

KEREN OR

THE NEWSLETTER OF OR SHALOM קרן אור

Or Shalom Jewish Spiritual Community, Vancouver, B.C.

Tammuz/Av/Elul/Tishrei 5760-5761 August/September 2000

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NEXT YEAR IN YERUSHALAYIM

By Rabbi David Mivasair

*Me-al pishgat Har ha-Tzofim,
Shalom lach, Yerushalayim.
Me'ab dorot halamti alayich,
Lizkot lir'ot be-or panaich . . .
Yerushalayim, Yerushalayim,
Lo azuz me-po*

From the peak of Mount Scopus,
Peace to you, O Jerusalem.
A hundred generations have I dreamed of you,
To merit seeing in the light of your presence . . .
Jerusalem, O Jerusalem,
I will never move from here.

I remember dreamily singing these words as I first
came up to *Yerushalayim shel Zabaw, Ir ha-Kodesh*
— Jerusalem of Gold, the Holy City — 29 years ago.

I lived for a year on the top of
Mt. Scopus, among the first
group of Hebrew University
students in the new dorms,
roads unpaved, scraps of shrapnel
from the Six Day War still
littering the bare grounds.
Living and learning in
Yerushalayim changed my life; I
knew it was my place to dwell
there forever and ever.

I am returning to Yerushalayim
now older and, I hope, wiser.
God knows I've changed.
Manifesting the waiting potentialities
of my youthful self, the seeds of *atzilut*
from my early years have since blossomed
and fruited into the world of *asiyah*.

And Israel, too, has changed. I remember
in 1971 walking in wonder among the
Palestinians who lived all around me
and being greeted with warmth and
curiosity, welcomed into homes and
conversations. Nearly 30 years later,
I'm going to a far more sophisticated
and complicated country. The shimmering
mists of naive wishfulness have since
burned away revealing

THE REB SITE

the hard complex realities that must be
dealt with.

As much as I love living in beautiful,
peaceful B.C. and hope, God willing,
to stay here many years into the future,
it will never truly be home deep down
inside. As constantly troubling and
difficult as Jewish life in Israel is,
I will always regard it — as have a
hundred generations before me — as
the home of my soul.

While I'm in Yerushalayim, I'll miss
you: my friends, my teachers, my
community of the last five years. "*Libi
bamizrah, va-ani bi-ktsei ha-ma'arav*" . . .
My heart is in the East and I am in the
farthest ends of the West," lamented
the 10th-century Hebrew poet and
philosopher Yehuda ha-Levi, reflecting
on his life in Spain, the westernmost
point of land known in his time. Like his,

my heartstrings run to their source
in Eretz Yisrael. When I am there,
though, I know my heart will sing of
my home in this bountiful, hospitable
place among the gentle, wise sisters
and brothers of Or Shalom.

While I'm away, I urge you to give
of yourself to our community. So many
people tell me how very much they
appreciate Or Shalom, how much it
means in their lives to have a Jewish
spiritual community like ours. It is a
true place of holiness. We

can't take it for granted. Or Shalom
is what it is only because caring,
devoted members make it be that way.
In the coming months, please look
deeply into how you personally can
give to our community to sustain us
and strengthen us so that our work
in this world will be even richer and
fuller for ourselves and for all with
whom we share our sacred journey
through life.

We'd love to hear from friends from
home. Our address in Yerushalayim
will be: 20/8 Ha-Ma'apilim; Jerusalem,
Israel. Our phone will be (02) 561-7053.



— "Jerusalem" by Theo Tobiasse

HIGH HOLY DAYS



HIGH HOLY DAY SERVICES IN NEW LOCATION AT THE JCC

As announced in the last issue of Keren Or, High Holy Day services this fall will be in a new location — the Wosk Auditorium at the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) at 41st and Oak.

The move from Talmud Torah, where Or Shalom has held Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur services for 14 years, resulted from a decision by Beth Israel synagogue to exercise a prior agreement to use the school for its High Holy Day services. Beth Israel, recognizing the inconvenience to Or Shalom, has agreed to make a donation to offset part of the cost of the move.

The JCC is wheelchair accessible and also has good facilities for children and for the traditional break-the-fast potluck dinner. The Centre will make its parking lot available free of charge.

Fran Ritch and Mary Adlersberg are heading up planning for the holiday season; please contact them via the office at 872-1614 if you can help set up for services or volunteer time in other ways.

There will be another issue of Keren Or before Rosh HaShanah with updates. A mailing to members, as well as information for the broader Jewish community, will provide additional details.

— *Dodie Katzenstein*

YOGA AND JUDAISM — “UNITE AND RETURN”

"Unite and Return" is an evening yoga workshop led by Evelyn Neaman to help prepare ourselves for the new year. It will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 27, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at Or Shalom. The month of Elul is the time for introspection and Tshuvah (return) and what better way to do this than to unite the body, mind and soul through breath work, yoga postures, chanting and meditation.

This workshop is open to anyone wanting to explore the parallels and practices of yoga (to unite) and tshuvah (to return). All are welcome. Pre-registration is required and payment is a donation to Or Shalom. For more information or to register, call Evelyn at 738-9295.

SCHEDULE FOR SERVICES — 5761

All Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur Services will be held at the Jewish Community Centre, Wosk Auditorium, 950 W. 41st Avenue.

ROSH HASHANAH, Day 1

Friday night, Sept. 29:

Candle-lighting, 6:35 p.m.

Ma'ariv, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 30:

P'seukei d'zimra and Shaḥarit, 9 a.m.

ROSH HASHANAH, Day 2

Saturday night, Sept. 30:

Candle-lighting, 7:36 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 1:

P'seukei d'zimra and Shaḥarit, 9 a.m.

Tashlich, 5 p.m.

(Note: Tashlich will be held in Queen Elizabeth Park)

YOM KIPPUR

Sunday night, Oct. 8:

Kol Nidre, 6:15 p.m.

Monday, Oct. 9:

P'seukei d'zimra and Shaḥarit, 9 a.m.

Yizkor, 12 p.m. (approximately)

Musaf, 12:15 p.m. (approximately)

Break, 1-5 p.m.

Meditation with R' Yehuda Angel, 4:30-5 p.m.

Minḥa, 5 p.m.

Neilah, 6:30 p.m.

Havdala, 7:12 p.m., followed by Break Fast

YOUR HELP NEEDED FOR BREAK FAST

Co-chairpersons are needed for the Yom Kippur potluck break fast and for the singles potluck lunch on the second day of Rosh HaShanah at the JCC.

"It's an incredible and interesting experience, a wonderful opportunity to connect with members and affiliates of the Or Shalom community," says Sue Ackerman. Please call Sue at 736-8221 or e-mail susan@intergate.bc.ca

LATE-BREAKING BABY NEWS

Effron Esseiva joyfully announced to the e-mail list: "Our baby daughter was born this afternoon July 26th, 23rd of Tammuz, at 2:30 p.m. in our home in Anmore. 6 lbs 11 oz. Janet and the little one are both very well."



A sister for Zoe.

DEVOTING MY RABBINICAL ENERGIES TO MY HOME FIELD

By R' Yair Hillel Goelman

Filling in for Rabbi David Mivasair while he is on his well-deserved sabbatical is going to be a big challenge for me and for the community. On the one hand, I am thrilled that after serving as a "locum" rabbi in other shuls, I am able to devote my rabbinical energies to my home field, to Or Shalom, which has nurtured me and nourished me for so long. Coming home will enable me to speak a shared language of prayer, music, laughter and celebration that makes Or Shalom the very unique and beautiful Jewish community that it is. On the other hand, the time and energy that I have available to me is restricted by my continuing contractual obligations to UBC and my life-long commitments to my family. So, as a Libra, my challenge continues to be the pursuit of balance and equilibrium.



After a lot of discussion with Reb David, Pam Ratner and others, I think we've come to an understanding of how I can best be of help to Or Shalomniks during the Hebrew year 5761 (2000-2001). I will be available for all life-cycle events such as weddings, funerals, baby namings, britot, unveilings, Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies. I will also work with our dedicated core of daveners to ensure that the High Holiday, Shabbat and holiday davening will continue to be a central feature of our collective soul, or *neshama k'lalit*.

Adult education will also be a priority. I have some thoughts on the kinds of things I would like to do in adult education and have had some preliminary discussions with other people in the Vancouver and Seattle Jewish communities about co-sponsoring some guest speakers. Reb David has been helpful also making some contacts with some Jewish Renewal teachers who will be in the general vicinity next year and I've also chatted with Marty Puterman about a couple of possible guests for next May's retreat. I would be very interested in hearing from the community as to what you think your specific

interests and priorities are in terms of adult education.

One area that I will be supportive of but not directly involved with is in the preparation of Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and their families. To co-ordinate this important task, Or Shalom has hired a magnificent young woman named Sheryl Sorokin who has tutored many, many youngsters. She will be responsible for helping families find tutors for their children and for guiding them through the planning of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah itself. One of the perks of my job is that I get to work closely with Ms. Sorokin. I will help out by conducting regular classes on the Shabbat morning davening and will also work with Sheryl in delivering the B'yachad Sunday morning family education programs for the youngsters and their families.

One of the many things that Reb David does so well that I can only offer on a very part-time basis is pastoral counselling. I will be available if people wish to check in with me on an emergency basis or to get some advice on where they might be able to obtain the kind of support or guidance they need. But I won't be able to enter into any kind of contin-

uing or sustained counselling relationships. I am aware of many of the places in Vancouver that offer personal, couple and family counselling, but would certainly appreciate any suggestions from folks in the Or Shalom community who want to suggest any specific agencies or professionals whom they think I should be aware of.

I am also going to be limited in my ability to respond adequately to the many calls that come to the Or Shalom rabbi from non-members. Some of these calls deal with very specific requests and others are fairly general. I would welcome the participation of Or Shalom members who will serve

as an ad hoc *bachnasat orchim* or welcoming committee to help receive inquiries from outside folks and to make a special effort to greet newcomers by phone or in person at our events.

So, *hevre*, the day is short, the work is great but so is the community we are all part of. With your help, hopefully, I'll be able to be of help, too. Best ways to reach me on rabbinic matters would be to phone the Or Shalom office (872-1614) or to use my e-mail address: hillel.goelman@ubc.ca

SENDOFF FOR MIVASAIRS

You are invited to attend a garden party send-off in honour of our Rabbi, David, and Michal, Yehuda, Sophie and Miriam Mivasair. It is to be held at the garden of Hillel Goelman and Sheryl Sorokin, 494 East 18th Ave., on Sunday, Aug. 6, at 5 p.m. The food is kosher so please bring only uncooked salads, fruit or vegetable, with no dairy products. You are welcomed to bring drinks. Call Sheryl if you have questions at 876-9790 or e-mail srs_sorokin@yahoo.com. Please RSVP.

— Sheryl Sorokin & Hillel Goelman

AFFIRMING THE ESSENCE OF A SACRED RELATIONSHIP

By Rabbi David Mivasair

In late July, the Or Shalom e-mail list was alive with discussion about same-sex marriage in Judaism. This is because in August I will for the first time officiate at the wedding of two Jewish women, Rahel Bailie and Emma Hamer. Marriage between two Jews of the same sex is something quite new. Most of us still have many questions about it. It is not clear to many of us whether it is the right thing to do. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of my thinking about same-sex marriage in Judaism with Keren Or readers who aren't on the Or Shalom e-mail list. If anyone wants to send me comments or questions, please write me at mivasair@aol.com.

1. Is it marriage? Is it proper to use the Jewish religious term for marriage, *kiddushin* for two women or two men in a committed, lifelong loving relationship? Every person I've spoken with in the Or Shalom community supports at least the idea of some kind of Jewish "commitment ceremony" for lesbian and gay couples. One question I've had to answer is whether it is appropriate to use the conceptual framework and the language of marriage and *kiddushin* for same-sex couples. My answer is "Yes".

The Jewish word for marriage, *kiddushin* is from the same Hebrew root as *kaddish* *kiddush* *mikdash* and *kedushab*. It is all about holiness or sacredness. When a man and a woman marry in the traditional Jewish world, the man says to the woman "*Harei abt mekudesbet li*— You are sacred to me . . ." The woman indicates that she accepts his holding her sacred by accepting a ring onto her finger. In our circles, the expression of desire and the opportunity to respond is usually mutual: both the man and the woman usually each say similar words to the other and each accepts from the other the offer of sacred loving relationship. I believe this is the essence of marriage. Each partner holds the other to be *mekuddash*— sacred — and wishes to be *mekuddash* to the other.

It is clear to me that good, loving same-sex relationships are just as worthy of being called *kiddushinas* good, loving opposite-sex relationships.

The traditional ketubah expressed the action component of love. The man proposes to the woman, "I will honour you, will care for you, will provide for you . . . as Jewish men do for their wives" and the woman accepts. In egalitarian ketubot, the promises are reciprocal. Again, it makes perfect sense to me for a same-sex couple to have a ketubah (if they wish) as a vessel to express their visions and promises to lovingly care for one another just as an opposite-sex couple does.

Even the the words spoken under the *huppah* in offering the ring, ". . . *ke-dat Moshe ve-Ysrael*— according to the ways of Moshe and the people of Israel," make sense to me at a same-sex wedding. The deepest essence of "the ways of Moshe and Israel" are to love

and respect one another's neshamah, to raise up the holy spark that is the other. The details of weddings and marriage arrangements change from time to time. I cannot imagine that Moshe himself was married with a *huppah*, a ketubah and sheva brachas. The halachah — the way — of the Jewish people changes over the centuries as we come to understand things differently. So, two women or two men saying to each other ". . . *ke-dat Moshe ve-Ysrael*" are at once affirming the deepest essence of their relationship as the deepest essence of "ways of Moshe and Israel" and also knowing that they are part of the continuing evolution of the ways we manifest our religious truths into practice.

Insisting on a different wedding ceremony for same-sex couples from opposite-sex couples seems to

me like insisting that their relationship is essentially different. It is like insisting that when a woman says the brachas over an aliyah to Torah she must say something different from a man because in the past 2,000 years only men had aliyot. Two Jewish men or two Jewish women whose neshamas are joined together should have available all the richness and depth our sacred tradition offers to loving, committed Jewish couples.

2. How to reconcile this with Biblical teachings that a man who lies with a man as with a woman is an abomination and shall be put to death?

I've discussed this several times in *divrei Torah* on the

FROM THE BOARD

The Or Shalom Board of Directors, while supporting in principle the performing of same-sex Jewish weddings, recognizes that this subject may be new territory for some members. At its June meeting, the Board discussed the importance of open discussion and input leading to the development of clear guidelines on the issue. Because the August ceremony to be performed by Reb David occurred on fairly short notice, we feel that there is a need for a thoughtful process of learning and feedback during the next months. The Board made a commitment to creating opportunities for all members of the Or Shalom community to express their views on this topic.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

relevant parshah (Lev. 20:13). The verses in the Torah are not about loving, committed couples. The Torah is teaching that when we use another person as an object for our own sexual gratification, not relating to them as who they really are but instead fantasizing that they are someone else, we are committing an abomination. When a man lies with a man and knows he is with a man, not “as with a woman” but clearly with his partner in his relationship, this is something altogether not discussed in the Torah.

We know that Torah is still being revealed into the world — God is not finished with us yet, *baruch ha-Shem*. One of the Torah truths that has become revealed in our generation is that same-sex couples are as loving, committed and holy as opposite-sex couples. Unquestionably, throughout our history, our religion has condemned homosexuality. Just as we have adjusted other aspects of our religious teachings and practices that have been at odds with the deepest, truest Torah that we know — going back all the way to within the Torah itself* — we now need to right this wrong. From the very beginning of Judaism — and even before — we have known that the written Torah is incomplete without an oral Torah to enable us to live it. The oral Torah is still open and growing, like a Tree of Life, as more of the ultimate Torah is revealed into our collective consciousness.

3. How can I officiate at a same-sex wedding without a thorough Or Shalom community-wide discussion and decision-making process — especially when I’ve insisted on such processes for other decisions such as patrilineal vs. matrilineal descent and kashrut policy?

More than five years ago, when I was interviewed for the position as Or Shalom’s rabbi, I was asked in a meet-the-candidate gathering of perhaps 40 or 50 community members how I would relate to gay and lesbian members of Or Shalom. I said that, of course, I would treat them like every other member and welcome them to participate in everything that anyone else does. I was then asked whether I would marry two members of the same sex. I specifically remember saying then that I would. After the meeting, three different members of Or Shalom told me how happy they were that I said that

and that one day they’d like me to be at their *huppah*.

During the first year that I was here, I suggested that we participate as a congregation in the Pride Parade to make our support for gay Jews very public. After a thoughtful, wide-open discussion over a period of several months, including a “talking circle” of some 40 or 50 *chevra* at the retreat, the board voted unanimously to do so. Or Shalom was proudly featured in the Jewish

Western Bulletin with a photo of us in the parade.

About two or three months ago, at my initiative the Bulletin ran a story about same-sex marriage in Judaism and quoted me as saying I was prepared to officiate at a same-sex wedding but that no one had ever asked me to. A number of people in the community told me they were proud of Or Shalom and proud that I’m their rabbi. Absolutely no one expressed to me any objection or concern.

Further, I am a member of two rabbinic associations which both have strongly supported same-sex marriage in Judaism for years and Or Shalom itself is affiliated with the Network of Jewish Renewal Communities which also supports it.

Honestly, it didn’t occur to me that my officiating at a same-sex wedding needed to be discussed in the community. From the very beginning of my relationship with Or Shalom, my position has been clear. No one has ever mentioned any kind of objection. I brought the question to the board in June about how public we want to be if there is some *tikkun olam* to be gained by associating Or Shalom with this just cause. There was no question about the rightness of me supporting a same-sex Jewish couple at their *huppah*. Several members have told me and one said in the June board meeting that they are shocked that anyone in Or Shalom thinks their right to have their rabbi at their wedding to another Jew is even an issue for a community discussion in any way at all.

* See Rashi’s comments on Numbers 27:2, based on teachings in Midrash Tanhumah, that the daughters of Tzelophad saw Torah truths that Moshe Rabbeinu hadn’t seen. Rashi was struggling with how Torah could change. His answer, learned from his teachers and their teachers before them, is that our understanding of Torah changes. Moshe simply could not see what the daughters of Tzelophad were to see in the next generation.



Rabel Bailie, left, and Emma Hamer at home. Reb David invited them to attend a community discussion on same-sex marriages at Or Shalom on Monday, July 31, which followed a community discussion July 5. Reb David is officiating at their wedding on Aug. 13.

DONORS HELP EASE OUR FINANCIAL CRUNCH

By *Dodie Katzenstein*

Members of Or Shalom responded generously to a recent call for support in dealing with a difficult financial situation. Letters mailed to members and friends of Or Shalom, along with a follow-up telephone campaign, generated \$27,815.10 in additional donations for the fiscal year, which ended June 30.

The Board of Directors issued the donation request letter in March, after learning about an impending budget shortfall. The letter noted that several factors contributed to the problem, notably a remaining mortgage of over \$150,000. Interest and principal on the mortgage cost Or Shalom about \$30,000 a year.

Board co-chair Micha Menzcer says, "We were very pleased with the response to our letter. Our members gave generously, so that we were able to end the year in good shape."

Since that time, the Board has stepped up efforts to boost revenues from fundraising and grants, and to ensure that membership and building fund fees are paid up. Menzcer says the Board has now placed top priority on finding ways to pay off the mortgage as quickly as possible, freeing funds for building improvements, educational programs and other community services. Work is already underway on \$20,000 repairs to the stucco on the tower, repainting the exterior wood and refinishing the doors. Completion is expected by the end of August.

Improving Or Shalom's financial status is an ongoing need. The Board welcomes suggestions as well as volunteers to participate in fundraising activities. Questions or comments can be directed to Micha Menzcer by telephone at 877-1208 or by e-mail at menzcer@telus.net (Micha also wants to know who donated the 10 cents!)

KABBALAT SHABBAT AT THE BRIER

By *Ann Daskal*

I would like to gather a group of Or Shalomniks together to create a few Kabbalat Shabbat evenings at the Louis Brier Home and Hospital in the coming year. The purpose of this group, which does not have to be large, would be to help decide what activities would be of interest to Louis Brier and Or Shalom people alike, plan the events and share in the work of putting them on. (Not everyone has to participate in every event.) It would also be great to hear from people who are willing to lead activities or perform — such as singing, storytelling, group discussions, or know people who might be willing to do so.

We have had three lovely intergenerational events since January, an elaborate and very well-attended Tu B'Shvat seder and two smaller Kabbalat Shabbat evenings with singing, discussions and story telling, which were also very enjoyable.

I have found that helping to create these events, or even just participating, has given me a greater sense of connection to the larger Jewish community and a chance to share and enjoy the rich experiences of our elders. So give me a call at 255-1595 if you are interested in getting together to create a few more of these events. Or e-mail me at rockrose@telus.net

GO AND STUDY



Mini-Ulpan teachers Shoshana Hofman and Rahel Halabe.

FEW SPOTS LEFT IN AUG. 14-18 MINI-ULPAN

Only a few spaces are left in the Vancouver Summer Mini-Ulpan, being held at Or Shalom from Aug. 14 to 18. Already, 13 students have registered for the first Hebrew immersion program in the city. The Mini-Ulpan has received a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Vancouver that allows it to offer scholarships towards the tuition fee of \$300.

The Mini-Ulpan will be held from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The course level is Ulpan Level Beit -- low-intermediate. For a level check, contact Rahel Halabe at 879-2677 (rahel@telus.net). For information and registration, contact Lorne Mallin 222-3379 (lmallin@telus.net). Check the website: orshalom.bc.ca

HEBREW SCHOOL SEEKS NEW STUDENTS

The Or Shalom Hebrew School is looking for new students. We offer classes from Kindergarten to the 7th grade, (Bnei Mitzvah year). The innovative style of teaching incorporates Jewish studies with an outreach program to the community. Bnei Mitzvah classes offer studies about Talmud, Torah, and traditional Jewish studies. Trips to the Louis Brier Home and being involved in an international Peace Quilt project make our school unique. Teachers form a professional and dedicated team with many years of experience. — *Bat-Ami Segal*

SOUNDING THE SHOFAR IN INDIA & MEETING THE DALAI LAMA

By *Mordehai Wosk*

Hana and I have recently returned from Bangalore, India, where we were privileged to participate in the World Festival of Sacred Music. This global event was initiated by the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In his message, the Dalai Lama said that we are beginning to recognize the interconnected nature of our lives, which in turn emphasizes the need for each one of us to develop the spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation in tackling problems facing us today. He says that music is perhaps the most universal form in which the human spirit has tried to express its innermost yearnings. It symbolizes the yearnings for harmony with oneself and with others; with nature and with the spiritual and the sacred within and around us. The sacred music of every community expresses this universal longing that is shared by people all over the globe. It was in this spirit that musicians from around the world gathered to express through their music our common spirit.

We travelled to India as a part of the Musical Mosaic of Canada, comprised of Vancouver musicians Nancy Fischer (Nur Jehan), Andre Thibault and Randy Raine-Reusch. My part in the group was primarily to sound the shofar. During the weeklong festival we were continually amazed by the variety of music, the kaleidoscope of sights, sounds and ancient traditions. Mongolian shamans rubbed shoulders with Zulu singers, wandering minstrels from Bengal entranced the audience with their mystical chants, Rajasthani musicians in resplendent turbans performed next to gospel musicians from North Carolina. One hundred and eight Tibetan monks and nuns with their traditional regalia of robes, tall hats, horns, symbols and drums chanted in the traditions of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Sufi poets from Kashmir graced us all alongside an Italian opera soloist. And there was so much more.

When the opportunity to go to India to participate in the festival arose a still, small voice encouraged me. I felt inspired to sound the shofar, the oldest sacred instrument of Israel, among the nations on the world stage. The shofar sounds a wake-up call that echoes back from ancient times and remains a vibrant means of transformation.

We were astounded by what unfolded. Once the journey

began the miraculous surprised us time and again. I left Vancouver expecting to sound three notes as a prelude to the song "Hasheveinu" arranged by Nancy Fischer. It all began at Not Just Jazz by the Bay, one of Bombay's hottest nightclubs. The Canadian Consulate had arranged a performance and so the shofar made its debut on the Arabian Sea. Already the three notes had expanded into the performance of three songs.

From Bombay, we moved on to Bangalore, the high-tech centre of India with a population of eight million. Upon arrival at the festival we discovered that the shofar was being called upon to inaugurate the World Festival by heralding the entrance of the former president of India, Shri R. Venkataraman.



Hana and Mordehai Wosk join hands with the Dalai Lama in Bangalore, India.

Amidst the feast of exotic sights and sounds that made up the festival, the Musical Mosaic of Canada performed to an appreciative international audience. The shofar was integrated into several compositions, which ranged from sounding the traditional notes of the High Holy Days to improvising within a medley of spiritual music.

On the third night of the festival from among the 650 musicians at the festival, the shofar alone was called upon to announce the arrival of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as he entered the auditorium. The Dalai Lama was visibly moved. He spontaneously blessed me along with my tallis, and with that gesture the deep respect between our two traditions was clearly expressed. He greeted me with the word "Shalom".

Another wonderful surprise was the personal audience that our small Canadian group was granted with the Dalai Lama. We felt infused with compassion, humility and happiness. An amazing highlight for me was an unscheduled, spontaneous, private conversation with the Dalai Lama. For about 10 minutes he held my hand in his as he looked into my eyes and answered my question, "How do we know when we are doing God's will?"

His answer was both intimately personal as well as universally applicable. He spoke of trusting my deep, intuitive knowing while balancing that with a very careful analysis of the mind, as well as much spiritual practice. In these few minutes he implanted in my open mind a clear awareness of the basic foundation upon which the intuitive mind can flourish and God's will can be perceived.

By Lisa Stevenson

PARASHAT METZORA: APRIL 15, 2000

I would like to share with you some of the important things I have learned from my studies over the past few months. There are three areas I'm going to talk about. One is my parasha, called Metzora. Second is about Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Shabbat. Today is no ordinary Shabbat as this is the last Shabbat before Pesah. Last I will talk about my Haftorah. My Haftorah comes from the writings of the prophet Malachi.

METZORA:

Metzora is about the purification of a someone with a skin marking, like leprosy. The rabbis interpret this to refer to the power of speech and its consequences. Speaking properly and nicely about people is very important. There is a story in the Torah where Moses' sister Miriam says something bad about Moses' wife. She says that Moses' wife has very dark skin and that it isn't very good. After Miriam says this, God makes Miriam's skin get white spots on it. Sometimes the smallest comment can be very hurtful. When you say bad things, for instance, if you spread a rumour, you can't stop it from spreading. The only thing you can do is apologize. When a rumour is said about someone and they hear it, they know it may not be true, but many other people may think it's true. Then people treat that person as if the rumour was true. A rumour cannot just hurt someone's feelings but it can also affect their daily life, and prevent them from getting a job.

SHABBAT HAGADOL:

Today is Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Shabbat. This is a very important Shabbat because this was the last Shabbat before the Jews left Egypt. In Egypt the Jews could have Shabbat but they only got physical rest and not spiritual rest. They got this spiritual rest when they knew they were leaving Egypt and ending their period as slaves to the Egyptians. On this day something else very important happened. God told the Jews to sacrifice a lamb, but if they were found by the Egyptians they would be killed because Egyptians worshipped sheep. But the Jews did it anyway.

This is why it's called Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Shabbat. Today is one of the great Shabbats because it's the last Shabbat before Pesah. After this Shabbat there will be Pesah and Elijah will come.

HAFTORAH:

This week I read a Haftorah from the writings of the prophet Melachi. This isn't the normal Haftorah because it is Shabbat Hagadol. This makes it a special day so there must be a special Haftorah. In my section, God talks about before the day when He will get rid of all evil, Elijah will come. So if Elijah does not come, what God says will not happen. But if Elijah comes it is said that God will take all bad people off the Earth and turn the hearts of the parents to the children and hearts of the children to the parents. So that everyone will be nice and there will be no evil. This makes parents able to pass Jewish information from generation to generation.

There is also another time when Elijah will see people passing the story from generation to generation. This is at Pesah. Elijah will come and see all the celebrations about Pesah. There is a story where if you do not stay awake at the Pesah service, Elijah will come and take you away in a bag because when you are asleep you cannot hear the story that is supposed to be passed to you. Elijah is a prophet, just like Malachi. Elijah, when he was alive, was a very outgoing man. He defeated the priests of Baal and Queen Jezebel. Elijah not only shows up at Pesah, he also comes to circumcisions. Elijah comes to these celebrations because he has come to see the passing down of the Jewish religion from generation to generation.

What does this mean to me?

I decided to do this Bat Mitzvah because I had a choice. I thought it might be interesting and my friends were doing it so I decided to do one. I have learned another language, which I found interesting, I learned more about Jewish customs and religious beliefs and I learned a lot about correct speech. This has made me think about what I say about people. It also made me think about the impact of what can happen if you say something bad. As you heard in my Haftorah section there is a great deal of importance in passing things on in the Jewish religion. One thing that I'm doing is continuing on the tradition of the Bat Mitzvah. My generation in my family now has passed on the Jewish tradition. Elijah should be pleased. What this Bat Mitzvah meant to me was that I am becoming an adult and that I can read from the Torah.



BAR MITZVAH DVAR TORAH INTERPRETING LAWS WITH COMPASSION

By Ilan Wright

PARASHAT EMOR: MAY 13, 2000

My parasha is called Emor, which means to say or to declare in a gentle way. This part of the Torah takes place after the Exodus from Egypt when the Jews, who had been slaves, were on their way to the land of Israel. All of this parasha is about G-d speaking to Moses on top of Mount Sinai, while the people are below in the desert. Over and over, the parasha tells of G-d directing Moses: “*Emor el Aharon ve-el banav* — say to Aaron and his sons,” the Kohanim. Most of the laws are directed towards the priests. The parasha also speaks of keeping the Jewish holy days like Shabbat, Passover and the counting of the omer. It ends up with a story that seems completely unrelated, about a young man who blasphemes against G-d and has to be stoned to death by the people of the community.

I'm interested in the laws the Kohanim had to follow. The men on my mother's side are Kohanim, so even though I myself am not a Kohen, I still feel a strong connection.

One law is that a Kohen can't touch any dead body except that of his immediate family or even be in a place where a dead body is. Still today Jewish men who are Kohanim stand outside the cemetery when they attend a funeral. In the time of the Bible, and as long as the Beit Ha-Mikdash was standing, a Kohen who had touched a dead body could not perform any ceremonies or take sacrifices from the people until he went through a process of purification (a mikvah) and then after sunset he was declared qualified again. My uncle told me that although my grandfather and his uncles were Kohanim in England, they did not want to be called upon to bless the congregation, as they were all doctors. Another law prohibits Kohanim from serving as a Kohen if they have any strange condition in their body. They had to be physically perfect. They couldn't purposely cut or mark their skin. Also, they couldn't marry any woman that they wanted. For example, they couldn't marry a widow or a divorced woman.

I think it must have been very stressful to be a Kohen in the days of Moses, because you had to follow every single law pertaining to you. There are so many laws and they are so restrictive. I wondered: What would happen if you didn't follow them all? The answer is if you did something you weren't sup-

posed to do, you weren't qualified any more to serve as a Kohen.

Another thing that caught my eye was the strictness of some laws in the Torah. At first when I saw the story of the blasphemer I was shocked. It tells how the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man were out among the Israelite camp and had a quarrel with one of the men there. He then used G-d's name in vain and was later on stoned to death by the whole community. I was curious how G-d could do this to someone for simply cursing. So I decided to look into it more deeply. I found out this wasn't the only part in the Torah where G-d was cruel. For example, Reb David told me, it says in

Deuteronomy that if your son is a rebellious glutton and drunkard and both parents tell this in front of judges, all the men in the city are to pelt him to death with stones. Also in Numbers there is a story of a man who was stoned to death as well, just for gathering firewood on Shabbat.



But when I opened up the Mishnah with Reb David and we started looking at the question of the “cruelty” of G-d in the Torah, the rabbis discuss the words *ben sorare* which refer to the rebellious son. They said *ben* is a boy between the ages of childhood and adulthood. If a boy was considered an adult after Bar Mitzvah, or thereabouts, the time when

a boy would have been considered a *ben sorare* would have been quite short, between 12½ and 13. The instances quoted in the Talmud of someone dying for being a *ben sorare* were non-existent.

So although the Torah has laws and consequences for breaking the laws that at times seemed very punitive and even cruel, I realize the rabbis interpreted the laws with compassion. They may appear harsh, but the chances of actually being subjected to these punishments were probably quite small. In fact, after the time of the Bible, there was never a Sanhedrin, a Jewish court that sentenced anyone to death, until the Eichmann trial.

Before, when I thought the Torah in the times of Moses and Aaron was strict, I concluded that the laws nowadays are watered down. But after looking closer at the Torah and how it has been interpreted all through Jewish history, I've changed my mind. I've realized that the Torah can't be followed or even understood without some interpretation. I have learned a great deal these past few months.

By Elana Thau

PARASHAT BEMIDBAR: JUNE 3, 2000

My parsha is called Bemidbar, the first parsha of the book of Bemidbar, the fourth book of the Torah. The book tells the history of the Jews' lives in the desert after they escaped from Egypt and encountered God at Mt. Sinai where they received the Ten Commandments.

My parsha deals with God's instructions about how the Jews should organize themselves in the desert. God tells Moses and Aaron to take a census of all the male members of the tribes over the age of 20 who are fit for military service. The Levites are instructed to carry the tabernacle and all its furniture and to serve as God's first-born.

When I was told I was to do an entire speech about my parsha I had no idea what I wanted to write about. What was it that really called to me? The Levites, the census? Then my mom got the idea that maybe the two of us should read the entire book of Bemidbar. So we started. Every day I was more and more interested. Both the book, and the parsha Bemidbar, led me to what I want to talk about today.

As Bemidbar continues, the tribes are within sight of the Promised Land. Twelve spies are sent in to explore the land of Israel. After 40 days they return. Ten have nothing but negative comments. Only two of the spies have faith and believe that they can enter the land. The people listen to the 10 pessimists. The Jews still have a slave mentality; they cannot see how they can work together. In God's eyes the Jews are neither worthy nor holy enough to enter Israel; they must wait until a new, pure generation is born. Only the two spies who had faith will survive the desert to enter the land with the new generation. The Jews re-enter the desert. They are given all sorts of rules and tests so they can learn to be grateful for what they receive and to trust God's word. The rules and desert life are very harsh.

When I imagined what life was like for the Jews to leave slavery and build a communal and spiritual life in the desert, I thought of what it meant to be righteous and have faith in God in the desert, compared to what it means today. In my parsha the first thing that God orders Moses to do is to take a census. That is God's attempt to have the Jews take stock that each person counts. Bemidbar stresses that to be holy to God everything you do counts — good or bad. The Torah teaches that what one person does in community affects the rest.

I understand the reason for laws but their harshness bothers me. No one of us is perfect. We all have done something bad or incomprehensible in our lives; it is just normal. When I read Bemidbar, I got the impression that everything had to be perfectly in order and no one was permitted mistakes.

Over the centuries what Jewish people's belief and faith in God mean has changed greatly. Different Jewish thinkers have different beliefs of what you have to fulfill to be considered a righteous Jewish person. Traditional Judaism teaches that the Torah is God's word. You must keep the exact rules that God gave, to be close to God.

In my opinion, in order to be righteous and have faith in God we do not necessarily have to be completely traditional. In the Yom Kippur Haftorah, the book of Isaiah verses 10 and 11 states: "If you open your heart to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom as the noonday. God will always guide you, and satisfy your soul in drought and relieve your bones."

There have been many times in our history, when our faith and righteousness have been put to the test. An example in modern times is the Second World War when people had to hide their Judaism. Jews were hated all around. How are we so different from everyone else? Our differences are our history and our beliefs. People should not be ashamed of their faith. So many worry about being Jewish because they think that if they commit to their Judaism they will be hated for it.

I think that during your Bar or Bat Mitzvah year, people question their commitment to Judaism. The people who really have faith try to make their year special. I personally have done quite a few things this year to make this year count. I have been to Shul on a regular basis. I have studied the Torah. I have helped out in my school and in the Ronald McDonald House. I really enjoyed helping out there. It made me feel warm inside knowing I had done something to help out those really in need.

I have made a vow to give one-tenth of the money that I receive for my Bat Mitzvah to the Jewish Family Services Agency and to CARE, to help those affected by the drought in Ethiopia. My parsha takes place in the desert where there is no water and barely any food. God helped the Jews but otherwise the situation would have been similar to the Ethiopians. People starving and everything dying by the second. We need to keep our faith but we also need to look out for each other.



By Lisa Barer

PARASHAT KORAH: JULY 8, 2000

In this week's parshah, Korah, Dathan and Aviram question the authority of Aaron and Moses to set and enforce God's laws. "All the people in the community are holy, and God is with them. Why are you setting yourselves above God's congregation?" asks Korah.

Why did Korah object to Moses appointing his brother Aaron as the Kohen Gadol? If we scratch the surface a bit, we find a character who seems interested mostly in his own power and position. For example, instead of suggesting that decisions such as this should be based on a democratic community vote, he seemed only to want to replace the authority of Moses and Aaron, which had been granted by God, with his own authority.

But if we dig a little deeper still, perhaps Korah was right to have questioned some of Moses' decisions. Moses appointed Elizaphan, eldest son of the youngest uncle in the Kehath family, as the leader of that family. He bypassed Korah, who was the eldest son of the second-oldest uncle. Since high appointments were generally made on the basis of age, Korah may have been right to think that this appointment was worth disputing.

But did the wrong that Korah felt personally justify him encouraging mutiny among the Israelites and publicly mocking Moses? On the other hand, did Korah's behaviour really justify the harsh punishment? Why was Moses not able to convince God to spare these people as he had convinced God to spare the Israelites when they made the golden calf?

One possible explanation can be found in an interpretation of Pirkei Avot. The authors talk about the difference between selfish and worthy or "heavenly" disputes. Disagreements "for the sake of heaven" are those dealing with different beliefs about how to improve the lives of everyone, or to bring everyone closer to God's teachings. For example, Pirkei Avot talks about the disagreement between Hillel and Shammai, which was about how the Jewish people should observe the laws of the Torah. This was a dispute "for the sake of heaven".

When Korah asks, "Why are you setting yourselves above God's congregation?", is this not also a dispute "for the sake of heaven"? Well, not really.

What Korah seemed to be saying was, "Why should Moses and Aaron tell the rest of us holy people what to do?" This appears to have been much more of a "selfish" dispute, all about Korah, and not about the greater good of the community. The parshah begins with the words "*vayikach Korah* — Korah took." We presume this refers to the men he took with him for the rebellion, but "Korah took" could also be meant to describe his basic character. Korah, Dathan and Aviram were all engaged in self-serving disputes with Moses, and it was

the selfish reasons behind the disputes that justified the punishments they received.

What does any of this have to do with today? In this chapter of our history, those selfish individuals who were determined to divide the community and improve their position at the expense of others received the ultimate punishment — the death penalty. Putting oneself ahead of the community and the laws of the Torah was serious business back then. Yet today we find, all around us, disputes that seem to be mostly about the people doing the arguing, about personal gain and about

dividing rather than uniting. But there doesn't seem to be much in the way of punishment being handed out.

For example, there seem to be a lot of Korahs and not very many Moseses among the people we elect to make the laws that we have to follow. A lot of people seem to get themselves elected not because they think they can do great things for the people, but because they think they can do great things for themselves. Even in Israel, it is hard nowadays to figure out which of the endless conflicts are "for the sake of heaven," and which for the sake of personal ambition.

So why isn't the earth opening, and where are the fire and the plagues? Maybe the punishments are different today, or maybe the miracles that brought death to Korah and the others took place over long periods of time. Maybe today's plagues are the slow poisoning and destruction of our lakes, our oceans and our forests, and the extinction of more of God's creatures every year because of selfish interests. The fishermen argue about who is going to get the most fish, and the punishment is that the fish disappear and none of them get any. We let selfish interests get in the way of caring for the poor and the sick, and we end up with our communities falling apart. Like the people who followed Dathan and Aviram, or Korah, if we are too influenced by those driven by selfish interests, we may face a similar fate.



NEWS AND SHMOOZE

AIMEE & FRED Fred (my chatan, who really does exist) and I are sponsoring a kiddush on Aug. 5. Since we will be getting married after Reb David and Michal leave for Israel, we are going to start celebrating early so that they can also share in our simcha. Also, because the wedding will be relatively small (that means lots of relatives but not a lot of room), and we would like to celebrate with the entire Or Shalom community, please come on the 5th to Or Shalom. Thanks,

— *Aimee Promislow and Fred Tischler*

THANK YOU We warmly thank all who offered condolence, support and sustenance during our mourning for the loss of Sue's mother. Special thanks for the lovely fruit basket delivered to us in Cape Town.

— *Sue and Maurice Bloch*

LILITH MAGAZINE Our thanks to the donor of a renewed subscription to the Jewish feminist magazine Lilith, donated in honour of Jenny Puterman and available for reading and borrowing in the entryway.

ALLEN'S HONEY My honey is once again for sale in time for the New Year. My bees are located in Lower Mainland neighbourhoods and produce a variety of flavourful honeys. The honey is prepared without any application of heat or pasteurization to ensure the most complex of tastes, exactly as the bees produce it. If you wish, come and taste and pick the honey you like. I sell in a variety of containers big enough for your whole family or small enough to give as gifts: 10 lbs. for \$35, 500 gms for \$5 or a dozen for \$54, 250 gms for \$3.50 or a dozen for \$39. Ten percent of all sales to Or Shalom folks goes to Or Shalom. Call me at 736-4184.

— *Allen Garr*

CASSANDRA & IRWIN Cassandra Freeman and Irwin Levin are thrilled to announce they will be married in Vancouver on Sept. 4.

KEREN OR קרן אור

(Beam of Light)

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