for the Ancient Greeks, though, America's passion for entertainment never would have come to be. The notion of staging plays and musical productions was first invented by the Athenians in the sixth century BCE, and spread to the rest of the Greek world by the third century BCE, helped in part by the unifying conquests of Alexander the Great. Though Greek drama dwindled after a bad couple of centuries, they hung around long enough to introduce the up-and-coming Romans to the allure of the stage.

Intellectually highbrow, sophisticated theatrical endeavors would seem to be just the sort of thing the Jewish mind would have embraced over the millennia of Jewish life. In fact, most of the original motion-picture production companies that sprang up in early twentieth-century Hollywood were created and/or financed by Jews (seven out of eight to be exact).

And yet, we do not find that the theater had any place in traditional Jewish life throughout the ages. In fact, one of the ways in which the "Enlightened

entertainment

Recalling yesterday's breakfast is so boring, but the memories of last night's trip to Hogwarts or Alcatraz can leave our pulses still racing the morning after.

Jews" of late-nineteenth-century Eastern Europe distinguished themselves from their not-so-enlightened brethren was by organizing Yiddish theater.

When we learn to appreciate the real-life drama of our challenges and successes, we realize that any figment of someone's imagination, no matter how vividly portrayed, is just a pale imitation.

Why the apparent aversion to drama, to the portrayal of exciting events in Jewish life, whether fiction or non-fiction?

Storytelling, on the other hand, has always been a very Jewish activity - starting, of course, with the Torah. Though known more for its wisdom and commandments, the Torah spends most of its time telling the stories of how we came to be. The Talmud, the great repository of Jewish wisdom, routinely makes use of anecdotes in its explanations of Jewish concepts, beliefs, and even laws - devoting pages of text to revealing deeper truths through stories.

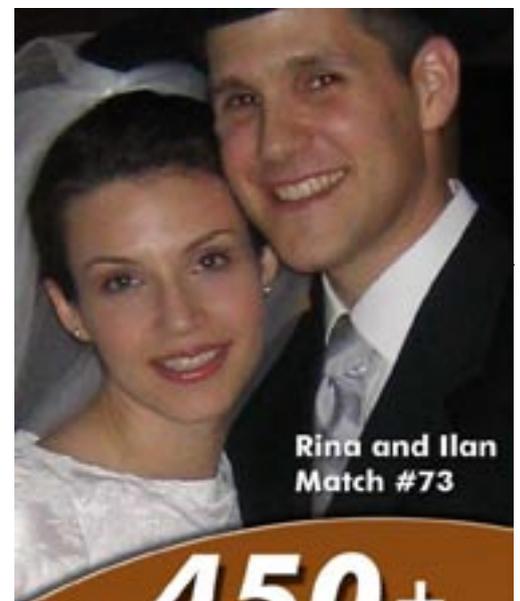
But the telling of compelling anecdotes itself was never the point. The stories were always presented as parable, designed to convey a lesson or a nugget of wisdom. Storytelling for its own sake, as an exhibition of talent or as entertainment, was conspicuously absent from Jewish life.

Our people has always found everyday life to be utterly compelling and thoroughly engaging in the pursuit of meaning and connection to G-d. In a Torah framework, daily life can be an intense and exhilarating ride of connection and fulfillment. A Jew cognizant of the excitement inherent in being did not need the diversion of riveting tales of suspense and romance, nor did he particularly value them. Take precious time out of one's day for something someone made up? For what? And the notion of spending seven months and two hundred million dollars simply to bring that literary invention to life - why, that would have positively boggled the mind!

We Americans as a society love the idea of leisure or "free" time, time to use for our own pursuit of pleasure without obligation. Using that precious time to its utmost is our passion. If we can fill that day or week with adrenaline rushes and incredible virtual experiences, unmatched in our droll routine, then so much the better. In other words, we "live for the weekends." So we rush to multiplexes and playhouses, and we adore those entertainers and producers who are able to give us quality options for those wonderful moments of diversion, even more than we look up to those who could inspire us to thrive ourselves. Life intensified is a more desirable alternative to normal existence.

The Jewish ideal is the reverse: we may need moments of diversion, but even those are channeled towards replenishing our body and spirit for the more important and ultimately more fulfilling work of living life. The most fascinating story of all is the one we write ourselves with the thoughts and actions of our days, the best tales the ones that really happened to us, the best anecdotes the times when we made a difference in the world. When we learn to appreciate the real-life drama of our challenges and successes, we realize that any figment of someone's imagination, no matter how vividly portrayed and how expertly brought to life, is just a pale imitation. So we don't work towards the escape of vacation, even if we need and even enjoy it when it comes around. And we don't yearn for "life intensified," because *real* life is exactly where we want to be. And that, my friends, is living.

37



Rina and Ilan
Match #73

450+
married!

1000's of
screened members

Private, discreet

Personalized
service

Orthodox
managed

**FIND your
soulmate TODAY!**
Frumster[™].com

A SPIRITUAL DECATHLON

by Dovid Goldman



The first Olympics that I remember from my childhood are the 1980 Winter Games in Lake Placid, New York. My father's interest inspired my own, and by the time the games ended, I was sliding up and down the hall in my socks like speed-skater Eric Heiden. I still get emotional when I think of the ecstatic pandemonium that broke out the moment the USA Hockey Team won the Gold Medal, with goalie Jim Craig single-mindedly skating around the ice in search of his father.

Four years later, as a fourteen-year-old, the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles captured my attention completely. More than the excitement of the competition, though, was the way the athletes seemed to be so alive. Each one seemed to believe in himself or herself with such freshness and vibrancy. Who could lay claim to the glorious fulfillment of the American Dream more than an Olympic Gold Medalist? Their lives were being fulfilled before our eyes and they were heroes like no one else. Could anything be more inspiring?

I took it personally, therefore, when, years later, I discovered my own people's response to the ancient Olympic spirit - they rejected it. Worse, they created the holiday of Chanukah to celebrate the Jewish victory over the invasion of Greek values, and the exclusion of the Olympics, among other features of Greek culture, from Jewish history.

What was so bad about bringing people together from all over the world in the friendly pursuit of excellence? Was this something to go to war over, to risk a battle of "the weak against the strong, the few against the many"?

Who could lay claim to the glorious fulfillment of the American Dream more than an Olympic Gold Medalist? Their lives were being fulfilled before our eyes and they were heroes like no one else.

It would be convenient to blame their revolt on the barbarism and immorality that, according to an article in U.S. News and World Report (August 9, 2004), characterized the early Olympics. If the threat this posed to the highly civilized and ethical Jewish society was the source of their objections, that wouldn't be so bad. Unfortunately, although this may have been part of the problem, the Jewish sources speak for themselves - they rejected athletic competition in Jewish life on its own merits.

One of the most impressive qualities our Jewish ancestors have always had (and one of the more frustrating) was their foresight. They accepted responsibility not only for the well-being of their own generation but for maintaining the integrity of their people forever. This fierce degree of responsibility can feel smothering in the short term, but it has consistently proved itself over the decades, centuries and even millennia of Jewish life. One of their primary considerations was the concern that introducing the pursuit of physical achievements for their own sake would be the beginning of the end for their predominantly spiritual existence. What a society promotes and celebrates, they taught, penetrates the consciousness of its people more than any lesson from a parent or a teacher ever would. And we humans will always be pulled much more powerfully by the tangible immediacy of the physical than by the elusive intimacy of the spiritual. If we care about our spiritual values, they insisted, our heroes must be heroes of the spirit and not of the stadium.

Despite our ancestors' resistance to Greek culture, there was one thing they loved about it - the glorious celebration of the individual milking every ounce of his potential. Their attitude to sports contained a breakthrough discovery in its view of man - we can achieve greatness far beyond our apparent limitations suggest.

The four-minute mile is a classic example. It was in May of 1954 that the first athlete broke the 4-minute barrier and it took only six weeks for the record to be broken. According to Wikipedia, "In the 1940s running a four-minute-mile was thought to be the physical limit of the human body. However, it is now the standard of all professional middle distance runners." Today, the record, set in 1999 by Hicham El Guerrouj, stands at 3 minutes 43.13 seconds - almost 17 seconds below the "human limit."

s p o r t s

Imagine if we brought that attitude to spiritual achievement? It sounds pretty weird to the modern ear, doesn't it? But think of just a few Jewish heroes - Abraham, King David, Hillel, Rabbi Akiva - that was how they lived and that is our culture. Without the heroism of the Jewish resistance to Greek culture, Hillel, who followed those events by three generations and Rabbi Akiva, who followed by three more, would never have come to be.

Being Jewish in America presents us with this challenge today as never before. Virtually all our celebrities achieve their fame for physical qualities, in ways that are becoming more and more grossly physical. Most of us have trouble identifying spiritual qualities in the first place, let alone respecting them in others or achieving them ourselves.

Despite our ancestors' resistance to Greek culture, there was one thing they loved about it - the glorious celebration of the individual milking every ounce of his potential.



Break Tradition!

Give the ultimate one-of-a-kind gift to the bride and groom—
The Lucite® Wedding Cube
The Lucite® Wedding Mezuzah

Send us the actual broken glass or bulb from the ceremony and we'll have it suspended as a crystal clear Lucite® Cube or Mezuzah (or both!) for you to give to the happy couple. Imagine - that magical second when the glass is broken - frozen in time - forever! Our Lucite® Wedding Cube and Mezuzah are guaranteed never to fade or yellow, ever!

The Treasured Collection

For more information call us toll free

1-800-729-2321

1-301-986-8888 • Fax: 301-986-0370

Visit our website: www.treasuredcollection.com

9 Candlelight Court • Potomac, Maryland 20854



Lucite® is a registered trademark of the Dupont Corporation



Could you imagine trying to get the media interested in a spiritual decathlon—one in which strength of character, honest thinking and personal responsibility won medals, instead of running, jumping and throwing? Forget about it. It is up to us to apply Olympic-quality focus and dedication to our *real* values.

In fact, Chanukah *means* dedication, though it is usually understood in connection to the rededication of the Temple and the lighting of the miraculous Menorah we now celebrate. But it has a double meaning. The Maccabees risked their lives to preserve Judaism because of the depth of their dedication to the eternal values of our heritage - and their dedication *beat the Olympian's*. We carry their legacy in fighting to preserve Judaism. This is the season of dedication. What are you dedicated to?

lighting the menorah

everything you need to know

The MENORAH

Unlike the 7-branched Menorah that stood in the Temple in Ancient Jerusalem (which now serves as a symbol of the state of Israel), the Chanukah Menorah has 8 branches. The primary goal of lighting the Menorah on Chanukah is to publicize the miracle of the 8 nights the Temple Menorah remained lit during the time of the Maccabees - on only one night's worth of oil.



Part of the design of the Menorah is to show which night of Chanukah it is, since we light that number of candles each night. Therefore, all 8 candle holders on the menorah should be at the same height - and preferably in a straight line.

Menorahs also have a ninth candle called the "Shamash" which is used to light the other candles. To avoid appearing as one of the candles that represent what night it is, the Shamash should be set apart in some way - either placed higher than the other candles, or significantly off to the side.

Finally, in order to dedicate the light of the Menorah to the Chanukah miracle, we are taught to make sure there is another light in the room by which to see. In a pinch, the light of the Shamash will do.

The WINDOW

To best publicize the miracle, the Menorah used to be lit outside the doorway of one's home, on the left side when entering, opposite the Mezuzah. This is still practiced in Israel in many places and in some places throughout the world. Traditionally, the Menorah is lit in a window facing the public thoroughfare. If for some reason the Menorah cannot be lit by the window, it may be lit inside the house as well.



Since the mitzvah occurs at the actual moment of lighting, it is best for the Menorah to already be in place when it is lit rather than to be moved there afterwards. The candles may not be blown out, so make sure they are lit in a place they can safely remain until they burn out.

The CANDLES

While any candles are "kosher" for Chanukah use, many people choose to use olive oil to better remember the original miracle. Either way, it is important to choose candles or to use enough oil for the lights to burn for at least 30 minutes after nightfall. (Those famous colored candles just barely qualify!) Many Jewish bookstores now sell longer colored candles.

Today, you can buy an olive-oil "kit" (also available in most Jewish bookstores) that includes the right amount of pre-filled little "cups" that will fit into many Menorahs just like a candle.



The LIGHTING

On the first night, one candle is placed at the far right (as you face the Menorah). For each successive night, we begin by placing the right-most candle first and adding candles to its left as appropriate. We always light beginning with the left-most candle first, and then proceed to the right as we light the remaining candles.

There are two blessings that are recited as we stand ready to light each night. On the first night, the *SheHechyanu* blessing is added as well to appreciate that we once again have lived to celebrate another Chanukah.

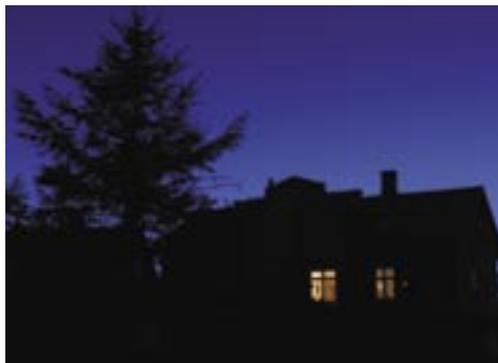


Should any of the candles blow out accidentally, even very soon after being lit, it is not necessary to relight them, although it is a good thing to do if you choose.

The TIME

The Menorah should preferably be lit immediately at nightfall. It is best to wait, however, until all the members of the household are present. This adds to the family atmosphere and also maximizes the mitzvah of “publicizing the miracle.” However, the Menorah can be lit (with the blessings) late into the night, as long as people are still awake.

The Menorah should remain lit for at least 30 minutes after nightfall, during which time no use should be made of its light.



On Friday evening, the Menorah should be lit at least 18 minutes before sundown, just before lighting Shabbat candles. Since the Menorah needs to burn for 30 minutes into the night (which begins about an hour later), at least one of the candles used on Friday evening should be big enough to last that long (the regular “colored candles” only go for about a half hour but standard Shabbat candles will work fine.)

The BLESSINGS

The first two blessings are said with the Shamash already lit, but immediately prior to lighting the Chanukah candles.

BLESSING #1

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-beinu melech ba-olam, Asher kid-shanu bi-mitzvo-sav, Vi-tzee-vanu li-bad-leek ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, the Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to light candles for Chanukah.

BLESSING #2

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-beinu melech ba-olam, She-asa nee-seem la-avo-seinu, Baya-meem ba-baim ba-zman ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who made miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

BLESSING #3

This blessing is said on **the first night only**.

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-beinu melech ba-olam, Sheb-be-che-yanu vi-kee-yimanu Vi-bee-gee-yanu la-zman ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

This paragraph is said each night, **after the first light has been kindled:**

*Ha-nerot ba-lalu anach-nu mad-likin
Al ha-nissim vi-al hanif-laot
v'Al ba-tshu-ot vi-al ba-milchamot
She-asita la'avo-teinu
Ba-yamim ba-beim, ba-zman ha-zeh
Al ye-dey koban-echa baki-doshim.*

*Vi-chol sbmonat ye-mey Chanukah
Ha-nerot ba-lalu kodesh beim,
Ve-ein lanu reshut li-beesh-tamesh ba-bem
Ela leer-otam bilvad
Kedai le-bodot u-li-balleh li-sbimcha ha-gadol
Al ni-secha vi-al niflao-techa
vi-al yeshua-techa.*

We kindle these lights
For the miracles and the wonders
For the redemption and the battles
Which You performed for our forefathers
In those days at this season
Through Your holy priests.

During all eight days of Chanukah
These lights are sacred
And we are not permitted to make ordinary use
of them
But only to look at them
In order to express thanks and praise to Your
great Name
For Your miracles, Your wonders, and Your
salvations.

a new celebration

jewish unity live!

by AJS Staff

42

This Yom Kippur, on Kol Nidrei night, one congregation heard an appeal like no other. Yes, there were cards on each seat asking for a commitment - but not for anything anyone expected. It was an appeal not for dollars but for a commitment to Jewish Unity.

Those in attendance were introduced to a new program called "The Jewish Unity Siyum." One of the cherished celebrations in Jewish life, though not as popular (yet) as a Bris or Bar Mitzva, is a "Siyum," which means "completion" - of a course of Torah learning. What makes the Jewish Unity Siyum unique - and potentially revolutionary - is that it recasts the Siyum, traditionally celebrated in the context of Talmud study, as a celebration of any course of learning which begins with a commitment. Now, anyone - whatever their background in Jewish education - can share in the celebration.

Songwriter and performer Peter Himmelman with Kol Zimra singers and Rabbi Zvi Holland at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts.



Courtesy of Linda Enger

The program, whose chairmen include Mortimer Zuckerman (see *Inspired People*, page 12), was launched last year by Community Kollels around the country as a means of enhancing Jewish Unity and promoting Jewish learning. A Community Kotel, for those who have not yet been exposed to their work, is an organization dedicated to building Jewish unity by sharing exciting educational opportunities with all segments of their communities.

Dr. Steven Kanner, a past-president of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Phoenix, Arizona, did not know what a Community Kotel was until less than 10 years ago. Now, he is the president of the Phoenix Community Kotel and a national leader building a movement of Jewish unity around the country.

"If there is one thing the People of the Book should be able to celebrate together it is the study of "The Book," he says. "By adding the structure of personal commitments and the community-wide celebration, we take Torah study out of the classroom and into the heart of the community."

BUILDING TOGETHERNESS

According to Rabbi Aaron Gruman, Director of Torah Links in New Jersey, the Siyum will be celebrated by Kollels and other organizations around the country every year in a gala event called Jewish Unity Live. In 2005, five major events occurred simultaneously on the very same evening that hundreds of thousands of Talmud enthusiasts around the world were celebrating the Daf Yomi completion of the Talmud. And on US army bases across the world, smaller celebrations were held by our Jewish servicemen and women far from home.

There is so much strength in the Jewish people when we work together for what is important. What could be more important than joining together in commitments to Jewish learning that will make an exciting difference in strengthening the unity of our people?
– Lynda Walker



Broadway star Dudu Fisher at Jewish Unity Live 2005 in New Jersey.

"There is a real need today to create programs that will foster community engagement togetherness," says Lynda Walker, recipient of this year's Jewish Unity Award in Atlanta. "Too much attention is given to matters that tend to be divisive. There is so much strength in the Jewish people when we work together for what is important. What could be more important than joining together in commitments to Jewish learning that will make an exciting difference in strengthening the unity of our people?"

The 2005 celebration certainly made a big splash. A video presentation prepared for the event included messages from Senator Joseph Lieberman, former Israeli Knesset minister Natan Sharansky, Congressman Eric Cantor, Hollywood screenwriter David Weiss, actor Eliot Gould and other Jewish leaders. Featured speakers at events around the country included Eli Weisel, Haddasah Lieberman and almost included West Wing star Josh Molina who got called away at the last minute for an unplanned shoot. The events included musical performances by Broadway star Dudu Fisher, songwriter Peter Himmelman, Kol Zimra and others. Many venues presented the premiere of the feature film, "Passover with the Wellmans," created to explore the challenges of Jewish unity within the family.

This year's events, planned in dozens of cities around the country including many college campuses, promise to be even bigger. Featured locations include Atlanta, Phoenix, Dallas, New York, New Jersey and Seattle.

*Jewish Unity Live 2005 at the New Jersey
Center for the Performing Arts*



In one section of one poster, for example, you will find a professional studying the 10 Commandments, a teen-ager studying the prayer book, a Rabbi studying a tractate in the Talmud and a three-year-old studying "My First Parsha Reader." You find a working mother studying a book on Jewish character, a college student learning about Jewish philosophy and a fourth-grade boy who decided to get a head start and study his whole Bar-Mitzvah portion.

WATCHING THE GROWTH

"The central theme of the events is to touch people with the power Jewish learning has to increase our pride in our Judaism, both as individuals and as a community," says Guardian of Jewish Unity David Friedman. "As big and exciting as the events are, their energy comes not from the celebrity but from the learning achievements of the participants. Last year proved that the Jewish people really need an outlet to celebrate the depth of what they accomplish in their Jewish learning. It sounds like a cliché but there was literally dancing in the aisles."

So far, over a thousand individuals have already chosen their learning commitments for this year's event. Beautiful wall-size posters are hanging in venues around the country where names and text selected are displayed to remind everyone of just how big this movement is becoming. The range of participants and texts is nothing short of inspiring.

"This Shabbat I was standing next to the poster," one participant reported, "and I overheard a conversation between four kids between the ages of maybe five and seven. They were finding their names on the sign and telling each other what they were learning, how much they did already, what their siblings were learning. There was Jewish pride in these kids like you wouldn't believe. Of course, it made me cry."



Students from some of the eight Atlanta day schools that participated in Jewish Unity Live 2005 receive their certificates.

If there is one thing the
People of the Book should
be able to celebrate together
it is the study of "The Book"
— Dr. Steven Kanner

The central theme of the events is to touch people with the power Jewish learning has to increase our pride in our Judaism, both as individuals and as a community
– David Friedman

BEING A PART OF IT

“Joining this program has become one of the most meaningful Jewish things I’ve done in as long as I can remember,” says another participant. “Jewish learning has been a little hard for me to get into. But now, I know that I have something to look forward to in completing my learning project, and sharing this process with friends in my community and Jews across the country makes it feel so much more exciting. And I’m really learning something.”

The Jewish Unity Siyum is open to everyone, wherever they live. All you have to do is pick a Jewish learning project that will make you proud and sign up! Just visit our website – ajspirit.com, or go directly to jewishunitylive.com for more information about how to take part. If there is no celebration planned in your community, we can help! Email us at editor@ajspirit.com and we’ll let you know if plans are in the works in your community and if not, we’ll help you plan your own! As the proud media sponsor of Jewish Unity Live, we are excited about our role in promoting this revolutionary program of pure Jewish meaning and inspiration.



**Better Health is Only
A Click Away**
At The Kasher Vitamin Superstore

Largest Selection of Brand Name
Kasher Vitamins at Discounted Prices!

- ✓ Freeda
- ✓ Landau
- ✓ Maxi Health
- ✓ Nutri-Supreme
- ✓ Solgar
- ...and many more!

We ship worldwide. Order today receive it tomorrow!

Call us at 1800-645-1899 or visit us at
www.KasherVitamins.com



all you can eat and more...

Kosher.com is the largest Kosher food distributor on the web. If it's Kosher, we have it! Whether it is frozen food or prepared meals, we will ship it right to your door!

www.kosher.com

A JEWISH CHILD ON CHRISTMAS

by Sarah Shapiro



With all the graceful white steeples soaring up around us into the starry night...perhaps that was when I first got an inkling...

For some people, Christmas never keeps its promise. But for me as a child, Christmas never failed. It was always magical, always a mystery, always the one day of the year that could be counted on to bring us together as a family. In other words, it was the one celebration (aside from Passover dinner at Aunt Sophie's) that my father, *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins, wouldn't dream of missing.

For him, a child of immigrants in New York City during the Depression, Jewish holidays were a grim business. Observance was enforced by well-meaning grownups who - in their own distress, and in their ignorance of both Judaism and of basic child psychology - meted out fearfulness in

the garb of piety. Boring hours in synagogue, uttering endless prayers in an ancient tongue, reciting words whose meaning was left unexplained... while meanwhile, out on the street, to identify oneself as a Jew was to court anti-Semitic violence.

As a father, he resolved early on that his own children would be spared: no one was going to force-feed his daughters any superstitious nonsense. Indeed, the only holiday we observed in full was the one he himself had never experienced personally - the one with no religious baggage, and whose whimsical traditions he and my mother could sort of create from scratch, improvising as they went along. For him - and therefore for us - it was nothing but fun and a shimmering joy, and the fact that he could bestow it so guiltlessly upon his children represented, for him, America's wonderful liberation from his own parents' Old World ties and tribal bondage. Come December 24th, no urgent meeting in Washington, no lecture in Des Moines, not even an editorial deadline, could have dragged him from our midst in snowy Connecticut.

GOD'S LITTLE ACRE

My father may have aimed for freedom from ritual, but our observance of Christmas had many, and we guarded them zealously, inflexibly. From late November on, the suspense grew deliciously day by day. Presents – some already wrapped and ribboned – were hidden in the chilly closed-in porch where the ping-pong table, waiting idly for warmer weather, wobbled under its annual burden. I'd sneak out there sometimes to take a peek, and the pile kept rising higher. The tree got decorated only on Christmas Eve, not before, and only tiny white lights were permitted – no tawdry multi-colored ones. Ditto for bulbs – none but silver and gold. Each year, four handmade paper angels appeared on the mantelpiece, one for each daughter. I was the littlest, last in the row, in red robe and golden wings.

They succeeded so well, my parents, creating a wonderful celebration for their children, and themselves. What would have made them suspect that somewhere inside me, something was amiss?

Once (it was the mid-1950s, and the Holocaust had already gotten a fast, temporary burial under a thick, deep silence), one of my sister's friends drove us kids into town for the annual community carol-sing on Christmas Eve. There, on the charming village green known as "God's Little Acre," surrounded on all sides by the whitest and loveliest of Colonial-era churches – Congregational, Methodist and Episcopalian – we joined the assembly of our fellow citizens as "Silent Night, Holy Night" rose on their happy, sonorous voices up into the frosty air.

Before daybreak next morning, opening my eyes into pre-dawn darkness and seeing that the longed-for moment had finally arrived, I'd jump out of bed to rouse my big sisters (who were always a few steps ahead of me in blasé sophistication). A blissful mysteriousness animated everything, and – here in the Jerusalem coffee shop where I type on my laptop forty years later, a fleeting kinesthetic memory just now streaked through some buried region of my brain (like a falling star, no sooner did it appear than it was already gone) of the nearly unbearable excitement, standing there waiting for them at the top of the stairs.

I couldn't see why it should be so, but in my heart of hearts I knew. To be a Jewish child on Christmas... was to be scared of who I was.

Then, the magic – the wonder of it! – when from the bottom steps, we'd first set eyes on the four red stockings hung over the fireplace, and the twinkling tree with its star on top, and the heap of shining presents under its boughs! We'd dump out our stockings on the floor to see what we got, and if I'd ever harbored any hope that Santa Claus was real, the walnuts and oranges would have disabused me of any such notion. Health food was Mommy's unmistakable trademark. No fat and merry savior would have restricted our white sugar intake to one red-and-white striped candy cane per stocking.

We weren't supposed to open anything more until our parents got up, and even then, no one could just plow ahead self-centeredly. We had to take turns – unwrapping the presents one by one, with everyone else looking on – so it always took all morning long, opening everything all together, as a family. Then came the huge family breakfast, the one time all year we did such a thing, to eat breakfast all together, formally, in the dining room – with white candles on the table, and linen napkins, and the red-plaid tablecloth saved exclusively for this day. Even the menu was a firmly set tradition: sausage and scrambled eggs.

Then, at last, the crowning glory: my father would appear in his annual Santa Claus costume, which as the years went by, became more and more comical and absurd: Santa as an old woman, Santa as gorilla, Santa with little bells and a tin can hanging pitifully from his tail.

My stash of Christmas presents was always big, and satisfying. Though there was always an inexplicable sort of deflation and collapse into nothingness the day after – *is that all there is?* – I recall feeling jealous of someone else's gift on only one occasion in all those years. Late one afternoon on the 25th, after all my new toys and new clothes had been put away and the world – suddenly depleted of mystery, collapsed in on itself like a black hole – I was talking on the phone to Linda, a friend from elementary school. We were comparing notes on our respective hauls – among other things, I'd gotten a musical spinning top and a yellow parka – when she reported a pair of red Suzy-Long-Legs, which incited my intense envy. But in the same conversation, she casually astounded me with the news that she and her siblings had gotten into a fight over a present. It was a shock. *On Christmas Day?* I was horrified, and silently relieved. Linda's family had allowed this

day - *this day?* - to be tainted by business as usual. Red tights or no red tights, I was luckier, after all.

They succeeded so well, my parents, creating a wonderful celebration for their children, and themselves. What would have made them suspect that somewhere inside me, something was amiss?

That one Christmas Eve when we ventured out into the larger community and I stood surrounded in all my smallness by the tall, smiling people on the village green, stamping their feet in the cold and laughing and talking, and with all the graceful white steeples soaring up around us into the starry night...perhaps that was when I first got an inkling...

I remember now (with sorrow) how my father gripped the steering-wheel and spun his head around. "Sarah!" It was as if he'd been struck. "What do you mean?" "I got a job teaching English, and it starts on December 25th," I explained proudly.

All those people were familiar with this place. They came here every Sunday. We didn't. We never went anywhere like this. God's Little Acre? Even Santa Claus seemed realer than God. And that story about the baby in the manger: even the grownups seemed to believe it. For us, it was just...a beautiful picture.

Something was suddenly very plain, and I didn't want to see it. To be a Jewish child singing Christmas carols was to feel...like a fool. A misfit. I was making a fool of myself in my own eyes. All this longing to belong...to partake of someone else's joy. No matter how radiant, glorious, magical, and enchanting ...no matter how deeply I was stirred by these baffling words on

my own lips...something craven and pitiful was going on. Something had been hidden, or I was hiding from something. And the whole thing had spawned something like...contempt. For what?

For...myself?

It was useless.

I couldn't see why it should be so, but in my heart of hearts I knew. To be a Jewish child on Christmas...was to be scared of who I was.

IN THE WOODS

At twenty-two, I began advertising to my family that I'd discovered my Jewish identity. I got work teaching English in the most conservative, old-school Orthodox society I could find - Hasidic Williamsburg - and my first day on the job happened to be Sunday, December 25th.

On the car ride going back to Connecticut a few days before the holiday, there I was in the back seat, my parents in the front, when I made my announcement. I was not going to be joining the family this year for Christmas morning festivities. I had a job. Not only was this a great touché as far as religion was concerned; it was also almost the first time in my life that I was going to earn a penny.

I remember now (with sorrow) how my father gripped the steering-wheel and spun his head around. "Sarah!" It was as if he'd been struck. "What do you mean?"

"I got a job teaching English, and it starts on December 25th," I explained proudly.

"But Sarah, this is a family tradition! We're always together on this day. You can't do that!" My mother reached out and put one hand upon his.

"Oh, yes, I can," I shot back, my voice rising. "Christmas is a Christian holiday, and we're not Christian. I'm Jewish and so are you!"

"We don't look upon it as a religious holiday! It has nothing at all to do with religion!" His voice cracked. "For us it's a national holiday!"

I did go to my first day of work, and all the little girls seemed to enjoy the class, though the principal fired me politely when I showed up the next morning. Evidently some parents had complained that the new English teacher had had their daughters memorize a strange, Gentile-sounding song about someone named Sally.

*One two one,
One two one.
One two, one two,
ABC.*

*My mother said
I never should
Play with the gypsies
In the woods.*

My parents would have joined right in. That song was one of our family traditions, dating back to my mother's Utah childhood. I'd shared it with my new charges with pleasure, and all their sweet and vivid voices had rung out:

*I've got a bonnet trimmed in blue
Do you wear it? Yes I do!
When do you wear it? When I can.
When I go out with my young man!*

Little did I know, coming from a family whose Christmas tree was at that moment standing in all its splendor in our living room, that little girls named Raizie and Feiga and Sorale, from old Hasidic families in Williamsburg, have never heard of girls called Sally. Nor do they know what's so great about young men, much less that young ladies "go out" with them.

My shame was great. I had lost Christmas with my father, and the Hasidim in Brooklyn, too. My show of independence had been a sham, and the Jewishness I'd claimed as my own wasn't mine at all.

BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS

My own children, and children's children, haven't had to go through this particular brand of confusion, this divided sense of self...this standing on the outside looking in. The little flames that light up our window throughout Chanukah have always been mirrored in all the windows of their neighborhood, and throughout Jerusalem, and around the world.

They don't share my persistent sense of loss, when December 25th comes around...not of the Christian holiday their mother once coveted, but of the valiant father who didn't know that it's not freedom from ritual a little girl needs, but her own rituals. The religious traditions he abandoned - because to him as a boy, their meaning had never been revealed - were the very ones that could have held all my undifferentiated yearnings in their steady embrace. Only they could have quenched my childish longing for beauty, drama, excitement, order, for the self-esteem engendered by self-discipline, and above all, for inclusion - to feel *I belonged*.

What did I, like every child, need? I needed to know there's such a thing as miracles in the world - something invisible and transcendent, beyond the mundane. Magical? Yes, but more than magical. Something real.

For the ideal is real. *L'bavdil bain kodesh l'chol*. Blessed are You Who distinguishes between sacred and secular, and between light and darkness.

Everyone around that little boy was in the dark. There was no one who could tell the child who became my father: *Your people celebrate the miracle of Creation itself, every Friday night*. That's the one day each week that brings parents and children together - *no matter what, kids, you can count on it* - with special linen on the table, and singing, and candlelight.

Sarah Shapiro is the author of Growing With My Children, Don't You Know it's a Perfect World, and A Gift Passed Along (ArtsScroll), and editor, most recently, of The Mother in Our Lives (Targum/Feldheim). She lectures and teaches writing in Israel and America.

LOSE

**7-10 LBS IN THE FIRST WEEK
AND 20-25 LBS BY MONTHS END!**



**NO STARVING! NO HUNGER!
TAKE THE FIRST STEP
TO A NEW YOU!**

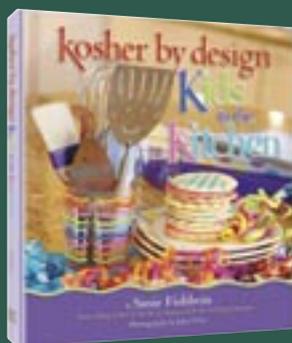
Now You Can Find KDC Kit At
WAL★MART (pharmacy Section)

(866) 572-9525
WWW.KOSHERDIETCLUB.COM

* Individual results may vary

KOSHER DIET CLUB





COOKING WITH KIDS? SUSIE FISHBEIN MAKES IT FUN AND EASY! BY GAVRIEL ARYEH SANDERS

American Jewish Spirit: Your latest project, Kosher by Design Kids in the Kitchen came out November 1. It's beautiful, like your previous two books. But it's very different. What inspired you to create it?

Susie Fishbein: I have four young kids and for the last four years, they've seen me spend hundreds, maybe thousands of hours in the kitchen. Not wanting my professional focus to exclude them, I found creative ways to incorporate their assistance into my recipe testing and food preparations as fun ways to be together. They love it. It's a great bonding experience. We've created a storehouse of memories together. And they know how to do things! They are growing up Torah literate, kosher literate, and kitchen

50

literate. I can only imagine how happy their future spouses will be! So the short answer to your question is that the book naturally emerged from including my kids on previous projects.

AJS: What's the intended age range for Kosher by Design Kids in the Kitchen?

SF: (laughs audibly) Well, the suggested level is from nine up, but there are things in this cookbook you can do with kids as young as five and six. What's most amusing to me is that there is no upper level. Parents are telling me, "Hey, I love this book for myself! There are some great quick and easy recipes here!"

AJS: Besides time well spent together in the kitchen, what other benefits did you include in the design of the recipes?

SF: You know that I'm a big believer in the home being the most important of all Jewish institutions. To me, that makes the kitchen the nerve center. So many practical aspects of preserving a Jewish home take place in the kitchen. While this book focuses primarily on a wide range of foods that kids naturally love to eat, the Jewish component is more subtle, emerging as a byproduct of preparing foods according to kashrut standards.

There are significant general education benefits also. Kids in the Kitchen teaches children to understand proportion and measurement, math skills, timing, cooking implements, and culinary vocabulary, not to mention nutrition and health knowledge. In school, our children often learn about proteins, calories, fats, and carbs in the same way they learn the elements of the periodic table - from charts and pictures. How memorable or meaningful is that? It's important for kids to see what a cup of sugar in a recipe looks like.

And kids acquire tremendous self-esteem from knowing they can prepare delicious foods themselves. This confidence has a spill-over effect into other areas of achievement, like mastering a musical instrument or performing better in school.

AJS: Are the recipes difficult?

SF: Each recipe is graded to indicate degree of difficulty. In the upper right corner you'll notice a little chef's hat - though somebody said they look more like muffins! So one hat represents easy, two hats represent more difficult, and three hats represent the most challenging. Truthfully, they are all easy, straightforward, and fun. The main differences will be in the number of ingredients, the tools required, the cooking time, and of course how soon it's ready to eat!

AJS: Have there been any surprises for you since the book has come out?

SF: Yes. The most consistent response - and we didn't anticipate this - has been how much adults love the book for themselves! One of my friends told me her husband uses it to whip up something fast when he's home alone, hungry, and doesn't want microwaved leftovers. A therapist friend told me he recommended the book for a father and son to spend more time together at home.

AJS: Thanks for creating the book. We're sure Jewish homes across the nation will enjoy using it.

SF: My thanks to you and your wonderful readers for letting me into their homes.

Susie Fishbein is the author of the bestseller cookbooks Kosher by Design, Kosher by Design Entertains, and the newly released Kosher by Design Kids in the Kitchen (ArtScroll Mesorah Publications). She holds an MS degree from Brooklyn College and resides in Livingston, New Jersey with her husband and four children.



chocolate haystacks

The most important ingredient in this recipe is the chocolate. Make sure you are using good quality chocolate bars, the kind you want to snack on. Try not to use parve chocolate chips; they don't tend to be made out of good tasting chocolate. I like the Belgian and Israeli brands of chocolate bars, like Schmerling and Elite. Ghirardelli white chocolate bars work well too. They usually come in 3½- or 4-ounce bars so you will need two bars to make this recipe.

Equipment list:

cookie sheet	parchment paper
medium pot	silicone spatula
measuring spoons	soup spoon

Ingredient list:

7-8 ounces good quality white chocolate, milk chocolate, or semi-sweet chocolate
 ½ cup dry roasted peanuts
 2-3 handfuls of thin pretzel sticks

Line the cookie sheet with parchment paper. Set aside.

Break the chocolate up into small pieces. Most chocolate bars have score marks and you can use them as your guide. Place the chocolate into a medium pot.

Turn the heat to low. Melt the chocolate, stirring the whole time with a silicone spatula. Chocolate burns easily and can be tricky to work with. Every 45 seconds, lift the pot off the heat and give the chocolate a good stir to help it melt more quickly.

If for some reason your chocolate is not smooth or shiny, add 2 tablespoons of water and return the pot to the heat, stirring the whole time to make it smooth.

Remove the pot from the heat.

Add the peanuts into the pot.

Break the pretzel sticks in half and add them to the pot.

Use your silicone spatula and stir to coat the peanuts and pretzels.

Using a soup spoon, scoop out spoonfuls of the mixture. Place the "haystacks" on the prepared cookie sheet.

Place into the refrigerator for 15-20 minutes or until the chocolate has hardened.

Store the haystacks in an airtight container in the pantry or in the refrigerator.



breakfast burritos

If you like a little spice to start your day, then these breakfast burritos are for you! You can control the spiciness with the kind of salsa you use. Go for mild for not spicy and medium or hot for a fiery dish.

Equipment list:

medium mixing bowl	measuring cups and spoons
whisk	8-inch frying pan
wooden spoon or silicone spatula	microwave oven

Ingredient list:

4 large eggs	2 tablespoons milk
1 tablespoon butter	½ cup shredded Cheddar cheese
2 large (9-10 inch) flour tortillas	6 tablespoons bottled salsa
aluminum foil	spoons

Crack the eggs into a medium bowl. Add the milk.

Using your whisk, mix the eggs and milk, and then really whisk it to get some air into the eggs.

Place the butter into the frying pan. Place it over medium heat. When the butter is melted, add the eggs.

Using your wooden spoon or silicone spatula, scramble the eggs.

When the eggs are a little set, add the shredded Cheddar cheese and mix it in. Cook until the eggs are bright yellow, fluffy, and not runny at all and the cheese is melted.

Carefully remove the pan from the heat.

Warm the tortillas in the microwave for 15 seconds.

Spoon the egg mixture into the center of the tortilla.

Spoon the salsa on top of the eggs.

Fold two opposite sides of the tortilla to the center. Roll up the tortilla from the bottom.

You can leave the top open so the pretty colors of the eggs and salsa show or roll it the whole way.

To keep the burritos warm, you can wrap them in aluminum foil and place them into a 350° F oven for 10 minutes.



52

Miracle at the Wall

by Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal

As I approached my twenty-third birthday with nothing to show for it but a string of bad dates, each worse than the previous one, I was almost ready to give up on ever finding my soul mate. Then my Aunt Rivky, who lives in Israel, told me that many people go to the Western Wall to pray for their soul mate. Specifically, she told me, praying there for

forty days in a row was a blessing and had brought many couples to the marriage canopy.

I must admit that I was skeptical, but I knew that praying at the Western Wall could certainly do no harm. And if my own personal prayer was not answered, perhaps it would help someone else in

Israel. So I decided to go ahead and, as the advertising slogan says, “Just do it!” With the help of Aunt Rivky, I made arrangements to rent a room in the neighborhood of Jerusalem called the German Colony, which is within walking distance of the Wall. I took exactly forty days off from work (I had a very understanding boss) and flew from New

York to the holy city with no small amount of trepidation.

I had been to Israel many times before, but never on my own. My aunt had arranged for me to rent one room in the apartment of an American-born woman. Sara was in her late thirties, still single, and very bitter. She seemed to hate me from the minute we met. The reasons weren't hard to fathom. With every movement, every gesture, every shrug, her attitude implied: Where do you get the nerve to worry about being single? What's the emergency? You're only twenty-three years old. I, on the other hand, am almost forty. My biological clock is ticking. Yours is just fine. I don't know if I'll ever get married and have children. You still have prospects. You have some chutzpah to think it's you who's in crisis!

Far from home, I was hurt to encounter such overt hostility – but I tried to understand her perspective. If I was suffering, how much greater must be her pain and torment? I ached for her. I was far younger than she, and my possibilities were less bleak. So I tried to overcome her animosity by explaining the purpose of my trip. As I launched into my recital, she could not help but be intrigued. Although she lived in Israel herself, she had never heard about the forty-day prayer ritual. So when I urged her to join me, she set aside her antagonism and agreed to accompany me.

Every day, for forty consecutive days, Sara and I went faithfully to the Western Wall for morning services and to recite a special prayer for a soul mate. From there, Sara would go off to work, while I would head for studies at Neve Yerushalayim Teachers Seminary, where I was temporarily enrolled. We repeated this scenario regularly every single day without fail. It wasn't easy! Even though I had come to Israel for this purpose and this purpose only, there were mornings when I almost didn't make it

in time for morning prayers. There were mishaps; obstacles; delays that seemed to conspire against me and stymie efforts constantly. Yet I was determined. Despite the hardships that confronted me, I managed to complete a full sequence of forty days in a row. Then it was time to go home.

I hopped a plane that took me back to New York, back to my job, and back to my parents' home, where I waited for someone special to appear. Obliging, he arrived on schedule – just a few short months after my return from Israel – and joyfully we set our wedding date for the night of Tu B'Av – an auspicious time in the Jewish calendar. As I mailed out my wedding invitations, I thought of my old roommate Sara, and impulsively decided to send her one, too. I did not really expect her to travel so far, but I wanted to notify her of my good news. In response, I received a note from her saying: "Thank you for inviting me to your wedding, but I'm sorry I won't be able to attend. You

see, I will be getting married on the exact same night myself. Mazel Tov!"

Sure enough, inside the envelope was an invitation to her wedding scheduled for... Tu B'Av.

– Ayala Cohen

Reprinted with the permission of the authors.

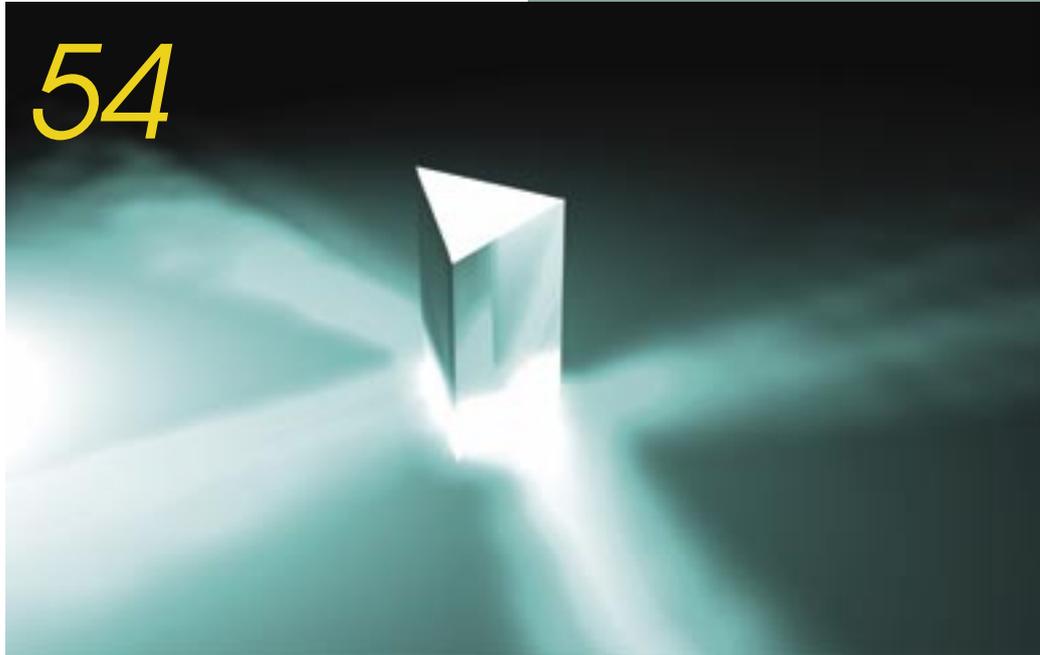
53



Beauty in the Dark

by Yitzchak Feldheim

54



Remember once hearing someone sharp sum up all Jewish holidays as “they tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat.” Living in the age of sound bites and instant gratification, I am never inclined to forgo a concise and succinct summation. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of beautiful subtlety that is lost in such a terse depiction. Just as the foods of our celebrations of victory vary from the matzoh balls of Passover to the *bamantosben* of Purim and latkes of Chanukah, so too do the individual holidays celebrate unique and varied philosophical victories.

Throughout the history of our people, the one thing we consistently experienced was persecution from those around us. Virtually every nation has had its chance to take pot shots at this resilient people. Yet for all of the similarity of these “pot shots,” every one of them has been

unique. Every one of these persecutions has been a distinct struggle with a unique evil and has resulted in a unique and distinct victory.

To properly appreciate the specific celebration of Chanukah’s victory of Judaism over Hellenism or Israel over Greece, it is necessary to understand exactly what it is that Greece represents.

In order to define the nation of Greece specifically, it is useful to begin by explaining the fascinating Torah view of the purpose and role of individual nations in general. G-d’s purpose in creating the nations is best described with the analogy of a parent feeding a young child an apple. While the parent’s goal may be for the child to eat the whole apple, it is impossible or dangerous for the child to eat it whole; therefore it is necessary for the parent to cut it into many small slices, so that the child can – piece-by-piece – eventually eat the entire apple.

Similarly, G-d perceived that in giving mankind the mission of achieving perfection, like giving a child a whole apple, He was asking the impossible. He therefore began a progression of dividing the totality of the job into smaller pieces whereby individual groups could be assigned different aspects of the job. Through segmenting the world into different nations, G-d sought to spread out the workload. By dividing the job, G-d delineated the nuances of the nations, with each allotted a specific slice in the *pie of the pursuit of perfection*.

These sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth - each represent a third of the new world and therefore each is entrusted with responsibility for a third of the pie of perfection.

G-D AND THE NATIONS

To understand the specific niche that Greece occupies in the grand scheme we must go back to the very beginnings of the nations, to right after the flood when the three sons of Noah, (the ancestors of both Greece and Israel) set out to rebuild a destroyed world. These sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth - each represent a third of the new world and therefore each is entrusted with responsibility for a third of the pie of perfection.

How does one go about dividing the quest for perfection into three parts? We can begin by observing that all human engagement does divide neatly into three types: thoughts, emotions and actions. As humans, we think, feel and act - that's it. Shem, the ancestor of the Jewish people - hence Semites (Semite, Shemite same thing) - translates as "the namer" or "the definer." He is entrusted with the role of the mind. He can pursue perfection of "his third" by seeking out wisdom, truth and knowledge or he can fail at his mission of intellect by embracing ignorance, arrogance and falsehood.

Ham translates as "heat" or "passions" and for his "third" is entrusted with the heart - the seat of emotion. His mission is to pursue love, brotherhood and peace while avoiding rage, hatred and jealousy.

Finally, Japheth, the father of Greece, translates as "beauty." His "third" is to perfect the body. His assignment is to achieve health, strength, beauty and industry. In fact the blessing that Noah gives to his son Japheth is "May G-d grant *beauty* to Japheth and may he dwell in the tents of Shem."

TWO QUESTIONS

To truly understand Greece, we need to get a little Talmudic and ask two questions about this blessing. First of all, why is it necessary for Greece to dwell in the tents of Shem? Why is it not good enough for him to focus on perfecting his third by achieving beauty? Secondly, in studying Greece, it may be true that they excelled at physical beauty, bringing the world the likes of Greek architecture and the Olympics, but that is only half of Greece - the legacy of Sparta. What of Athens - the seat of democracy? And what of the philosophy of Plato and Socrates? Greece, it would seem, symbolizes more than just beauty and the body - they have a pretty significant role in the world of the mind and intellect too. How are they different than the children of Shem?

For the Greeks, this light bulb never turned on, and they went along, treasuring their beauty in the dark.

The answer to these questions is essentially the full understanding of what Greece and Chanukah is really about. The great Kabbalist, the Maharal¹ of Prague, explained that Greece really is only about the physical and the pursuit of beauty. The Greek interest in philosophy was driven not by an interest in truth and meaning, but by a desire to behold the symmetry and order of the world as it is. The difference is subtle but significant.

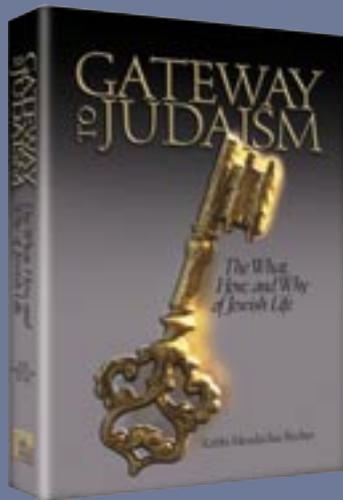
The Greek development of the mind was driven by aesthetics; they sought the logic and sensibility of the physical world they knew in order to enhance its beauty. They didn't want knowledge beyond what was already tangible and, in fact, they detested the wisdom of Israel. So while the Greeks recognized and developed the power of the mind, they limited its scope to their own values.

Noah's blessing anticipated this when he said, "may you dwell in the tents of Shem," a reference to the place to study truth. There is nothing wrong with beauty - it is the first part of his blessing. It's just not the end of it. When one perceives such beauty and symmetry it ought to send him flying into the "tents of Shem," struck by the realization that *when everything fits so perfectly someone must have planned it*. What does it all *mean*? What is it *about*? How do I *respond*?

For the Greeks, this light bulb never turned on, and they went along, treasuring their beauty in the dark. The Midrash, in fact, finds in the darkness that preceded G-d's creation of light a reference to the "enlightenment" of Greece.

Japheth, Greece and the celebration of beauty have great value but only if they will find their way into the tents of Israel, the scion of Shem. There, they will learn that beauty is not an end in itself but rather a trail of bread crumbs that leads to truth and ultimately to G-d.

So this is Chanukah, an epic battle between those who would have everything - even the mind - serve and end with the body (them) and those who appreciate physical beauty *as the vehicles to ultimate meaning* (us).



Gateway to Judaism: The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Shaar Press, Brooklyn, NY,
512pp, \$29.99

Coming Home to Judaism: Aussie Rabbi's New Book Points the Way

Mordechai Becher is widely known as one of the most engaging (and funniest) Jewish educators of our time. Australian-born and Jerusalem-trained, he is a seasoned and sought-after lecturer to secular and searching Jews who want compelling, informed answers to life's most important questions.

Becher is a senior lecturer for Gateways, a highly popular series of weekend-retreats offered throughout the country, and has years of experience answering tough questions from tradition-resistant and assimilated American Jews. Along the way, he's helped thousands of 20-, 30-, and 40-somethings embrace a Judaism that their parents and grandparents often discarded in favor of ethnic anonymity.

Becher's seeker-intensive interactions, which included a stint as chief respondent for Ohr Somayach's "Ask The Rabbi" forum, inspired him to distill his insights, illustrations, sources, and resources into an important new book, *Gateway to Judaism: The What, How, and Why of Jewish Living* (Shaar Press).

Becher explains, "I felt there was a need for a single, comprehensive, yet user-friendly volume that would provide clear explanations, references, and models for what goes on in a contemporary

traditional Jewish home."

He notes, "Great numbers of searchers coming through our seminars tell us they yearn for a Judaism that appeals to the intellect, cultivates the spirit, anchors meaningfully to the past, and conveys a compelling burden of proof to inquisitive skeptics. Their hunger really inspired me to write a practical guidebook that would help them actualize this desire in the most important of all Jewish institutions – the home."

At over 500 pages, Becher's work is no abridged visitor's guide to Planet Judaism. Written in a casual, often humorous style, his book opens with a treatment of the cycle of Jewish life as expressed through marriage, birth, *brit milah* and baby naming, *bar* and *bat mitzvah*, and the laws and practices surrounding death, mourning, and *kaddish* (Chapters 1-3).

To add situational relevance to the book's many how-to sections, Becher created the Levys, a fictional nuclear family. In chapters 4-13, the reader follows the family's preparations and observance of Shabbat and the holidays, demonstrating how a traditional, yet contemporary home preserves and transmits Jewish values through celebrations.

Passing from time-related topics to spatial spirituality, Becher offers a chapter on the role of the synagogue as the community's home for the Torah scroll and communal activities surrounding it, followed by a chapter on the historical significance of the land of Israel (Chapters 14-15).

The remaining chapters of *Gateway to Judaism* (16-24) lead the reader into deeper, interpersonal waters that explore individual Jewish character and commitments in action, thoughts, and words. Some of Judaism's most treasured values are expressed in this section, including such themes as justice, charity, ethics, and kindness. It also discusses concepts of modesty, kosher dietary laws, and material artifacts of Jewish spirituality such as *mezuzah*, *tallit*, and *tefillin*. In the realm of thought, Becher reviews Judaism's thirteen fundamental principles of faith as articulated by the *Rambam* (Maimonides), the nature of the *mitzvot* (commandments), and the role and benefits of Torah study for the individual. Becher concludes this section with a treatment on Jewish prayer and the significance of *brachot* (blessings) in daily life.

The novice reader will find the book intensely practical; especially in its candid debunking of the notion that only the most pious and extreme among us can incorporate Torah principles into daily living. Knowledgeable readers and Jewish outreach professionals will appreciate the ample end-notes and source references, which support the explanations of faith and practice.

Some may find Becher's work too comprehensive due to the immensity and historical span of Jewish texts and traditions. Nevertheless, he has produced an impressive work, which should take its place alongside other enduring introductions to Judaism, such as Hayim Halevy Donin's *To Be A Jew* and Herman Wouk's *This Is My God*.

Becher notes that many American Jews are combing through ancient philosophies in quest of modern spirituality, looking for "the key" to unlock the pathway to soul serenity. Over the years, he has helped many find the elusive spiritual solution in their own backyards. Quips Becher, "Dorothy in the Land of Oz learned what many Jews today are discovering – that there's no place like home! And Torah literacy is the very foundation of that home."

Becher's many seminar students describe him as refreshing, witty, and eloquent -- with a distinctive Aussie twang. They also acknowledge that his *Down Under* stirs people to action. Hinting at what motivates him to teach and write with such passion, Becher says, "I learn with a lot of people today who started from nothing, other than having Jewish parents. Many of them are now exploring Jewish texts they never knew existed and are bringing their priorities into an orbit of Torah-based commitments. It's my great hope that this new book will make both their Jewish learning and their Jewish living more accessible and fulfilling."

Gateway to Judaism delivers an engaging insider look at the mindset, lifestyle, values, and challenges behind the current revival of traditional Judaism. Anyone seeking to understand how and why Jews do what they do will appreciate the book's straightforward and readable style. Becher demonstrates that Judaism is not a jumble of meaningless rituals and anachronistic rites, but a vibrant lifestyle that brings joy and meaning to contemporary living. This revelation alone will surprise many readers and will make their steps through the gateway worth the trip.



Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, originally from Australia, is a Senior Lecturer for the Gateways Organization, one of the fastest growing and most successful adult education providers in North America. He lectured at Ohr Somayach College in Jerusalem for 15 years, served in the Israel Defence Forces and taught in training programs for rabbis and educators.

Rabbi Becher received his rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. He has co-authored two books on contemporary issues in Jewish law and has responded to thousands of legal, ethical and philosophical questions on an "Ask the Rabbi" website. *Gateway to Judaism: The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life* (Shaar Press, November 15, 2005) is his latest book.

His expertise in applying classic Jewish concepts to contemporary life has made him a sought after lecturer around the world, including Australia, Canada, England, Israel, Russia, South Africa and USA. Rabbi Becher has studied comparative religion, archaeology and history and is on the speakers list of the Israeli Consulate in New York. He lives with his wife, Chavy, and their six children in Passaic, New Jersey.

Out of the Closet

by Debbie Hirschman

Okay, I'll admit it. I'm a closet Jew.

You'd probably never know that I'm Jewish. I have blond hair and green eyes. I don't wear a Star of David – never would – that's what they had to wear in Nazi Germany. I really don't talk about Judaism to people outside of my community. I really don't make it public that I'm a Jew – and particularly don't disclose that I'm a religious Jew. So I live in the closet as a Jew. And until recently, I preferred it that way.

There are many reasons for my secrecy – but I realize now, they're mostly because of the Holocaust.

My mother and her sister are Holocaust survivors, and their parents were murdered in the gas chambers in Auschwitz. When my mom speaks of her parents, she still always cries, heartbroken, as if it had just happened yesterday. As if she were still that teenager that had her parents ripped out of her life, forever.

I always had very mixed feelings about the Holocaust. On one hand, I was powerfully drawn to it and wanted to know more information about it. On the other hand, it caused Judaism to have such a horrible stigma. As a result, everything related to being Jewish had negative associations that I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I didn't want to be associated with being a persecuted Jew. So I pushed both the Holocaust, and Judaism, away.



To add to all this, I was hardly raised Jewish at all. My mother married a Catholic, and so I was raised with really no religion of which to speak. My mother always said, "Hitler was our matchmaker." In other words, had her family been alive, she never would have married a non-Jew. My parents agreed not to push either of their religions on my sister or me, and they kept with that agreement.

I always felt sorry for my cousins who only celebrated Chanukah, with its dismal decorations. To "celebrate" Chanukah, my mother would always just cry and sing a song in Hebrew that her father sang when he was alive.

HIGH HOLIDAY PAIN

In my WASPy public high school in suburban San Francisco, I never admitted to anyone why I missed school on the Jewish New Year. I certainly wasn't bat mitzvahed; it never crossed my mind. We went to temple just 2 days a year, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. In temple I recall my mother and her sister crying, or sitting with pained looks on their faces. No spiritual meaning for me, just more negativity. Every year, on schedule, I sat watching my mother and aunt who had suffered so much already, suffer yet again.

We celebrated both Christmas and Chanukah, but I always felt that Chanukah was a poor imitation/substitute for the Christmas that we celebrated with joy and beauty. I always felt sorry for my cousins who only celebrated Chanukah, with its dismal decorations. In our home, next to a beautifully decorated Christmas tree, pathetically sat a tarnished, copper menorah with unattractive wax candles. To "celebrate" Chanukah, my mother always cried and sang a song in Hebrew that her father sang when he was alive.

As I got older, I searched for God and meaning in this world, but didn't get answers through religion. Since no Jewish education was available, I explored being a born-again Christian. I got into it for a while, but could never really buy the Jesus thing. (Why need a middle man?) The last straw came when I was at a Bible study class. I asked how they knew what Jesus exactly said and meant, since there had been so many translations and

versions of the New Testament. They didn't like my question and basically said I should shut up and just have faith and not ask questions. At that point I threw in the towel with Christianity. Can't ask questions? Can't get answers? What kind of a religion is that? Blind faith wasn't my bag.

But neither was Judaism... yet.

By sheer coincidence (a.k.a. God's will) I stumbled into traditional Judaism through Aish HaTorah with my soon-to-be husband. Slowly, we made the trek of becoming religiously involved - first going to a few Shabbats, then moving along the scale. I learned the incredible beauty of Judaism. I found that every question I had, had a multitude of answers through Judaism. I felt that Judaism was - tragically! - an amazing, well-kept secret. Everything about it rang true.

I started learning and knowing about the religion that my grandparents had died for.

But still I was a closet Jew.

I still didn't want to be singled out as my family had been, and looked at unfavorably - a Jew. *Der Juden!* I didn't want to be persecuted in any way as my family had been in Poland by the Nazis. My mother always said, "You can be a Jew on the inside, but not on the outside." It was too risky to be a Jew on the outside.

But push finally came to shove, and although I didn't know it, this year I was about to get shoved out of my closet.

I started learning and knowing about the religion that my grandparents had died for. But still I was a closet Jew.

GAINING PERSPECTIVE

Work was now conflicting with Shabbat. The daylight savings time-change was about to occur, and I was no longer comfortable with the idea that I might miss candle-lighting on a Friday night because of a work commitment.

But what would they think of me?! I can't expect to leave early just because I'm Jewish! Here I was, feeling that being Jewish is bad again.

continued on page 62

GET THE FINANCIAL HELP YOU NEED.

BUSINESS, PERSONAL, AUTO,
MORTGAGE, REFINANCING

NO FEE, LOW RATES, QUICK APPROVAL.

CALL 1 866 882 6866

A Patent Law Firm

Weiss May & Harris P.C.

Free Initial Consultation

8 Patent and 3 IP Attorneys

All Technologies - simple and complex

Received over 1200 US Patents & 100's of US TM, SM & Copyrights

Est. 1976 in Arizona

All credit cards accepted

4204 N Brown, Scottsdale

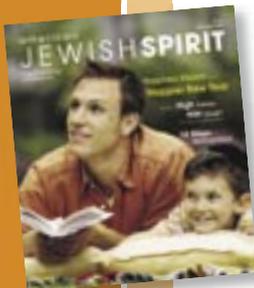
480-994-8888

D.C. Office: 206-682-1722

NV Office: 702-8787323

www.weissiplaw.com

The American Jewish Spirit Reader....



35,000 households:

- \$120,000 average household income
- 76% very likely to travel in next 12 months
- 46% likely to travel to Israel in next 12 months
- \$1400 average monthly credit card purchases
- 80% access Jewish content online

"It is such a professional publication...

I have only heard excellent comments...

The response to advertising has been phenomenal...

It should go from strength to strength!"

Derek Saker Director of Marketing Frumster.com

To advertise call Robin Meyerson at **602-424-0102** or
1-800-289-3732 or email her at rmeyerson@ajspirit.com

continued from page 55

60

THE TREE AND THE LIGHT

As Christmas and Chanukah coincide (or collide), the world provides us with powerful imagery illustrating this lesson. The philosophical descendants of Japheth set out with their children to scour the countryside in search of the perfect tree. Then they find it - a perfect tree: evergreen, symmetrical, tall and strong. They stare up at it with awe and pride, marvel at its beauty and majesty ...*and then chop it down.* Branches that will never again provide shade, generations of pine cones that will never be born - all because of the belief that beauty is an end to be captured and set as the centerpiece in your living room.

Ironically, when beauty becomes an end you end up without even beauty. Just wait for January and ask that perfect pine that would have remained green forever, as it lies sideways at the curb slowly turning brown.

In stark contrast is Chanukah, when the children of Shem also embarked on a search, scouring the desecrated temple for a flask of pure oil. When the Maccabees finally - miraculously - found some, it represented nothing but the potential to create light. While the Greeks might have showcased the flask on some mantelpiece or smeared the oil on their bodies, glorifying the oil as the culmination of beauty, we look to this beauty as a beginning. For us, beauty is a means to truth and light.

So both the tree and the olive oil find their home in the living room. Yet while the tree has met its end, the oil in its menorah is there to create. When beauty is not an end, but serves as a pathway to something larger such as truth and light, then such beauty never dies. It burns miraculously past its physical limitations, day after day after day - for eight days instead of just one. And its light shines on to this day.

So this Chanukah remember: they tried to kill us, we won, let's eat and then say, what delicious food, what a beautiful world... what a wondrous G-d.

This beautiful imagery provides our model of Jewish education. The soul of man, says the Prophet, is the candle of G-d. When an unlit soul comes into the world, it depends on the light and the flame of others to fulfill its destiny. It awaits the intimate approach of another's radiance that will touch it - and ignite it. This flame will warm the soul and enlighten it and awaken it to the cold fuel, beginning to course through its veins, which will feed the light it is meant to provide. Its "hero" will not depart until it leaves this young soul with a slowly rising flame of its own, one that can be shared endlessly with others.

The Jewish hero is this individual with the warmth and the light to inspire others to approach him and, "touching him," to become like him. He will first be our hero, but then, as the candle that has lit another, will withdraw, allowing us to give our own light and to become the hero of our own lives. And, as the lights of the Menorah, we must always remember that it is "towards the center of the Menorah that the flames shall cast their light." We must remember the Source from which we came.

So many of us remain unaware of the endless pool of oil from which our own wicks can draw. So many of us live as embers and not as flames. There is a need for Jewish heroes today perhaps more than ever before.

Chanukah is the celebration of the Maccabees along with all the awesome heroes of Jewish history whose light miraculously burns on. And it is an annual reminder for each of us, all candles of G-d, to find our heroes, to become heroes and to share our light with future generations. It is their destiny, and ours.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Herman Neuberger, ob"m, the late president of Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore, Maryland. He was a hero in more ways than I have described, sharing and increasing the light of so many. He passed away in his sleep early on a Friday evening in October, in the glow of the Shabbat candles he had lit moments before. "Ner Israel" means "the candle of Israel" - and that he was.

Shlock Rock

J Rap City **Featuring Lenny Solomon**

You Can find all of
Shlock Rock's 26 CD's at
www.shlockrock.com
or 1-800-233-9494
email info@shlockrock.com

*WITH SPECIAL GUEST
EZRAH G*

NewStyle Judiaca by Liora

New Style for an old tradition

Join the 100s of people who enjoy a piece of original Jewish art in their homes, silk painted pictures, mezuzah cases, hand painted challah covers, one of a kind personalized wedding and anniversary art work by Liora.

Phone 414-444-7777 or email liora.art@sbcglobal.net



But I knew I had to speak up.

Everyone has his or her tests. One of mine is work. I obsess over it, agonize over it, ruminate over it. My husband rightly said, "You should be as afraid of God as you are of your boss." He was right. I had to get my priorities straight.



This last Rosh Hashana I prayed that I could put work in perspective. God answered my prayers. I knew that I had to tell my boss that I'm a religious Jew and I need to observe the laws of my religion.

But I was so incredibly uncomfortable with this idea. How could I say this to my boss? How would he respond? I felt my Judaism conflicting with work, and being considered, once again, negative. But I had to be honest with what was more important.

I realized, in thinking what I would tell my boss, that I have two main reasons for being a religious Jew. One is because it gives enormous meaning, purpose and beauty to my life.

The other is that it finally let me come to terms with my relationship to the Holocaust. If I can practice Judaism, the same Judaism that the Nazis wanted to wipe from this earth, then my grandparents' deaths, and those of 6 million innocent Jews, would not be in vain. I am carrying on that which they died for. The Nazis did not win. Those innocents did not die in vain. Judaism lives on, and is being carried on... with me.

When I picked up the phone to my boss, I asked God for the words.

If people in concentration camps risked death to practice their religion, if starving Jews in concentration camps forfeited food to observe Yom Kippur, then certainly an extra hour of work on Friday was a sacrifice I could make.

When I picked up the phone to my boss, I asked God for the words. I started to explain my carefully thought out statement. I prefaced that this was a difficult discussion for me to have, because it's very personal, because it's very important to me, because - I'm Jewish. And I'm uncomfortable bringing this up because of my history, because being Jewish has never been seen as a very positive thing - that my mom had been in a concentration camp just because she was a Jew, and my grandparents were murdered just because they were Jewish. And then I burst into tears.

I burst into tears, for them, and also for me.

Finally accepting who I am.

Finally out of the closet.

How could I say this to my boss?
How would he respond? I felt
my Judaism conflicting with
work, and being considered,
once again, negative. But I
had to be honest with what
was more important.

SHINING LIGHTS

The phone call went swimmingly, and my boss was very accommodating. (I guess it's hard to say no to a woman bawling at the other end of the line.) And last week was such a relief when I didn't feel the need to go into hiding when Shabbat candle lighting came at 4:36 p.m.

I recently heard a rabbi saying that the candles of Shabbat relate to the candles of Chanukah. He said that women light two Shabbat candles (to both remember and keep the Sabbath) and it's also a custom to light a candle for each child born into the family. When a child asks why the candle is lit for him, the rabbi said, we should make a point to answer that the reason is that each child, each person, brings his own special light to the family and to this world.

Similarly, when we light our Chanukah candles, we send light out into the world, refusing assimilation into general society and proclaiming our rededication to our faith.

Maybe this year my light got a little bit brighter.

Debbie Hirschmann graduated from U.C.L.A with a B.S. in physiological sciences and then earned her Masters in Business from U.S.C. She currently works in the pharmaceutical industry and lives in the Los Angeles Aish community with her wonderful husband, Ross, and daughters Aleeza and Eliana.

Monthly iPod Giveaway.

New drawing every month.



Win a free ipod at
www.aish.com/ipod


aish.com
Your Life. Your Judaism.

With 130,000 email subscribers and 2 million monthly visitors, Aish.com is the most popular Judaism website, featuring insightful and practical wisdom on spirituality, relationships, work, current events, weekly Torah portion, holidays and the live Western Wall camera.

The Hero Of My Life

by Rabbi Dovid Goldman

Every year on Chanukah my mind turns to the topic of heroism - not only because of the inspiring initiative of the Maccabees in risking an impossible battle to protect the integrity of our people, but because of the moving symbolism of the Menorah and the mysterious allure of its flames. There is a truth in their steady glow about the depth of the soul and its ability to illuminate the world that never fails to inspire me.

The hero character, of course, comes from the ancient Greeks. They invented the mythological super-human who embodied extraordinary qualities within the character of a person. Since then, the hero has come down to Earth. Today, we call someone a hero when they capture our imagination with stunning achievements that seem larger than life.

But there is another kind of hero, perhaps the most important kind. He is the real-life hero who has transcended ordinary life and is engaged in true greatness. He is someone intensely dedicated to values we are inspired to believe in and embrace. He is someone who has so risen above self-doubt, who has so engaged the most compelling enterprise that, in his wake, we can transcend ourselves.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Self trust is the essence of heroism." In the scheme of Jewish values, self trust is not a luxury - it is a primal need that must be fulfilled. In the Torah view of man, we thoroughly depend on our heroes to wrench us out of our own little worlds and to welcome us into the society of the exceptional. With the rarest of exceptions, none of us can sense within ourselves what we can become. From within the ordinary, we cannot imagine the extraordinary.

The Maccabees represent for us a contrast to the Greek hero. Though they achieved "great feats of strength" in winning an impossible victory over a vast and far superior opponent, we remember primarily the miracle of the Menorah. Though they took responsibility to carry out the battles, we thank G-d for their miraculous victory. They are heroes to us because we learn from their dedication - from their belief in higher values worth fighting for. Their job was to lift us into greatness and then to humbly step aside.

Do you remember the opening of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*? It's not as famous as the first words of *A Tale of Two Cities* ("It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...") but for me, it has remained the most memorable. It goes like this: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my

own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show."

I love this question, partly because I think it reflects a Chanukah lesson about Jewish heroism. If heroes are those other people who come into our lives and play a larger-than-life

role - those who help make our own little worlds into big ones - what does it mean to be the hero of your own life? Is that station not supposed to be occupied by anybody else?

I believe the answer, and the Jewish view of heroism, is found in the lights of Chanukah. In describing the Mitzvah to light the Temple Menorah that stood in Jerusalem, the Torah says "when you raise the light of the candles, it is towards the center of the Menorah that the flames shall cast their light." What is meant by "raising the light of the candles?" The Midrash answers: "When you use one candle to light another, you bring the burning flame close to the new wick, and hold it there until a new flame begins to rise of its own accord."

"Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." - *David Copperfield*

JUDAICA EXPRESS

We deal exclusively in mail order...
...for the ultimate in Jewish bookstore convenience!



 **AFELDHEIM**



JUDAICA PRESS

 **ARTS SCROLL**

**FREE
SHIPPING!**
ON ALL ORDERS
OVER \$100

Bar/Bas Mitzvah Gifts • Books & Seform from all publishers
Taleisim • Talis/Tefillin Bags • Benchers & Yarmulkas
Software • Music Tapes & CD's

1-800-2-BOOKS-1 (226-6571)

Call Shmulie Epstein

or email: JudaicaExpress@aol.com

10,000 JEWS MEET INSIDE EACH WEEK.

(TWO AT A TIME)

That's right. 10,000 Jews of all affiliations and from across North America "meet" for an hour a week... over the phone. Through the innovative TelePartners program, each participant is matched one-to-one with a personal Torah trainer. Together, they discuss and discover Jewish knowledge and wisdom – enriching each other's lives in the process.

And there's room for you.

Explore any Jewish topic that interests you. Be it mysticism, philosophy or history, or if you just want to brush up on some Hebrew, we will match you with a TelePartner that's right for you.

Call 800-STUDY-4-2 today. The call is free and so is the program.

Standing room only.



To sign up or for more information, call 800-STUDY-4-2 or visit us online at www.800study42.org

Partners in Torah is a division of Torah Umesorah, the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools