

THE JEWISH STAR

VOL 9, NO 37 ■ SEPTEMBER 17, 2010 / 9 TISHREI 5771

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New twist on an old idea

A sukkah made of thread

By Michael Orbach

Can a sukkah be made entirely of glass? What about a sukkah made of interlocking pieces of wood that can extend infinitely? Is a sukkah kosher if it's made out of cardboard signs, each purchased from someone who's homeless?

There are the questions Josh Foer is dealing with right now.

Foer, a Jewish freelance journalist and author, decided in May to launch a worldwide sukkah contest. The challenge: strictly follow Jewish law in reimagining the sukkah, the temporary huts Jews are commanded to live in during the Sukkot holiday that begins next Wednesday night. Taking their cues directly from Masechet Sukkah, rules included the minimum number of walls a sukkah must have (two and a half), and guidelines for s'chach, the roof of the sukkah (that has to let in less sun than shade but must not completely prevent rain from entering). Foer teamed up with Reboot, the organization that ran Yom Kippur-themed questions on a billboard in Times Square last year, and launched SukkahCity.com by opening the contest to everyone.

"We were shocked by the response it got," Foer told The Jewish Star. "Over 600 architects from 43 countries — places like Kazakhstan, Egypt, Lebanon. From every race, faith, and creed, we had people wrestling with the laws of the sukkah. It was kind of magical."

The designs varied and even included something called an "Air Sukkah" which we are still unclear about. One sukkah was designed to resemble a burning bush. Foer appointed a jury that included New Yorker magazine architecture critic Paul Goldberger and Thom Mayne, the 2005 winner of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, considered to be

Continued on page 3

Crying foul over kaporos



Photo by Ben Lifshitz

Roughly three dozen people protested against the use of chickens for kaporos ceremony outside the Jewish Children's Museum in Crown Heights on Sept. 12. Members of the Crown Heights Jewish community met the protesters.

Plucky activists ruffle feathers, but supporters aren't chickening out

By Michael Orbach

Why did the chicken cross the road before Yom Kippur?

To get away from kaporos.

This time of year, many observant Jews perform the atonement ritual known as shugging kaporos, swinging a chicken around one's head three times. As they do

so they recite, "This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This chicken will go to its death while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and peace." Traditionally, the chicken is then slaughtered and given to the poor. A very common alternate version of the ceremony substitutes money for the chicken with the money going to charity.

The chicken ritual has come under scrutiny and been criticized in recent years, by both animal-rights activists and Jews concerned about the kashrus quality of the slaughter and processing of the chickens, and this year is no different. An organization has even been formed that is devoted to ending the practice of us

Continued on page 3

Shabbat-Yom Kippur Candlelighting: 6:42 p.m. Shabbat ends 7:40 p.m. 72 minute zman 8:11 p.m. Zman Kriat Shma 9:02 (Magen Avrohom) and 9:43 (GRA & Ba'al Tanya)

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Inside
THE JEWISH STAR

Ask Aviva	11
Classified Ads	14
Editorial	12
I'm Thinking	13
In My View	5
Kosher Bookworm	10
Letters to the Editor	12
On the Calendar	4
Parsha	5
That's Life	15

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Crying foul over kaporos

Continued from page 1

ing chickens for kaporos. The New York-based Alliance to End Chicken as Kaporos is a spin-off of United Poultry Concern, a non-profit that describes itself as dedicated to, “promote compassionate and respectful treatment of domestic fowl.”

“We’re not against atonement,” explained Karen Davis, the president of United Poultry Concern. “We’re against an atonement ceremony that has animal abuse.”

The group held a rally outside the Jewish Children’s Museum in Crown Heights, Brooklyn on Sept. 12. Three-dozen or so protestors including some religious Jews carried signs describing kaporos as inhumane. “Being cruel to animals is not pious,” read one sign. The protestors verbally sparred with teens and adults from the Lubavitch community. The rally was intended to take place while kaporos was underway but the organizers miscalculated.

“It was important for us to be there [anyway] since it was the period of the high holidays and some of the practitioners have a time for reflection without the birds being slaughtered,” Davis said.

Chaotic scenes captured on video were posted on the website Crownheights.info. A woman with red hair is seen yelling at Lubavitch men for “killing her loved ones.” In another segment, a young Lubavitch teenager defends the use of chickens for kaporos.

“G-d built the world,” the unidentified teen explained to a protester. “He made me and you and he made the chicken. G-d said the purpose of the chicken is you should slaughter it, make a blessing on it, and elevate it.”

Rina Daych, who lives in Borough Park and participated in the protest, called the treatment of the birds before and during the ritual “horrific.” On the night of the protest, the chickens were left out in the rain without food and water, she said.

“Even the way the animals are handled violated tza’ar ba’alei chaim,” she asserted, referring to the Torah’s prohibition against cruelty to animals.

The debate over Kaporos goes way back in Jewish history. No record of the practice exists in the Torah or the Gemorah, though it is variously dated to having begun around the ninth century. According to the author of the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Yosef Karo, known as the Mechaber, the practice is entirely adopted from pagan sources and should not be practiced. Rabbi Moshe Isserlis, the Ramo, a commentator on the Shulchan Aruch, holds the opposite opinion. Kabbalists such as the Ari, Rabbi Isaac Luria, supported it as well.



Photo by Ben Lifshitz

Two Lubavitch teenagers use the protest as a teaching moment to put tefillin on a fellow Jew.

This past week, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, head of Jerusalem’s Yeshivat Ateret Cohanim and the rabbi of Beit El, spoke out against the practice of using live chickens for kaporos.

“Because this is not a binding obligation but a custom, in light of problems related to kashrut and the suffering of animals, and given the edicts of the aforementioned rabbis, a recommendation must be made to favor performing kaporos through money, by performing the great mitzvah of providing for the needy,” Rabbi Aviner said, according to JTA.

The popularity of the ritual in America can largely be traced to the work of one man and his family: Rabbi Shea Hecht. Rabbi Hecht’s father began trucking in chickens to Crown Heights in 1974 and the family has been continuing the practice since.

“There are 50,000 chickens in the New York area,” explained Rabbi Shea Hecht. “Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht, who is in Gan Eden (heaven), can take credit for 85 percent.”

Each participant pays to perform the ritual and the money raised, Rabbi Hecht says, goes to the organization he heads, The National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education. Kaporos is the group’s second largest annual fundraiser and helps schools, camps and projects such as delivering food packages to the needy.

Rabbi Hecht defended the treatment of chickens and criticized the goals of organizations like the Alliance and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which staged a protest against kaporos two years ago.

“If I was G-d or king of the world I’d take children away

from parents who don’t know how to treat their children,” Rabbi Hecht asked rhetorically. “Would PETA shlep their kids away? By and large, the people who work for us we show how to hold a chicken in a way that it’s not painful. [Besides] a shechting is going to take place anyway!”

While the main goal of the Alliance to End Chicken as Kaporos, is to stop the use of chickens for the ritual, the organization’s larger goal is to stop the use of chickens, period.

“We’re pushing for the end to the use of chickens,” Davis explained. “Because it’s cruel and it’s not necessary to use chicken.”

This focus has hurt the organization’s attempt to stop kaporos, according to Shmarya Rosenberg of the Failed Messiah website, a former Lubavitcher and frequent critic of Orthodoxy.

“The problem with kapparot... is not that chickens are slaughtered,” Rosenberg wrote. “The problem with kapparot is that chickens are cruelly handled. They are transported crushed in cramped cages that do not allow them to move or open their wings. They often are not given food or water, and can go hungry and thirsty for days. They are left in those cramped cages, sometimes in the open sun, until slaughter. After slaughter the chickens are often poorly stored at temperatures that are too high to be safe, as their blood, feathers and waste litter the streets. And then, while some birds are cleaned and processed, many others are simply discarded... because the cost of cleaning and processing the birds is too high to make it worthwhile.”

Rosenberg continued: “But to argue that the slaughter itself is problematic — not because the chickens are being tortured to death, but simply because they are being killed — defeats the entire purpose of the protest.”

Rabbi Hecht, a prominent member of the Lubavitch community, professes to not be bothered at all by the protests. When PETA attempted to stop his organization’s kaporos programs by bombarding his office’s fax machines, a number of the faxes were anti-Semitic in nature, he recalled.

“Don’t tell me you’re so worried about the chicken,” Rabbi Hecht explained. “The gedolim say that people who want to be kinder than Hashem end up being cruel to human beings.”

These days, Rabbi Hecht says, he has a bigger problem than activists: competition.

“A lot of places cut us out,” Rabbi Hecht explained. “We used to do it in Flatbush. We don’t do it in Far Rockaway anymore. It’s private business now... Hey it’s capitalism, G-d bless this country.”

A sukkah made of thread

Continued from page 1

the highest award in the architecture field. The jury also included Israeli architect Ron Arad, and Michael Arad (no relation), the designer of the National September 11 Memorial. The jury convened in August and picked twelve designs from the submissions. The designs all share a single element: each is an innovation in what is typically considered a sukkah.

“Half the winners were kosher sukkahs and didn’t need anything done; the other half we ended up needing to tweak,” Foer explained.

For help in making the sukkot kosher, Foer turned to Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Rabbi Avi Weiss’ rabbinical seminary. Dani Passow, a semicha student, worked with the group facing various challenges with their designs.

“One of the structures involved a [sukkah made from a] single thread,” Foer said. “S’chach can’t be directly supported by steel so we had to come up with a way to make this work.”

The group ended up using an intermediate material to anchor the covering to make the sukkah kosher. In another design, the roof consisted of a single large log that was then perforated in order to make the sukkah kosher.

“We had the entire Yeshivat Chovevei Torah beis medrash discussing these structures and whether they could work within these traditional design constraints,” Foer laughed. “There’s quite a bit of flexibility built in [to the laws of the sukkah] — I would argue it’s

an invitation.”

An invitation to innovate, that is, sourced directly from the Talmud.

“The rabbis sitting around debating whether an elephant could function as a wall of a sukkah: what possible circumstances could have led the rabbis to have that discussion?” Foer asked.

Foer said that the response and the enthusiasm generated by the contest tied directly into the meaning of the holiday.

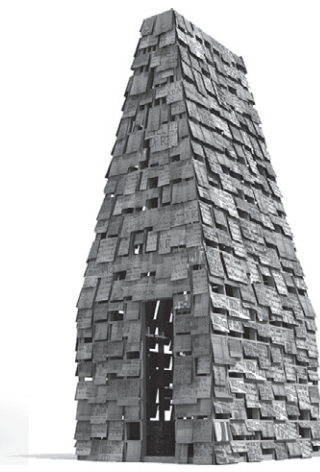
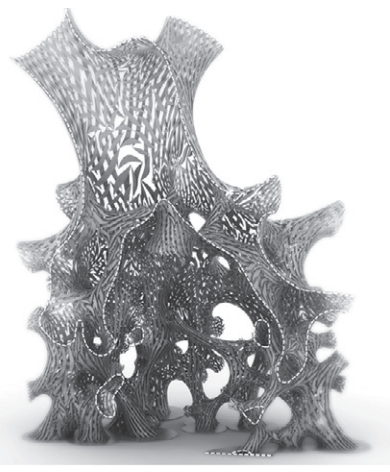
“I can’t think of anything else in architecture that attempts to do so much in such a small building,” Foer said. “This is the story of every Jewish ritual. We wrap everything up in layers of meaning, history and symbolism and the sukkah is no different; you spend a week engaging in collective memory.”

Foer continued: “[The sukkah] is also a structure that makes you confront the idea of impermanence. You can’t live in a structure that doesn’t have solid walls for a week and not ponder that your actual home is not that much more permanent than this... It really forces you to confront the ephemerality of the things in our lives and the ephemerality of our lives. I think architects got that.”

Foer also finds an element of social justice in Sukkot. “The theme of the holiday is homelessness and wandering,” he said.

Having a good time was also an important part of the design contest.

“Sukkot is about rejoicing,” Foer explained. “Yom Simchaseinu (the Day of our Rejoicing) — the happiest festival of the Jew-



Photos courtesy Sukkah City - Photo illustration by Alyson Goodman

ish calendar. The idea that we take architecture and use that as a means of rejoicing is an exciting idea for architects.”

The winning sukkot are being built in a warehouse in Brooklyn and will be put up in Union Square Park in Manhattan on Sept. 19 and 20. A contest on the New York magazine website will decide the People’s Choice Sukkah, which will then remain in Union Square

until Oct. 2. The other entries will be auctioned off for Housing Works, a non-profit that seeks to house the homeless.

In keeping with the added mitzvah of constructing the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur, Foer said the sukkot will be brought to Union Square at midnight on Saturday, Motza’ei Yom Kippur.

September 19

Lulov and Esrog

PURCHASE YOUR LULAV AND ESROG at the Weinstein house, located at 33 North Wood Lane in Woodmere, and a large percentage of the proceeds will be donated to the Ilan Tocker Foundation.

Pre-order by messaging Asher Meckler or emailing ashermeckler@gmail.com. Receive a \$5 discount (\$70 instead of \$75) if you preorder by September 8. No need to pay in advance. When preordering, please specify if you want an etrog with or without a pitom.

Chinuch (student) sets are \$35 and must be preordered by September 8.

The brand new Beaver Lake Cookbook will also be available for sale for \$18 with 100% of the proceeds going to the foundation as well. It's a must-have for the holidays and is filled with quick, easy and delicious recipes. Join the Beaver Lake Cookbook group on Facebook. You can reserve a copy as well by emailing michal-liw@gmail.com or messaging Michal Weinstein on Facebook. Don't forget to keep Tzvi Ilan Ben Gitta in your Tefilot this Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. He has a long road ahead but with our prayers and G-ds help he will return to his family healthy and whole again.

Dealing with bullies workshop

THE JCC OF THE GREATER FIVE TOWNS, located at 207 Grove Avenue in Cedarhurst, will be hosting an anti-bullying class from from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.. Studies have shown that one in every six children is bullied at school. At the JCC's free interactive workshop, children will learn non-violent conflict resolution and basic self-defense techniques. Led by Master Daniel Seggera, a 7th Degree Black Belt and Child Safety Expert, this workshop will also help children gain the self-esteem and confidence to succeed in school and in life.

Space is limited. To make a reservation please call Shoshana Lazar, Children's Enrichment Coordinator, at (516) 569-6733 ext. 204 by 12 p.m., September 16.

ON THE Calendar

Submit your shul or organization's events or shiurim to jscalendar@thejewishstar.com.
Deadline is Wednesday of the week prior to publication.



Courtesy of Midreshet Shalhevet

Midreshet Shalhevet High School for Girls in North Woodmere welcomed the freshman class of 22 new students from all over New York. Menaheret Esther Eisenman, far right, delivered an shiur on the Yamim Noraim to the students during their orientation.

September 20

Hadassah meeting

THE EAST MEADOW SIMCHA CHAPTER OF HADASSAH will meet at 7:45 p.m. at the East Meadow Public Library, on the corner of Front Street and East Meadow. Gary Hudes, president of Gennaro Jewelers of Bellmore, will speak about diamonds and other jewelry. He will also give tips on being an educated consumer in the jewelry shop. For more information call 516-481-1294.

September 21

Parkinson's Support Group

THE JCC OF THE GREATER FIVE TOWNS, located at 207 Grove Avenue in Cedarhurst, hosts every Tuesday a Parkinson's Support Group from 11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The purpose of this group is to bring together Parkinsonians, spouses and their fami-

lies in order to help them better understand the nature of the condition, gain confidence and join in community activities. For further information, please contact Cathy Byrne at 569-6733x220.

September 26

Simchat Beit Hashoeva in Cedarhurst Park

HOLIDAY FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY! Join Chabad of the Five Towns for live music, dancing, & entertainment by the Amazing Modern Gypsies. This show is a dream-like world of visual arts and dangerous stunts including Bubble Boy, Fire Manipulation, Flag Juggling & more. Celebrate with your feet as we dance to invigorating Jewish music. Rain date, September 27. Between 5:30-8:00 p.m..

Jewish Genealogy meeting

THE JEWISH GENEALOGY SOCIETY OF LONG ISLAND will hold its first meeting of the season

on Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center, located at 300 Forest Drive in Greenvale.

A Panel of those who attended The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) conference in Los Angeles will share the highlights of the conference with us. Refreshments will be served. There is no charge for admission. Our mavens will be there at 1:30 p.m. to help solve your genealogy puzzles.

For further information call Rhoda at (631) 661-6340 or visit our website at www.jgsli.org

September 27

Friends of Nahal Haredi

THE FRIENDS OF NAHAL HAREDI invite you to a reception in honor of the Nahal Haredi Battalion as it begins its second decade of service in the IDF on Chol Ha'Moed Sukkot, Monday, September 27th at 7:00 p.m., at the Leonardo Plaza Hotel in Jerusalem. Special tributes to Rabbi Hershel Bilet of the Young Israel of Woodmere, and Daniel Meltsev, recipient of Soldier of the Year citation for the Nahal Haredi. For reservations call: 011-972-54-662-0560.

Going to Israel for Sukkot?

THE SUKKOT HOLIDAYS are filled with fun and exciting kids and teen events in Jerusalem. Enjoy outdoor children's theater (Sept 26-28th) at the Botanical Gardens, Visit the "Lab" (September 24-28) for a collection of enjoyable kids plays, enjoy the Sukkot Festival at Ein Yael (Sept 26-28) with art workshops and an authentic Roman "Shuk", see the newly Remodeled Israel Museum and enjoy a great recycle workshop in the Youth Wing and dramatic gallery tours for kids, join the City of David "Dig It" program if you like to search for real artifacts from the earth dug out of the Temple Mount, March with local Jerusalemites in the annual Jerusalem March, Join thousands of people at the western Wall as the Cohanim bless the nation, enjoy the amazing view of the Western Wall at the 2nd Temple Model on the roof of the Aish Hatorah building in the Old City, Learn about Jerusalem through the ages as you take a ride on the Time Elevator or watch the Night Spectacular at the Tower of David, enjoy a scavenger hunt in English at the Museum of Underground Prisoners as you learn about the Underground fighters who fought in 1948 (Sept 26-28), play a video game "Catch the Counterfeit" at the Bank of Israel Visitors center (Reservations Required). For a full list of fun activities visit www.FunInJerusalem.com

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Yom Kippur

What forgiveness looks like

By the time I was 16 he had given me life, stolen my identity and moved to an island in the West Indies. Yet there he was, reaching for apples in the orchard and passing them to my children.

Several hours later, my three-year-old, who does not recall ever having seen this man before, asks me why I call him "Dad." I have to turn away and take a deep breath before returning to the mixing bowl she and I are using to make apple pie.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin explains in a videocast on JInsider.com that Jewish texts offer three attitudes towards forgiveness. In most cases, forgiveness is obligatory, in some it is optional and in rare cases, it is forbidden. The fact that forgiveness can be forbidden appears to be unique to Judaism.



Ilya Welfeld

Rabbi Telushkin says that forgiveness is obligatory in the vast majority of instances, especially in cases when forgiveness is requested and the harm inflicted is repairable.

He explains that forgiveness is forbidden in cases where irrevocable harm has been caused to others, citing Timothy McVeigh, the unremorseful Oklahoma City bomber as well as the terrorists of 9/11, as individuals we should not forgive.

But what is optional forgiveness? I am struck by the power this seems to place in the hands of the victim.

As Rabbi Telushkin explains, granting forgiveness is optional on two grounds. The first is when the inflictor does not apologize or ask to be forgiven. (This underscores our responsibility as adults to properly inform those who have wronged us, since one cannot request forgiveness without knowing they caused harm.) The second is when the damage caused is irrevocable, such as in the case of a slandered name. Lashon Hara, we know all too well from history, daily life and even US Weekly, can cause damage impossible to repair.

According to Rabbi Aryeh Gotlieb, Rabbi Emeritus of the Jewish Community Center in Paramus, known in our home as Saba Saba — he is the father of my stepfather — it is the victim that determines the permanence of the damage. Again, the power is placed in the hands of the victim.

It seems almost an unfair burden to place on someone who is suffering.

Yet, experts agree, holding a grudge does

more harm than good in the vast majority of instances. In Hilkhos Teshuva 2:10, Rambam writes that even if one has been maltreated severely, he should not bear a grudge. "This is the way of the seed of Israel and their proper hearts," Rambam explains.

Even Dr. Drew, a modern-day, pop culture version of Freud, tweeted the following in August of last year: "Forgiveness is when u think of those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well — one of the first experiences of a genuine recovery."

We filled three huge bags with apples at the orchard. My father is staying for dinner. I am not exactly enjoying this. It's like wearing clothing two sizes too small. But the children are comfortable and laughing. My father is smiling; using the few Hebrew words he knows because that is what he does around us. I am confused about how to explain this relation, conflicted about the smile I freeze on my face, worried I am taxing my husband who has been helping keep the house super neat because he understands that when this tidal wave rolls in, clean living room floors help.

"Because he's my Daddy," I reply to my three-year-old. She giggles like it's the silliest thing I could have said. I anticipate questions about the grandfathers she knows and loves.

"No," she says emphatically and points to my husband who is everything I could have wished for in a father for my children. "That's Daddy!"

"Sure is," I say. And we go back to blending the apples, flour and brown sugar.

My thoughts wander. I try to remember whether my father has ever requested forgiveness. I certainly do not feel irrevocably damaged; in fact, at the moment, I feel quite grateful. The timing of this visit isn't lost on me: Rosh Hashanah is literally around the corner. I am not a big believer in coincidence.

Earlier in the day at the orchard, my father took a bite of one of the apples as we walked between rows of trees. "Sour," he said. "Sour and ripe?" I asked, trying to remember which breeds the farmer had said would not ripen for weeks. "Sour and sweet," he replied.

I repeated it out loud as a question: "Sour and sweet?" I tried to imagine the taste without taking a bite of his apple.

My father caught up to the kids who had run ahead to another tree. I pulled out the camera to capture the moment.

Optional forgiveness, I thought. Maybe that was what it looks like.

Wishing The Jewish Star writers, readers and their families a Gmar Chatima Tova.

Ilya Welfeld stops to cherish the chaos, writing for The Jewish Star about balancing work, life and faith. Email her at ilyawelfeld@gmail.com.

Thoughts for the final prayer

A very experienced rabbi once told me that for Neilah, the last chapter of Yom Kippur — the final prayer, the setting sun, the last grab at the straw of life for the coming year — it is important to focus the attention of the mitpal'lim (those who are praying) in a direction that may help answer the questions we might not necessarily speak about on the holy day: Were my prayers answered? Will my commitments to change work? Will G-d accept my teshuvah? How will I know what I need to do to actualize the things I've prayed for and personally committed to do in this coming year?

I heard this idea from Rabbi Avner Kavas, a renowned speaker in Israel. There is a gemara which was made famous by Yossi Green, who put it to music, and Avraham Fried, who recorded it and sings it around the world. On Brachot 7a, the Talmud records: "Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha (the High Priest) said, 'Once when I entered the holy of holies to burn the k'toret (on Yom Kippur), I saw Akasriel — G-d sitting on His lofty throne. He said to me, 'Yishmael, my son. Bless me!' I said to him, 'May it be Your will that Your mercy should overcome Your anger, and Your mercy should overcome all of Your attributes as You practice mercy towards Your children...' And he responded to me with [a nod of] His head.'"



Rabbi Avi Billet

Can you imagine G-d saying to a human being — "Bless Me?" Is there anyone who would not want to give birth to a child who, one day, would be asked by G-d to bless Him? How does one merit to be blessed

with such a child?

There are midrashic accounts of Rabbi Yishmael's parents — Otzar Midrashim (Niddah, page 400), and in the Or Zarua (Volume One, Alpha Beta, on letters zayin and chet). Elisha, Yishmael's father, was very careful to go to the mikvah regularly. Initially, however, none of the children born to him and his wife survived. His wife asked him, "Why do all these other righteous people have children, and we do not even have one?"

He answered, "Because they and their wives are very careful about going to the mikvah; they observe it with their lives on the line."

She said, "We too will observe this as if our lives depend on it." They accepted upon themselves to do so.

Let us take a pause and remember that the mikvaot in those days were not like the heated,

filtered, beautiful mikvahs we have today. They were either murky and gross, or it was a natural spring, river or lake that was very cold. In some cases in history, particularly in Europe, Jewish women would have to break the ice in order to do their requisite monthly dunking. Men who went daily faced similar trials, except in the morning rather than at night.

Returning to our tale: Once when Elisha's wife emerged from the mikvah she encountered a pig — a ritually impure animal. So she went again. Upon emerging, she encountered a metzora (a person afflicted with the spiritual ailment called "tzara'at"), so she went again. 40 (it may be an exaggeration, but nonetheless a large number of) times she went through this ritual until G-d told the angel Gavriel to descend and stand before this righteous woman who had been through enough; she will become pregnant tonight with a boy who will become Yishmael Kohen Gadol.

When she emerged, she came across the angel Gavriel, who appeared to her in the image of her husband. After she returned home, she became pregnant and eventually gave birth to a son who was blessed with the true countenance of the angel Gavriel.

In the laws of Tevillah (dunking in the mikvah), a woman who sees something that is tameh (ritually impure) after she has immersed does not need to go back to the mikvah. Given the state of the mikvah in those days, each return to the mikvah was almost like putting her life in G-d's hands.

But she went back, perhaps 40 times, in order to do the mitzvah right.

This is what we call mesirat nefesh — being able to do something right, even though it is difficult. To have the fortitude to say, "I am going to sacrifice myself for the sake of G-d."

In the case of Elisha and his wife, they merited a son who was asked by G-d to bless Him.

If we commit to literally be mesair nefesh, to sacrifice of ourselves in body and spirit, for the sake of G-d, what kinds of merits will we have coming to us?

Maybe the answer to this is the answer to our original questions: Were my prayers answered? Will my commitments to change work? Will G-d accept my teshuvah? How will I know what I need to do to actualize the things I've prayed for and personally committed to do in this coming year?

If we are willing to sacrifice our hearts and souls for G-d, we'll be moving in the proper direction. How do we achieve that...?

Let us contemplate this thought during Neilah, to inspire ourselves for the coming year.

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Not joyful

Drinking still illegal for minors on Simchat Torah

By Malka Eisenberg

Excessive drinking, especially in minors, more than dilutes the joy of Simchat Torah. It is also dangerous and illegal.

Since 2007, in Nassau County, "it is a violation of the Social Host Law if a party host knowingly allows an underage person to drink alcohol," explained Chris Munzing, deputy director of communications for the Nassau County District Attorney, Kathleen Rice. Munzing said that there are currently 22 open Social Host cases. The law, which was passed in 2008, does not cover "anything that is a religious ceremony," according to Munzing, and "a glass of wine at the seder is not a violation."

"People should be aware that there are issues in allowing minors to consume alcohol," explained Michael Fragin, a trustee of the Village of Lawrence. "It's not just moral and medical, but criminal issues as well. Kids are camping out in people's

houses for Yom Tov. Kids from out of the neighborhood come without their parents for Simchat Torah and many parents are unaware of their obligations to these minor children."

Under the legislation, hosts who do serve alcohol to minors can face criminal penalties — information that is especially relevant for Simchat Torah.

"It is a major problem," stressed Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt, assistant rabbi at the Young Israel of Woodmere. "It's a chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d's name) above everything else. It's dangerous medically. The person is rendered incapable of doing the time dependent mitzvot (commandments) and forcing Hatzalah and doctors to be mechalel Yom Tov (desecrate the holiday)... It's a horrible, terrible thing on any level."

Rabbi Glatt praised local shuls for taking "strong measures." The risk of sudden death from excess alcohol is "thankfully rare but should not be just dismissed."

The Young Israel of Woodmere, Congregation Aish Kodesh and Yeshiva Sh'or Yeshuv have instituted policies of not serving liquor.

"Clearly the action taken by shuls in recent years to reduce or eliminate wine and liquor at kiddushim has a positive effect and a significant change for the better," said David Mandel, chief executive officer of Ohel Children's Home and Family Services. "At the same time, it doesn't completely eliminate the opportunity for drinking or alcoholism for those who choose to or really want to drink. The problem of drinking is exacerbated on days like Simchat Torah and Purim among some, both because of its popularity in excess including drinking and also it is either tolerated or can be hidden."

Mandel urged parents and community members to be more vigilant at these times, especially where there is a young person with leanings toward alcohol consumption. Drinking to excess can begin as early as age

10 or 12, he explained.

"It is difficult and often impossible to tell young people that they must stay home on Simchat Torah," said Mandel. He suggested that parents offer their home for the children's friends to spend several hours on Simchat Torah and "provide refreshments." Although some children might not appreciate the offer, Mandel says, others will.

"You as a parent will know where the children are and other parents will be deeply grateful," Mandel explained.

He noted that setting limits for an adolescent has limits. "It's just as hard as a parent to set rules for that day that the child hasn't heard or followed the other 364 days of the year," he said. "Be practical in your conversation and expectations."

A parent has the "right and obligation

to supervise and know where your child is," stressed Mandel. "G-d forbid Hatzalah should call you. You can 'check in' on your child on Simchat Torah without hovering and making your child nervous with your presence."



Under the legislation, hosts who do serve alcohol to minors can face criminal penalties — a law especially relevant to Simchat Torah.

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Primary results

Becker wins a shot at McCarthy, Weisenberg returns

By the Jewish Star Staff

County Legislator Fran Becker will get his chance to challenge Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy in November. Becker is the Republican candidate for the 4th Congressional District seat. The six-term member of the Nassau County Legislature trounced opponent Frank Scatturo, 10,361 to 7,733, according to unofficial tallies from the Nassau County Board of Elections.

Election '10

Voter grumbling about salary and pension double-dipping were clearly not enough to keep incumbent Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg from winning a chance at reelection. He defeated former County Legislator Jeff Toback for the Democratic nomination for the 20th Assembly District, 3,569 to 2,354.

Weisenberg, reached after the election, said he was going to "fight like hell for my people."

"I'm going to do what I do best," Weisenberg said. "I'm going to Albany to represent my people." He will face Josh Wanderer in November.

Toback said he didn't have future plans save for visiting his daughter in



FRAN BECKER
4th Congressional
District
challenger



HARVEY WEISENBERG
20th Assembly
District incumbent

college and helping his son with his golf game.

"The highlight of my night was the performance in the Five Towns. My friends are still supportive," Toback said. "The lesson I learned is Harvey has 60 years of goodwill and that goes a long way. You discount it at your own risk."

In the 3rd Congressional District, longtime Republican incumbent Peter King won easily, soaring to a 16,064 to 1,567 victory over challenger Robert Previdil.

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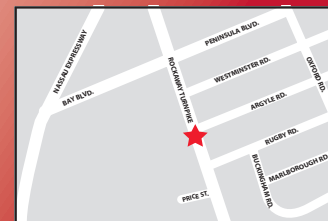
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Photo by Claudio Papapietro

Jay Feinberg, executive director of Gift of Life, spoke to students at the Stella K. Abraham (SKA) High School for Girls on Sept. 13, 2010.

The Gift of Life

Jay Feinberg wants to be your Jewish hero

By Michael Orbach

At the cozy restored mansion in Hewlett that houses the Stella K. Abraham (SKA) High School for Girls, Jay Feinberg, executive director of the Gift of Life, was convincing the roughly 200 girls in the auditorium to vote for him. Feinberg wasn't running for political office, but on a quest to capture one of the top 20 spaces on the Jewish Community Heroes contest.

The contest, sponsored by The Jewish Federation of North America, is conducted through online voting. As of The Jewish Star's press deadline on Wednesday afternoon, Feinberg was safely ensconced in second place with over 9,000 votes. The top 20 vote getters present at an annual Jewish Federation meeting and possibly win \$25,000 for their organization.

Feinberg knows exactly what he would use the money for. The Gift of Life is a bone marrow registry. Bone marrow comprises the stem cells found inside large bones that produce the components of blood — red, white and platelet cells. Bone marrow transfers are an effective treatment for a number of cancers. Possible donors are tested through a cheek swab, each at a cost of \$54 to process. Winning the contest, Feinberg explained on Monday, Sept. 13, would mean "450 cheek swabs."

Feinberg delivered his speech during the Aseret Ymei Teshuva, the 10 days of repentance that began with Rosh Hashanah and will culminate with Yom Kippur this weekend, since the school had chosen Gift of Life as the charity they would raise money for during the school's annual tzedaka campaign.

"Last year, our community became more aware of the need for a larger bone marrow donor registry," Rabbi Yosef Zakutinsky of SKA explained. "In addition, we were so awed and inspired by Jay Feinberg's story, and felt the need to spread awareness and raise funds for his fantastic organization."

As for stories, Feinberg has a compelling one. As he explained to the audience, he was not coming as the executive director of the Gift of Life, but as a cancer survivor. At 22, he recalled, "Everything was going along great," until he found himself in the emergency room with a doctor who was explaining that he had leukemia. Later at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Feinberg's situation proceeded to get worse. Chemotherapy would work for him for

three years, but after that would probably become ineffective, he was told. The doctor advised him to go home and make a bucket list of everything he wanted to do before he kicked the bucket, as the expression goes, and do them in those three years. After that, doctors would reassess what methods could be used to fight his cancer. However, the doctor did offer one slight ray of hope.

"Transplants can save your life," Feinberg said the doctor told him. "But, you'll never get one, since you're Jewish."

The doctor was not being anti-Semitic; he was simply pointing to the fact that at the time of Feinberg's diagnosis in 1991, very few possible Jewish donors were in the existing bone marrow registries. The doctor didn't count on one factor, however.

"The power of the Jewish mother," Feinberg told the audience. "She wasn't going to see her son die."

The Feinberg family began a marathon of bone marrow drives across the United States, Canada and Israel. Even the tiny Jewish community in Tokyo held one. At the time, samples were obtained through blood samples instead of the easy cheek swabs. Over 60,000 people were tested in 240 drives.

After four years the chemotherapy became ineffective but Feinberg still did not have a match. The Wisconsin Institute for Torah Study, a small yeshiva of 130 students held one of the final drives. At the last minute one of the volunteer organizers couldn't make it and his sister took his place. The sister was afraid of needles but at the last minute decided to get tested. She was Feinberg's perfect match.

"That's the reason I'm here today," Feinberg explained.

After his successful transplant, Feinberg continued to the organization his family founded.

"I couldn't let what we created vanish," he said.

So far the organization has over 170,000 possible bone marrow donors in its registry; he hopes to eventually have 300,000.

Though while he's aiming to be a Jewish community hero, Feinberg maintains that he himself is not a hero; the donors are. As an example he pointed to a red haired teacher in the audience: Yael Gelernter, a Tanach teacher, whose husband, Eli, has been a bone marrow donor on two separate occasions.

"You're saving someone's life," Gelernter explained. "It's painful, but it's worth it."

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The Kosher Bookworm

Yom Kippur taken seriously

Yom Kippur often has an extra, added spiritual affect on even the most marginally observant Jews. Whether it is the fasting or the abstinence from daily routine, Yom Kippur gives pause to all Jews to consider the true purpose of our lives.

This year two pieces of literature, each in its own manner, serve to point us in the right direction. We begin with "Subversive Sequels in the Bible" by Dr. Judy Klitsner (Jewish Publication Society, 2010). Klitsner, a devotee of the late Nechama Leibowitz, and a lecturer at Jerusalem's Pardes Institute, draws a striking parallel between the readings of Noah and Jonah.



Alan Jay Gerber

"Noah and Jonah: two prophets navigate perilous waters aboard their boats, apart from the doomed populations they might have saved," Klitsner writes. "Names, words, and themes are shared freely by their narratives. In both, rampant injustice, hamas,

threatens to seal the people's fate; both speak of a 40-day period preceding a planned annihilation. Each story prominently features a 'yona' — Jonah's Hebrew name is identical to that of the winged messenger sent by Noah, the dove. Both stories highlight such rare locations as Tarshish and Nineveh. Both narratives focus on personal chronicles of the prophets themselves, while presenting the barest minimum in the way of the actual prophecy they deliver. And both prophets... judge themselves and others very harshly. As a result, each sinks into a state of self-induced oblivion: Noah through alcohol, Jonah through a coma-like slumber."

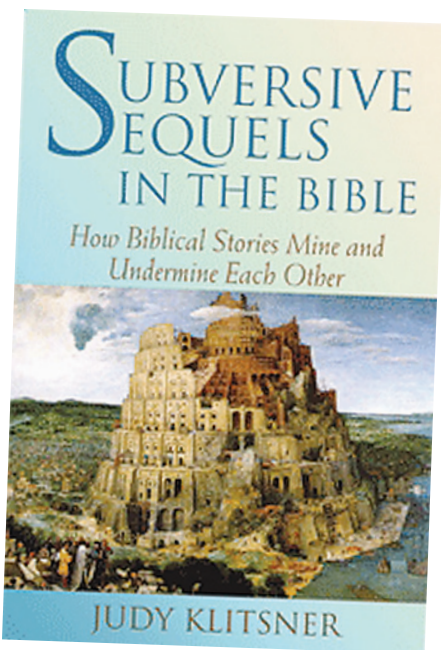
This message is, "especially relevant to Yom Kippur, the day in the Jewish calendar that has been set aside for self-transformation," Klitsner continues. "The book of Jonah, as subversive sequel to the story of the inevitable destruction in the days of Noah, challenges its readers to view themselves as endlessly capable of rewriting their own stories in radically new ways."

In other words, teshuvah.

Here we see these two ancient personalities linked thematically together to teach profound lessons in the art of teshuvah for us to ponder during Yom Kippur. A read of this chapter in this very challenging book should serve to give you a portrait of what constitutes a "subversive sequel" and its importance to the lessons of repentance.

The other book, "Confronting Scandal: How Jews Can Respond When Jews Do Bad Things" by Dr. Erica Brown [Jewish Lights, 2010], skillfully uses the Yom Kippur liturgy of Al Chet to highlight the monumental chillul Hashem of the criminal behavior of some within our religious community.

Each chapter is highlighted by the communal Al Chet response that is linked to the particular chapter's content. The communal shame is dealt with in a forthright manner, with issues like mesira, informing on a fellow Jew, and chillul Hashem, desecration of G-d's name, discussed and dealt with in a mature and dispassionate way.



"On Yom Kippur we begin the opening Kol Nidrei service with a request for permission to 'pray with transgressors,'" Brown writes. "This custom is based on a Talmudic statement made by Rabbi Shimon Chasida, who said, 'A public fast wherein Jewish transgressors do not participate is not a fast.'" The author goes on from this to develop practical aspects that must be considered in the handling of those who violate the law and then hide behind a communal shield of protection.

Further, the author even presents a litany of Al Chet responses that reflect upon this modern day plague. Here are some:

"In the spirit of experimentation, I put together a list contemporary Al Chets to elaborate on the sin of chillul Hashem that we confess to transgressing each year. This time, I've translated the introductory expression to reflect the plurality of sin rather than its singularity.

For our sin of thinking that ethics is someone else's issue.

For our sin of believing that we can wrong others without corroding our own souls.

For our sin of making Jewish affluence a bigger priority than Jewish goodness.

For our sin of thinking that Jewish education is not about values education.

For our sin of cheating on a test because we thought that a grade was more important than our integrity.

For our sin of not working harder to improve the reputation of our people in the world every day."

In reality, this list can be endless. This is the human condition: we are indeed frail creatures in need of a cure. This is the challenge that this book presents to us.

This is a timely challenge. If you do not believe me, read the daily papers and listen to the news. These sordid stories involve wealthy businessmen, prominent rabbis, teachers and housewives — the full gamut of society. No sector is immune and all have to account. Yom Kippur is a major part of that accounting to G-d. We are left to deal with the rest by ourselves.

Have a meaningful fast and a happy, healthy and prosperous new year.

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Cut out the sarcasm

Dear Aviva,

I was doing some thinking and just came to a realization. I have a very particular way of relating to people — I always have some quip or sarcastic retort to offer, and I realized that it's insulting to others. I'm very funny, but I'm also biting because my humor can be hurtful. My wife and friends laugh along, but I don't want to be hurting people so much. I feel like I can't be serious and I think I don't know of any other way to relate to others. Do you have any advice?

—Last one laughing

Dear Last one laughing,

Sounds like you don't joke around when it comes to honest self-awareness. And if timing is everything, you have perfect timing for taking a self-account, seeing as Yom Kippur is in the air.

So let's get to work. There are a number of ways that you could approach this, depending on what school of thought you hold by. I'll lay them on the table for you and you can choose which is the best fit for cutting out the sarcasm.

Psychoanalytic/Neo-Freudian/Object-Relations: Perhaps you are hiding behind your humor. What is it that you are hiding? Did you have negative associations with being serious that stem from your past (even as far back as your childhood)? The negative association to being serious is like a wound that is trying to heal. If you are serious in a positive

setting, it will heal without much scarring. You can involve your wife with this exercise and let her be a safe outlet for being serious. Define to her what is unsafe for you and have her avoid doing that. I personally am not so into this school of thought. I'm not saying that it's bogus, I just think there are other ways to effectively and efficiently solve your problem. But if you feel like this fits for you, go for it. It can even strengthen your marriage if done properly. Try any of Harville Hendrix's books.

Next up, we have the Behavioral school of thought. It doesn't really matter how you started this cycle of sarcasm. What matters is that it is an ongoing, present issue for you. Something within the interaction is reinforcing the behavior. Your goal is to figure out what that reinforcement is. It could be that the reinforcement is coming from you or from the other person. When you make a comment that is snide, it is also humorous, so it probably evokes a smile or guffaw from the other person. Maybe that is your reinforcement. Is there another way to get the same reaction? Can you take up telling neutral jokes about anonymous third-parties? Can you use your wit to uplift the

other person? I guarantee that this smile will be exponentially wider than a reaction to your typical comments. Or maybe it's not the smile and laughter that is reinforcing your way of relating to people. Maybe you are reinforced by the split-second look of shock that the person shows. I can't think of a socially appropriate replacement for shocking people (other than throwing a surprise party, or pouncing out from behind the bushes with flowers and chocolates). So if it is the shock that is fueling your bite, I recommend looking at your shoes when you make your offensive quips. This way you will not see the shock and will not be reinforced. The behavior should extinguish itself.

The underbelly of the Behavioral technique is punishment. If the first two suggestions don't work, try an aversive technique: Where a rubber band around your wrist and snap it every time you open your mouth the wrong way until you are Mr. Genial. Ouch!

The next school of thought is one that I was trained in: Solution Focused. Let's find the exception to your insulting humor. Is there ever a time when you do not relate to someone this way? Do you talk like this to

the elderly? Or to your mailman? Are you serious with your doctor? Pinpoint one person whom you are serious with. If you can't even think of one person, think of someone whom you are a smidge less sarcastic to. Then pay attention to yourself. When you are talking to this person, are you breathing faster or slower than normal? Are your hands open or clenched in fists? Are you focused on one topic or are you letting the conversation wander?

Whatever it is that is different with this person than with others is your key to change. Now replicate this difference when you are talking with everyone else.

And now the school of thought that is not subject to any verifiable research: Aviva's Intuition. (Try this only if the others don't work.) When you're hanging out, stay quiet. Keep your mouth shut and just observe and smile. Open your mouth only if you have something informative to add. If it's hard not to say something cutting just bite your tongue, literally (and gently). And you may get that reinforcement from the shocked look on your friends' faces when you don't have anything to say.

—Aviva

Aviva Rizel has received her Master's in marriage and family therapy from Hofstra University and sees couples, families and individuals. She can be reached at avivarizel.mft@gmail.com.

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Opinion

Editorial

A nice story, for a change

There is no shortage of sad stories in the newspaper business; no shortage of bad things happening to people and no shortage of things we'd rather not think about. But every so often we encounter stories that surprise us. Stories that for their sheer goodness put a smile on our faces. This is one of them.

At the end of June, The Jewish Star received a frantic email. A Jewish woman, whom we will call Miriam, was desperately seeking a place for her daughter and her two granddaughters who lived out of New York. The father of the children was dangerous and had just gotten out of prison. "Restraining orders don't always help," Miriam wrote. Miriam needed a place to stay temporarily as she planned on making Aliyah with her daughter in October. She didn't have much but was able to pay a few hundred dollars for rent and asked if The Jewish Star could help.

We sent out emails to various individuals inside the Jewish community and continued speaking with the woman. While we waited to hear back, the woman remained optimistic, certain that the Jewish community would be able to help her out. Some possibilities emerged, but they all fell through. Though the clock was ticking, Miriam did not lose hope. Eventually, we put Miriam in touch with Rabbi Boruch Bender, founder and executive director of the Achiezer Community Resource Center. The Jewish Star profiled the organization in May, when Rabbi Bender described Achiezer's purpose as "a clearing house" for anyone who was "dealing with an unexpected or difficult crisis, and [was] not sure where to start." Rabbi Bender agreed to look into the case. On Monday afternoon, we received an email from Bender explaining that the organization had done a "tremendous amount of research and after thoroughly vetting the story... we decided it was one we should help with."

Achiezer had found an apartment for Miriam and her family, the note continued. She would be sharing an apartment with a family that is willing to host her, free of charge, as

an act of chesed.

The Jewish Star contacted Miriam and she explained the situation as follows: "They were wonderful," Miriam said about Achiezer. "At the 11th hour so to speak (8:00 Tuesday, 7th of September) [they] called with the news and we were able to get in just before the chag. In addition, they located a place in the general area where I have friends so that the holiday meals were easy to arrange." Esther Naamat, Rabbi Bender's assistant, "also offered to host meals for us if there were any unfilled meals," Miriam added. As a final touch, she wrote: "Our host family is really very nice and even when they went away for the holiday, they left us a honey cake to start the sweet New Year. Pretty amazing!"

Rabbi Yaakov Bender, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Darchei Torah and Boruch Bender's father, shared another story about Achiezer. Last Wednesday, on Erev Rosh Hashanah, Achiezer learned of a local family that did not have food for the upcoming three-day holiday. The younger Rabbi Bender, according to his father, sent "his volunteers scampering" and they managed to buy food for the entire Yom Tov as well as brand new clothing for the family's three children. Miriam concluded her letter to The Jewish Star, writing that because of her limited religious background, she wasn't "able to actually understand the name of the organization." However, she was hoping to "know more so that when my situation improves I can perhaps make a donation to assist someone else." We cannot think of a better message to share during these Aseret Y'may Teshuva: a wonderful act of chesed performed by an equally wonderful organization. We know the name of the organization. It is Achiezer, which literally means "my brother's helper." It is a name the organization lives up to. You can donate to Achiezer Community Resource Center online at www.achiezer.org. Should you require assistance, the telephone number is (516) 791-4444. It is monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Letters to the editor

Halachic Pre-nups

To the Editor:

In your article on halachic prenuptial agreements ("A woman in chains"; September 3, 2010) Rabbi Avi Shafran is quoted as suggesting that such agreements suggest a false equivalence between marriage and commercial transactions. But Chazal had a very different perspective. They mandated the ketubah (according to some opinions; according to others, they enlarged it) as part of their recognition that love is only meaningful when it involves commitment, and commitment is most meaningful when it generates enforceable legal obligations. Nothing expresses true love as deeply as willingness to protect the beloved against one's own changes of mind or heart. This why the Ribono Shel Olam made formal treaties with the Avot and with Klal Yisroel, which Chazal depicted as marriage.

Rabbi Shafran is also cited as saying that his children are married without such agreements. I presume and pray that all their marriages are happy. But it should be clear that prenuptial agreements must be standard to be effective — it would be very difficult pastorally to say to specific couples that they need to sign because their relationship seems risky — and the costs of the Shafran children's failure to sign may be borne by their friends with less happy marriages, who chas v'shalom may end up as powerless agunot.

My wife often says, "Friends don't let friends get halakhically married without halachic prenups." As a rav who deals regularly with agunot and extortion in the beit din context, I strongly endorse her statement.

*Rabbi Aryeh Klapper
Dean, The Center for Modern
Torah Leadership*

Send letters to the editor to
letters@thejewishstar.com

Editor's note:
David Seidemann is off this week.



Photo by Leba Sonneberg

Birthday Celebration at Woodmere Rehabilitation and Health Care Center

On Aug. 26, Sophie Blum celebrated her 97th birthday with family and friends at Woodmere Rehabilitation and Health Care Center, where she has lived for the last three years. Above: Sophie, center, with her son, Steve Blum, and daughter, Arlene Greenblatt.

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Independent and original reporting from the Orthodox communities of Long Island and New York City
All opinions expressed are solely those of The Jewish Star's editorial staff or contributing writers

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The Jewish Star is published weekly by The Jewish Star LLC, 2 Endo Boulevard, Garden City, NY 11530.

Subscription rates: \$9 per quarter on a credit card in Nassau and Far Rockaway, or \$48 a year. Elsewhere in the US, \$15 per quarter or \$72 a year.

Newsstand Price: \$1.

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Opinion

Israel, land of refuge (not only for Jews)

Suleiman Yahya Ishaq is dead, shot at the age of 25 by Egyptian police. They shot him in the head and then riddled his body with bullets. They shot him because he was ordered to stop — and he refused.

Ishaq, a Sudanese refugee, was attempting to escape from Egypt into Israel. He almost made it. Sudan and Egypt are Muslim countries. Conditions in Sudan are so horrific that Sudanese Muslims regularly risk their lives crossing into Egypt, and risk their lives again crossing through Egypt into Israel, where they finally find refuge. In the Jewish State, the people of Sudan feel safe.

The trip is as difficult physically as it is emotionally. Maps can convey the distance between Sudan and Israel, but they cannot convey the dangers or explain the logic that motivates Muslims to cross deserts, fight off thieves and soldiers as they flee to Israel. We cannot comprehend the fear and yearning that motivates Sudanese people to give up their homes in one Arab country, illegally pass through another and fulfill their dreams in Israel.

What have they heard about the Jewish State that so entices the Sudanese to seek refuge there? They are not secret Jews who have been taught about the holiness of Israel or the uniqueness of the Jewish people and their con-

nection to their land.

These are Sudanese refugees seeking asylum in Israel because they have heard the truth about Israel. They risk their lives to enter Israel because in Israel people can live free. They do not care that Israel is a Jewish state; they care about freedom. Suleiman Yahya Ishaq did not make it, but thousands of refugees from Sudan have. Ishaq was the 35th person to be shot dead on the Egyptian side of the fence. Hundreds have been wounded. To Israel's credit, the people of Sudan are not sent away after they have crossed the border. The Egyptian border treats their Sudanese Muslim cousins much less kindly than the Israelis treat these strangers in their midst. The Egyptians think little of shooting the Sudanese they catch. From their side of the border, Israel can actually watch the migrants as they make their way to the border. They watch as the Egyptian army attacks the refugees. Israeli border patrols cannot stop the Egyptians from shooting the defenseless Sudanese — that would cause an international incident. On their own side of the border, the government of Israel has begun the humanitarian process of granting asylum and refugee status to their Sudanese guests.

The Sudanese in Israel are not security threats. They are not terrorists or drug traffickers. They are people escaping death and searching for life and refuge. Life means Israel. Death is the Arab land they are escaping. Israel is the beacon of hope for parts of the Arab world. Israel is worth risking your life for — not only by Jews.

Micah D. Halpern is a columnist and a social and political commentator. Read his latest book THUGS. He maintains The Micah Report at www.micahhalpern.com.

I'M THINKING



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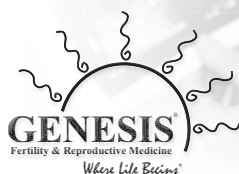


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Dear That's Life,

So, with our first three-day chag over, is it just me, or does anyone else feel like a fat pig? It's not just the overeating that does me in, but also all of the sitting and being sedentary that makes me feel like I could qualify as a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. It would be Snoopy, Kermit the Frog and me. The best part of this eating insanity is that there is no end in sight. With two more three-day chagim headed our way, my waistline is taking a beating.

A non-Jewish friend of mine is convinced that Judaism is not conducive to being thin. With two large, sit-down, multiple-course meals served weekly, it's an uphill battle to keep one's weight steady. How are Jews supposed to be thin, he wondered out loud, when there is so much that is centered around eating? Our eating habits are not our biggest problem, I argued. We have other crosses to bear, if you'll forgive the expression. And of course, there are good choices to be made — celery to munch on, plenty of water to drink and blah, blah, blah. The bottom line is that if I want another piece of challah, shmear with honey, I am going to have it. Sue me.

It was right before Thanksgiving a couple of years ago when a non-Jewish coworker of mine was visibly at her wits' end by the time she made it to work. Apparently, she was having 20 people for Thanksgiving dinner and was completely overwhelmed by the size of the meal, the shopping, the preparation and the clean up that she knew would follow such a meal. I looked at her, put my arm around her and said, "Honey, it's called 'Shabbos' and we do it every week."

Ironically enough, local newspapers were covering Fashion Week in New York City as

I was digging into my honey cake. Bizarrely thin women who look like they could use a meal at my table graced the pages of many a periodical that was delivered to my home. I would not be deterred — these women cannot be happy, I reasoned. Who could be happy being so thin that a gust of wind could blow you away?

That's not a way to live. Come to my house; let me feed you. Want some chulent? On the other hand, the U.S. Open was being played as I was contemplating whether one more piece of kugel was really going to kill me. These athletic, toned and muscular women clearly need to eat and must work off every bit of food that they consume. There had to be a happy medium, I thought. I was not going to be a Kim Clijsters nor do I want to be, but I did not want to be Brooklyn Decker either. Frankly, there has to be a way to have my cake and eat it, too.

Checking my email right after Shabbat, I sifted through the messages that awaited me. Like a voice from beyond, a Weight Watchers "chizuk" email was in my inbox, ready to give me pointers and low-cal recipes and here to tell me I am not alone. I know I'm not alone, I thought — I've been sitting in shul for three days with hundreds of other bloated people. Duh.

Don't worry: I get it, I get it. As someone told me years ago, weight loss is like religion:

You can always come back. So in this week of returning and repentance, here's to a new commitment to being a better Jew and a more sensible eater. After all, both one's inside and outside should look and feel good.

MLW



Sukkot in South Shore
Rebbe Eli Herzberg helped his students at the Yeshiva of South Shore pick an esrog for Sukkot.

Photo courtesy of Yeshiva of South Shore

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