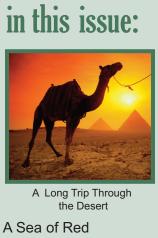


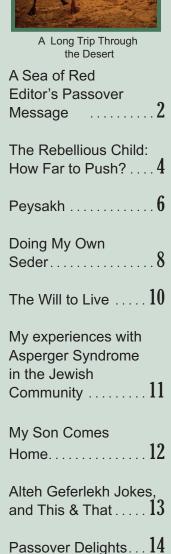
Being

Jewish

PASSOVER 2009

Relevant Judaism for Modern Life







HAPPY PASSOVER 5769

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A Sea of Red

Being Jewish

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By Michael Hanna-Fein Editor

The Passover miracle of parting the Red Sea helped the Jews escape slavery in Egypt. Once they were safely on the other side, the sea folded in on itself, and swallowed Pharaoh's pursuing army. A huddled mass saved by a tectonic phenomenon from a snarling hoard; this was truly a great miracle.

We now face a new turbulent Red Sea; a sea of red ink. The world is engulfed in an economic crisis, and it is affecting the foundation of our lives. We are wondering how we, who work hard for our money, and provide for our families, are now ensnared in a situation that is out of our control. Once again, we have become enslaved to riches that are in the hands of others.

We are slaves to the gods of greed. Our banking, and financial institutions, became addicted to inflated growth. No longer satisfied with the accumulated wealth, they concocted bigger investment schemes with far greater risks. New ways were devised to milk more money from the "Golden Calf," and they succeeded...for a time.

These magnificent gains were built on a sea of red. Our entire economy gambled on the accumulated debt of homeowners, investors, and consumers, which were bundled, and sold, to the highest



bidder. In the hunt for fresh "product" people were permitted, and often lured, into taking on more debt than they could afford. The inevitable collapse came when the housing bubble burst, and homeowners began to default on their financial obligations.

How will we ever manage to get to the other side of this new "Red Sea?" There is no Pharaoh chasing us, and we have all been reduced, to one degree or another, to the level of slave. One great mass of humanity searching for a pathway to the security we once new, and even took for granted.

Passover is a crossroad in a dilemma. When faced with death, or action, the Jewish people risked everything, and pulled together. They were willing to work together, make major sacrifices, and adjust-

ments, to their lives. Under Moses' guidance, they marched toward the sea, not knowing where their journey would take them.

Panic makes us want to grab what we can, and run, but Exodus was about saving an entire people. Only by saving each other can we truly save ourselves. As we look for an opening in the sea of our financial crisis, it's important to look back, and make sure we are not leaving the weak, the poor, the aged, and the infirm behind. We all deserve a piece of the American dream, that is so admired, and emulated the world over.

Unlike the Jews of ancient Egypt, we do not want to find ourselves floundering in the desert for forty years. This disaster is an opportunity to refocus, and redefine, who we are as a people. Our recovery will take time, and those years can be put to use for building a better world, and for creating a closer knit, and more empathetic society.

During the flight from Egypt, and while the Jews wandered the desert, there were many occasions when Moses' followers became disenchanted, and questioned whether this entire exodus was such a wise course. Rough patches occurred on their way to the Promised Land, and yet, with each set-back, a new miracle, or remedy, was discovered. Our ancestor's problems were not solved overnight, so we must be prepared for some set-backs in our recovery.

It is my sincere hope that when we meet these disappointments, instead of crying, and complaining, as occurred in the ancient desert, we do as Moses did, and find the water hidden in the rock, and the manna that is around us in the world. We must never lose faith that by sticking together, and trusting, and caring, for each other, we will make it to the Promised Land. After having endured the matzoh-like flatness of our economy, we will see the bread of prosperity rise before our eyes.

Michael has been publishing the Gantseh Megillah online since 1997. He is also the author of the Glossary of Yiddish Words and Expressions and he publishes Being Jewish magazine. You can visit his Web site at http://www.gantsehmegillah.com, where you will find links to the glossary, and the weekly newsletter. If you would like to communicate with Michael, you may email him at beingjewishmagazine@gmail.com.

note to our readers

We want you to love Being Jewish! We hope you will look forward to each issue, no matter your age, from teen to senior, because you find it relevant, user-friendly, enjoyable, and filled with valuable information, and inspiration about the Jewish way of life.

Each article is carefully selected, and edited so that every concept is easily understood, even by those of us who left the synagogue as teenagers, and did not return for 20 years or more

Our goal for Being Jewish is to help you find meaning, and relevance in the Jewish way of life. In every issue we will try to show you ways to access the three components of Judaism: Ethics, Spirituality, and Peoplehood (ESP).

The articles we publish are designed to help you look at your modern life, and our ancient traditions, and answer one, or all three, of these questions:

E How can I be a more Ethical person?

S How can I have a richer Jewish Spiritual life?

P How can I enhance my sense of belonging to the Jewish People?

Being Jewish (the magazine, and the Jewish way of life) is organized by the ESP circles, though as you can see by the diagram, and also by reading the articles, there is much potential for overlap.

For example, under Ethics, you will find sections like Working, and Being Jewish, Learning, and Being Jewish, Giving, and Being Jewish, and so on. But at the same time, you could easily find a Spiritual, or Peoplehood, dimension in each of these sections. We can also relate the Ethics, and Peoplehood circles more directly by realizing that Jewish values are the building blocks of Jewish peoplehood.

We hope we can show you ways to access each of the ESP circles, and where they overlap, so that in your modern life, you can more fully enjoy the wisdom, and beauty, of Being Jewish! - Gil Mann



The Rebellious Child: How Far to Push?

by: Gil Mann

Dear Readers:

During our Passover Seders, we read about the famous four sons: The wise, the rebellious, the simple, and the one who can not yet speak. Below is a letter about a rebellious child. The subject: Jewish education. I am sure many parents...and children will relate.

Dear Gil:

We'd like your opinion about how to approach Judaism, and Jewish learning, with our teenage son. Recently an opportunity came up for him to attend an excellent Jewish high school in our town. We were thrilled. He was not.

In fact, he sabotaged the admission process by purposely doing poorly on the placement exams. He basically wants to go where his friends go. Now, we would like him to supplement his education in some other ways -- going to services, and participating (not reading a book during services, his current practice,) doing a Torah reading occasionally, getting involved in the Jewish youth group at our temple, etc.

My son does attend a Jewish camp, and took (with pressure,) a one week trip to Israel last year. My question is, if we push him too much, will it turn him off to Judaism even more? Do you have any advice?

P

Dear P:

Given how adept your son is at sabotage, I think you are right; pushing him too hard could be counterproductive. When our son Josh (he told me I could use his name,) was a teen, even a

pre-teen, he had a similar attitude, though thankfully, he was not a saboteur! We responded four ways.

#1 We genuinely listened to his objections about everything, from frustration with services, to attending a Jewish day school. Of course, genuinely listening to children should be standard operating procedure; no matter what the issue.

But, for some reason, when the subject is religion, many parents seem to have a different attitude...more akin to cramming religion down the kid's throat. For example, "I had a Bar Mitzvah, and you are going to have one too -- whether you like it, or not."

When Josh was 11, he informed us that he did not want to have a Bar Mitzvah. Though we don't think an 11-year-old is in a position to make such a decision, we told him that we would not force him. We explained that he automatically "became" a Bar Mitzvah when he was 13. We told him, if he wanted to "have" a Bar Mitzvah he could, at anytime, as long as the ceremony was not within 6 months of his siblings. We also gave him a number of things to think about in his decision.

Knowing Josh, we chose this tact because we felt confident that he would decide he did want a Bar Mitzvah. As we expected, after he reflected a bit more, he indeed chose to have a Bar Mitzvah. Not only that, he did so with gusto, and learned much more than average for his Bar Mitzvah. In the end, he was very proud of himself.

#2 As for his questions, and objections, we did our best to answer, and told him that we genuinely respected his thinking, and questioning. I told him that I shared many of his sentiments, e.g. like Josh, I often find services to be meaningless, and I do not believe in traditional images of God.

Over the course of my conversations with him, I shared answers I had found to my own objections, and questions. I explained, in detail, why Judaism was important to me. I also sought answers from a rabbi that Josh liked. The three of us spent several sessions together talking about Josh's objections.

Here I must make an important point: you should be able to articulate your answers to the questions "why does Judaism matter?" and, "why be Jewish?" if you hope to have your children also want to be Jewish.

#3 We made compromises -- that is, both of us. My wife, and I, agreed to be flexible about not forcing him to do everything "Jewish" we wanted. Josh agreed to truly try the things he attended, even if he did not think he was gaining anything of value. Over time, he became fairly active in our synagogue's youth group. Every summer, he looked forward to attending 8 weeks of Jewish summer camp...though, I suspect, his attendance, and participation, in prayer services was spotty. I chose not to give him grief over that. We did pressure him to take a trip to Israel, and Poland. In retrospect, he was grateful to us.

#4 More important than all of this, my wife, and I, model that we love being Jewish 24/7. We love Jewish holidays, ethics, community, caring, food, family, Israel, and so many other parts of being Jewish.

As a part of modeling, keep in mind this wonderful quote, from Robert Fulgham, that I've thought of often, as a parent: "Don't worry that children

Gil's Jewish Email columns began on his popular America Online feature called "Judaism Today: Where Do I Fit?". You can read more of his columns at www.beingjewish.org. Gil welcomes any additional questions, or comments, about this topic, or any other Jewish issue. Email him at GilMann@beingjewish.org.

never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you."

Whether your child, grandchild, or child you care about, is wise, rebellious, simple, or unable to ask a question, how you lead your life is probably the greatest influence on the child. Think of your parents, and grandparents, and how they influenced you Jewishly. You play the same role to the children watching you. Remembering this, do your best to emulate the good influences you saw, as a child, and live a life you hope your child will want to emulate. You, and your child, will both be rewarded.

Happy Passover! Gil

PS Today Josh is 22 years old. He is passionately involved in a number of Jewish causes, and cares deeply about our synagogue...though he is still not crazy about services.

Gil Mann's new book: <u>Sex.</u>
<u>God, Christmas & Jews.</u> was a finalist in the Jewish Life, and Living category of the 2006 Koret International Jewish Book Awards.

The book features 18 of Gil's popular columns, in which he responds to

readers' most perplexing emails, including: Lam Very Angry with God!:

cluding: I am Very Angry with God!; Bizarre Jewish Sex; Body Piercing, Tattoos and More; I Will Not Circumcise My Son!; and Will Jews Burn in Hell? All names have been removed from the emails, of course!

The book (including shipping) is available at a discount to Being Jewish readers for just \$13. To order the book,

call 800-304-9925 or go to www.BeingJewish.org.





Peysakh

by: Eddy Robey

n every culture there are rituals by means of which an individual becomes part of a group. These activities may be called rites of passage, initiations, or hazing. No matter the name, or particular details, they represent a shared experience for members, and a basis for interpersonal bonding.

For Jewish women, the Passover holiday serves such a purpose. Yes, I know, some of my readers are now thinking of Bat Mitzvah cer-

emonies, or perhaps a first visit to the mikvah, but as important as those events are, Passover has the most significance. Until she has made her home ready for the holiday, and been hostess for her own Seder, she has not come of age.

No, helping her mother doesn't count, nor does being part of the

group making preparations for an event at a shul, or community center. Those who simply make arrangements for their families to spend the holiday at a special hotel, may be prosperous, and may even have children of their own, but have not yet joined the sisterhood of adult women; so to speak.

Some time ago, I had such a friend. She was almost forty, unmarried, and very tired of being treated as a girl. As an example, her mother would go shopping, and appear at her apartment with household goods, such as towels, or dishes, never having consulted as to their suitability, or the need thereof. That sounds innocent enough, doesn't it? No, it is not. Grown women choose their own linens, cookware, etc. Those gifts were generous, yet robbed my friend of the ability to fully manage her own ménage.

There came a year when my grown son was going to be away for the holiday, and I resolved to help my friend along the road toward the recognition she sought. She had done many kind things for me, and this was a chance for me to reciprocate. I became her personal helper, and chef, for that year's holiday, so that despite having a full-time job, she could have the first night Seder at her apartment.

The preparations for this event began before I

even arrived in New York from my home in California. I'd had a conversation with another woman, in the Los Angeles area, about what was going to happen. That year, there was a question as to the "Kosher for Passover" status of the coating on citrus fruit. This was not a big problem for Angelenos, most of whom know someone with a citrus

tree, but for those in colder climes, it meant the inability to include several beloved recipes. This other gal pal wanted to help. She went into her yard to pick lemons, and limes, packed the fruit carefully in papers, then shipped a box to Queens, as a gesture of feminine solidarity. What a lovely gift that was, one which is fondly recalled each spring.

The packing was done. It was time to go to the airport. For four hours on the plane, my mind took flights of its own, imagining the various tasks to be accomplished. Upon landing, there was no time to be lost. We went straight from the airport to an appliance store where I bought her a food processor, which would be in constant use until the big feast.

On to the apartment. Armed with aprons, and lots of good humor, we began the labor of love:

chucking out the chometz, scrubbing, and making lists for the shopping trips to be made. The shopping was a real step on the road to feminine understanding; my friend was in shock. She had to pay the bills; hundreds of dollars worth. "All of this for one meal?" She could begin to identify with her sisters, throughout history, who had scrimped, and done without, to put aside the wherewithal for annual celebrations.

During the week to come, she went to the office all day; then came home to work with me, all evening. Of course, I was there cleaning, and cooking, all day as well.. She learned to make Gefilte Fish, and Chopped Liver, the light hand required for Sponge Cake, and the patience for long slow browning of Short Ribs. At the end of each evening, we'd slump in kitchen chairs, and share a cup of tea before going to our respective beds, and collapsing in exhausted, dreamless, slumber.

The big day dawned, and we were awake with the sun. Tables to be set; Haggadahs, and Seder plates positioned; washing pitchers, and bowls placed; veggie nibbles set out to keep appetites at bay during the ritual; last minute cooking; and a frantic effort to get ourselves pretty enough for such a grand occasion. She was the hostess at last, full of both jitters, and joy, as she waited for the doorbell to ring.

Ring it did. The setting, and preparations, were duly admired. Then it came, not fifteen minutes after she opened the door, the first joke about constipation. Her shock was visible; how could anyone say such a thing whilst viewing her elegant preparations? She managed a weak smile, then moved on to the main event.

She got everyone seated, then took her place at the head of the table, and asked them to open their Haggadahs. The next shock came as the festivities barely begun someone wondered aloud as to how much could be omitted. All the work done, money spent, careful planning; for people to act as though the only thing which mattered was dinner? "Do we really need to wash twice?" someone asked.

She struggled to maintain order, and dignity, amongst the rebellious. We had a lovely, if somewhat abbreviated ritual, and the meal was much enjoyed, although corralling everyone to bench afterward required more than a bit of doing. The lot were sent home, each carrying a bit of something leftover to enjoy the next day.

The door closed behind the last guest, but it was not yet time to rest. There was food to be put away, dishes to wash, even a table to move so that my sofa bed could be opened. Finally, we sat for that last cup of tea before going to sleep. She looked at me, and I knew that she was one of us. She had hoped, planned, spent, cooked, and cleaned herself to the edge of endurance; then managed to be graceful in the face of vulgar jokes, and those who would have robbed the ritual to satisfy their appetites.

To be a Jewish woman is to be part of that struggle to maintain tradition, and love, at the Seder table. Though our labors be as nothing to those we had in slavery, still they are great, and worthy of the recognition we give one another.

To be a Seder guest is to be the recipient of love, expressed with all the care a heart can offer. Please be respectful of your hostess, she is one of a line of great women.

Eddy Robey holds a BA degree in Anthropology, and an MA in Logic from California State University, Northridge. Her much enjoyed, and raved about, recipes of all kosher cooking have been emulated, but never equaled. She has achieved the highest accolade a proud Jewish mother could hope for....her son is a doctor.



Doing My Own Seder

By Lynn Ruth Miller

y mother considered every holiday an ideal opportunity to exercise her culinary skills. She did turkey, and pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving, roast beef, and yorkshire pudding with latkes on Chanuka. Her favorite festival was the Jewish Passover, not because of the meaning of the celebration, but because it gave her eight full days of brand new menus to create. Passover was a marvelous marathon of cooking for my mother, and she outdid herself every year.

Passover is a holiday that uses none of the ordinary staples of the kitchen. The sponge cakes we serve, at that time of year, are made with flour that has no wheat in it, and are leavened with eggs. The traditional sponge cake was a dry, lemon flavored thing that could only be swallowed if it was dunked in tea for an extended amount of time. My mother's sponge cakes were moist masterpieces that even an anorexic couldn't resist. The saddest part of Passover's final day was that we wouldn't be eating those delectable desserts for another year. My mama made them with bananas, and with apples. She invented orange sponge cakes with candied dates, and figs on top, and spicy sponge cakes decorated with sliced pineapple, and maraschino cherries. She managed fudge sponge cakes with mint frosting, and ginger sponge cakes with a boiled frosting dusted with brown sugar. Every one of these creations was sixteen inches high, and so aerated you never realized that one bite was more than the average calorie allowance for an anemic child.

My mother managed to turn out two, or three, of these a day, and still clean the house, do the ironing, run over to the hospital to spread cheer, and cook banquets for twenty relatives every night. I can still see her putting her Sunbeam mixmaster through its paces whipping up egg whites, and folding them into the egg yolk mixture at the speed of light. She would fill angelfood pans with the batter, bake them at 350 degrees, and test them after forty minutes with a cleaned straw from the broom she used to sweep her kitchen floor. If no batter clung to the straw, she turned the cake over on a large seltzer bottle. and let it cool. Each masterpiece came out of its pan without blemish, and sat on the kitchen table ready for a dusting of confectioner's sugar, or a shower of frost-

ing when I returned from school. Our house always smelled like restaurant heaven

to me during Passover, and I did exactly the same thing Marie Antoinette recommended for her starving subjects: I ate cake . . . A great deal of it as often as I possibly could.

My mother was absolutely nothing but a housewife, and she devoted twenty four hours, seven days a week, to the job. I was a graduate of several colleges, and I was certain that when my time came to create a seder, I could make one as delicious, and impressive as my mother's, in a couple hours after dinner. All I had to do was read my mother's recipes, and follow them.

That was a bit of a challenge because my mother never wrote down exact ingredients for anything she cooked. She gave me a few 3 x 5 cards that said things like "Add potato flour until it feels right," or beat egg whites until nice."

When I married, I decided I would do my own Passover celebration just to show my mother I was as capable as she was in the kitchen. I invited everyone in my husband's office, and my in-laws, to our one room flat for a Passover banquet. I reviewed the recipe cards my mother had given me on my wedding day, and shopped accordingly.

Passover was on a Saturday that year. I purchased 6 dozen eggs, potato flour, three large angelfood cake pans, and quart bottles of Seven-up to invert the finished cakes on to cool. I couldn't find any Seltzer on the shelves at the local A&P.

On Friday morning, I took out several dozen eggs from the refrigerator so they would be at room temperature when I got home from work that afternoon. My intention was to bake three cakes that night, and three more the next morning, while I ground up the whitefish, grated horseradish, stuffed chickens, and peeled the potatoes for my dinner that night.

Friday evening after I had served my husband his dinner, I whipped up the first 14 eggs, folded them into the yolk mixture, poured them into the pan, and

Celebrating and

Being Jewish

put them in the oven. I began beating up the next batch while I waited forty minutes for cake number one to finish. When the oven bell rang, I pulled out a doubtful looking mixture, stuck a broom straw in it, and inverted the pan on a Seven up bottle. There was a startling woosh, and the batter spilled on the kitchen table. I was amazed. I had followed my mothers instructions to the letter.

My batter was ready for cake number two, and I squared my shoulders, and poured it into its clean pan. My confidence was a bit tarnished, and I did not begin beating up another fourteen eggs for cake number three. Instead, I packed the fallen batter into a loaf pan, and put it in the freezer to deal with later. After forty minutes, I turned the finished cake over on the Seven up bottle. I barely had time to turn my back on the little bugger before it collapsed on the table.

I reached for the telephone, and I called my mother. I described my fiasco, and said, "I think it was the bottle of Seven up that caused the problem. I couldn't find a seltzer bottle anywhere in this town."

My mother laughed. "Seltzer bottle?" she said. "What does that have to do with sponge cake? You didn't beat the whites enough, that's all."

I flushed. "Oh, yes I did!" I protested. "They looked exactly like yours always did before you mixed them into the egg yolks."

"MY cakes never fell out of the pan," said my mother. "You go back in that kitchen and beat those eggs harder."

"I tried twice," I said.

My mother cleared her throat. "When you fall off a horse, you need to get back in the saddle, or you'll always be afraid to ride. Right?" said my mother.

"Right," I said.

"Do you want to be afraid of a sponge cake for the rest of your life?" asked my mother.

"Of course not," I said. "But I won't spend any more money on eggs until I can find a seltzer bottle."

"Lynn Ruth, " said my mother. "Cake pans have little feet on them now. You don't need to hang them on bottles like I did when you were in high school! A sponge cake always stays in the pan if you beat the egg whites stiff enough."

"It's too late for this year," I said. "All the stores are closed, and I don't have enough eggs. Do you have room for a few extra at your house for Seder?"

There was a pause. "How many?" asked my mother.

I cleared my throat. "About twenty, not counting the Cohens. They said they'd stop by for dessert."

My mother's response was instant. "No problem!" she exclaimed, and I could see her mind sorting out new recipes for roasted chicken, candied brisket, and greasy potatoes. "What's a few extra mouths to feed on Passover?"

"You're sure, Ma?" I asked. "Will you have enough chairs?"

"On Passover, you recline," she reminded me.

"Right," I said. "What time should we be there?"

"Early," said my mother. "We have the service first, and then there's a lot of eating to do. Remember?"

I made a mental note to pick up some alka seltzer for Passover on the way to her house.

I remembered my mother's Seders very well indeed.

If you don't know Lynn Ruth Miller, then you are missing a fine jewel. Author, painter, and performer, she surprises, and delights everyone she meets. Her most recent book, The Late Bloomer, is her forth manuscript, and the cover is one of her original paintings.

To see all her work visit www.lynnruthmiller.com





The Will To Live

By: Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe

any years ago, Longevity magazine contained an article about research done by David P. Phillips, Prof. of Sociology at the University of California, San Diego. His findings revealed a significant dip in the number of deaths among Jews BEFORE PASSOVER, and a peak RIGHT AFTERWARDS. The number of deaths for the control group of non-Jews was stable throughout the Passover season. This research--taken from death records from 1966 through 1984--suggests that the social importance of the event was an influential factor in postponement.

Yes, when someone is ill and says, "Let me make it through the holidays," (Passover, Purim, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, etc.), it is probably more than idle wishing. Our loved ones have made a subconscious postponement process, and literally will themselves not to die until after a certain occasion. Professor Phillips has called this the PASSOVER EFFECT.

The late writer/Pulitzer Prize winner, Art Buchwald, was told that his kidneys were kaput, and he declined dialysis. He checked himself into a Washington, D.C. hospice to live out his final days. He planned his funeral (with a priest, a rabbi, and Billy Graham,) to cover all bases. The book jacket of "Too Soon to Say Goodbye," says that he strategized how to land a big obituary in The New York Times: "Make sure no head of state, or Nobel Prize winner, dies on the same day." (He didn't want them to use up his space.) He also wrote, "The beauty of not dying, but expecting to, is that it gives you a chance to say goodbye to everybody." Did he will himself to live long enough to complete his 33rd book?

In 1996, comedian, Alan King, wrote an autobiography. On the last page he wrote, "I'm hanging on. I still have 8 x 10 glossies, Max Factor #10, a pressed tuxedo, pierced ears, and will travel. So if there's anybody out there who has a bar mitzvah coming up, or a deli opening, or a gathering of any kind with more than 20 people, give me a call."

And, finally, the most touching story about the "Passover Effect," is found in Rabbi Robert A. Alper's 1996 book, "Life Doesn't Get Any Better Than This":



Years ago I heard a story about an elderly woman who was dying of cancer.

Almost completely confined to her hospital bed, she grew weaker day by day. But her spirit was strong, endearing her to the medical staff. The woman had a goal: Her granddaughter was to be married, and she was absolutely determined to attend her wedding.

She was willing to do whatever was necessary to get there; took all her medicines, endured some pain, attempted to leave her bed whenever possible, just to fight off the debilitation of a progressing disease.

And she succeeded. On the day of the ceremony the



nurses swarmed around her as if SHE were the bride. They dressed her, combed her hair, applied makeup, and sent her wheeling down the corridor accompanied by her children in their gowns, and tuxedos. A festive sight. A melancholy sight, too.

That evening, the woman returned to her hospital bed, exhausted, elated. Her favorite night nurse stopped by to offer congratulations, not only on the wedding, but on her having beaten death's timetable.

"You must be very happy tonight," the nurse offered. "You did it. You really did it!"

The woman, surprisingly, was not about to simply accept the good wishes. Rather, she looked up from her pillow, thought for a moment, and said, with the slightest glimmer in her eye, "Yes, I did. But you know,

I have another granddaughter..."

Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books: "Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tummlers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia."To order: Contact her at Wolfeny@webtv.net.



My experiences with Asperger Syndrome in the Jewish Community

By Nathan Weissler

At age four, I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, and have been in Special Education since age three. Asperger Syndrome (AS) is a neurological disorder that is on the autism spectrum. Common traits of AS include: difficulty with social skills--such as knowing the correct social thing to do, or say. Other traits include difficulty with physical skills, such as making a bed. or shoe-tying. People with AS also have intense special interests, on which they focus, almost exclusively, at times. My interests have consisted of Judaism, American History, Writing, Social Action, and most recently, Disability Awareness.

It has also been difficult for me, at times, to function within the Jewish Community. Ironically, while my special interests, at one point, kept me out, they have, more recently, brought me back in. When I was in Religious School, at my synagogue, as a young child, I was uninterested in the lessons, because I was not taught in a way I could appreciate, and understand. More importantly, I was simply uninterested, because the curriculum did not fit in with my then- interests, which consisted of various movies, such as Aristocats, the Sound of Music, and Toy Story. However, during my last year of religious school, my teacher, and her then teen-aged daughter, went to great efforts to ensure that I was comfortable in class, and I very much appreciated their efforts. Unfortunately, however, my parents decided it just wasn't working, and I began receiving Jewish education from a private tutor.

Gradually, my tutor was able to use my interests to get me interested in Judaism. As an incentive to stay on task, she set up a system of "Nathan Dollars," which were fake money I was "paid" with, for staying on task. For every "Nathan Dollar" I earned, I could spend one minute discussing a favorite topic. While this worked for me, one should be careful as to how they apply these reward systems--as I could well see a child with AS feeling demeaned, and infantilized. Moreover, we need to remember here that just as two non-AS individuals are not exactly alike, the same applies to AS individuals.

As I began to prepare for my Bar-Mitzvah, I realized that I wanted to merge my interests with my Bar-Mitzvah studies. An opportunity presented itself when I learned that my Bar-Mitzvah Parasha was Ha'azinu, which consists of Moses' last speech. Given that Robert Kennedy, whom I

was passionately interested in at the time, also died after giving his last speech, I decided to give a Dvar Torah comparing, and contrasting, Moses, and Robert Kennedy's, last speeches. The Dvar Torah was very well received, and I was delighted when it was published



as a Community Voices article in the Washington Jewish Week in June 2006. Since then, I have continued using my strengths to write. I have since published Letters to the Editor, and various articles in both the Jewish, and mainstream media.

After a few years of writing, and studying, Judaism, I felt something was missing. As my interest in Judaism deepened, I wanted to attend a Jewish day school that could provide me with the support I needed. At first, that proved quite a challenge. However, my parents found a special education program, at a local Jewish Day School, with a very good reputation, which I visited, and loved. As of this past fall, I am attending that program.

I very much enjoy attending this program, and have had many positive experiences there. This past November, I was the speaker at an annual freshman sensitivity training workshop. I got a lot of positive feedback, from my peers, about my presentation. The Jewish community does a commendable job of including those with disabilities. If every child, regardless of whether they have Special Needs, had the nurturing teachers, and peers, that I have, society would be greatly improved.

The Tanach teaches, "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind...." In contemporary society, this should be interpreted to mean that we exceed the biblical instruction--and support all members of their community, regardless of their differences.

Nathan Weissler, 16, lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is adapted from a talk given at Shabbat morning services at Shaare Tefila Congregation in Olney, Maryland, on February 21, 2009. He was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome at age four, and has been in Special Education since age three. He can be reached at nathan.weissler@hotmail.com



My Son Comes Home

By: Ilene Bloch-Levy

My son came home from Gaza just a few minutes ago. He came home as we had sent him off, only more tired, worn, and dirty. Thank you Hashem for bringing him home to his wife, his brothers, and sisters, and his loving brood of nieces, and nephews. All of us have been waiting patiently to hold him in our arms.

Barely able to wait to embrace him, I ran across the highway where his ride had dropped him off. I grabbed him in the middle of the road, and cars driving into my yishuv had to veer around me, standing on tiptoes, reaching for my tall, and handsome, son's face.

The drivers waved to us. A few rolled down their windows to say "todah -- thank you" to my son. I whispered todah again, to Hashem.

I helped him toss his heavy bags into the trunk of our car; the heaviest among them being the one weighed down with foodstuffs Israeli citizens had sent to our soldiers. Tens of thousands of kilograms of food had poured into the bases, in the south. Cartons upon cartons of instant soups, nuts, pretzels, cookies, and nosh of every kind; all sent by individuals, families, schools, and businesses throughout the country. We could barely lift his 'booty,' and we both shared a laugh, as we flung it into the trunk.

The words that had been in my heart, for so long, melted on my tongue. My eyes drank him in.
Tall, and bearded now, his face, and soul seemed a bit darker than when he left us that Sunday morning. He reached his hand to his head, and apologized for being

bareheaded. In the midst of everything his kippa had fallen off.

"No matter -- easy enough to replace," I said, as his hand slipped into mine. I reached up to grab his neck, and felt

his lips touch my cheek. I knew that his presence, like this, was all that I had prayed for, each day, since he packed his bags, and left, before the sun rose, that cold morning.



I pulled in front of his apartment, a few kilometers from my home. As we descended the steps I heard him speak gently, and lovingly, with his wife at work, telling her how anxious he was to see her. He turned on the boiler, and laughingly told me:

"I'm not getting out of this shower for the next hour."

He dropped his bags, leaned against the kitchen counter, untied his boots, and swiftly flung them aside. His bare feet rested on the tile floor. He was exhausted, and I hesitated to start the barrage of questions that had been streaming through my head, every day, every hour, for the past few weeks.

He smiled as he opened the bag of goodies, and told me about the elementary school children, from Mevasseret Zion, who had attached notes with their gifts. He spoke with three of them, to thank them personally. One child wrote a three page letter, and the soldiers in my son's unit were grateful to learn more of this 8-year-old's daily life, his favorite subjects, and his fondness for Playstation. When they called to speak with him, he was overwhelmed, and kept calling them "gibborim," heroes.

"Ima" he said, "I'm tired now, but I have to tell you how extraordinary this nation is. The children who wrote to us, the people who sent their good wishes

with their packages of food, the businesses that sent truckloads of goods. The soldiers I served with, each one caring deeply about the other one. Zahal who made sure that we were well trained, and well equipped, for our mission. But mostly. Mostly...



"This was a war that was guided by the Hand of G'd. Everyday we felt His presence -- whether deciding to enter a building, by smashing down the back wall, rather than entering through the front door, only to discover that the front door had been booby trapped, or searching rooms in a house, and uncovering a tunnel under a bed we had lifted where tens of Hamas terrorists were hiding in the hopes of kidnapping one of us, or dozens more stories."

I looked at my child's face, and saw the extraordinary young man he had become. He was filled with faith, and feeling a passion for those values that have held this nation together for thousands of years.

His very presence. His very modesty. His deep felt pride for being part of this nation. All of this wrapped around my heart, and left me humbled. Humbled, and grateful.

"And I will lift up my eyes unto the mountains, from where my strength will come."

Ilene Bloch-Levy is a partner, and Copywriter in Impressions, a Creative Marketing Company that prepares 'out-of-the-ordinary' marketing materials, and websites. She also is a freelance writer, and mother of six who lives in Sha'arei Tikvah. Ilene made Aliyah from New York in 1986. You can e-mail her at: ilenelevy@netvision.net.il

ALTEH GEFERLEKH JEWISH JOKES

Moishe, and Shmuel had not seen each other in many years, so Moishe invited Shmuel to join his families' Seder.

"My a wife, and kids, would love it if you joined us." "Great. But didn't you move?"

"Here's the address. And there's plenty of parking behind the apartment. Park, and come around to the front door, kick it open with your foot, go to the elevator, and press the button with your left elbow, then enter! When you reach the sixth floor, go down the hall until you see my name on the door. Then press the doorbell with your right elbow, and I'll let you in." "Good. But tell me... what is all this business of kicking the front door open, then pressing elevator buttons with my right, then my left elbow?"

"Nu? You're coming empty-handed?"

TH9S & THAT

Hebrew word "Seder" means "order."

The Ten Plagues

Water turned to blood.

Frogs.

Lice.

Wild animals.

Cattle disease.

Boils.

Hail.

Locusts.

Darkness.

Slaying of all Egyptian first-born.

The Four Questions

- 1. Why is tonight different from all others?
- 2. Why must we eat matzah?
- 3. Why do we have to dip twice?
- 4. Why must we eat while reclining?

What's on The Seder Plate.

- 1. Z'roah roasted chicken neck
- 2. Baytzah the hard boiled egg
- 3. Marer- bitter herbs
- 4. Charoset mixture of sliced apples, walnuts and wine
- 5. Karpas cooked potato or raw onion
- 6. Chahzeret more bitter herbs

The three matzahs on the table symbolize the three types of Jews: Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael.

Afikoman:

The very last thing that is eaten at the Seder is a piece of matzah called the "Afikoman."

It is customary for the children to "steal" it, and refuse to give it back unless the parents promise them a small gift.

Sometimes the parents hide it, and offer a reward to the child who finds it.

Opening the Door:

At the end of the Seder meal it is customary to open the door, and welcome in the Prophet Elijah.



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Three Passover Delights

By: Eddy Robey



very one of us has a memory of the perfect Kugel. More to the point, I have never met a woman who did not claim to make the best Kugel in the whole world. (Except, of course, for her Bubbe's) This is the one I like best. The versatility of this recipe has made it a year-round staple on my table. My friends call it

"Eddy's Fruit Lasagna," and I am often asked to bring it to parties. This recipe is written using Apples, but don't be shy in experimenting with other fruit. It also works well with Peaches, Strawberries, and Blueberries.

Peel, and thinly slice the Apples. Place all the ingredients, except the Matzos, and Apples, in the blender, and process until smooth. Grease an 8 or 9 inch square glass baking dish. Hold one of the Matzos under cold running water for about a minute, wetting both sides thoroughly. Place the wet Matzo in the bottom of the dish. Spread 1/3 of the Apple slices over the Matzo, and pour 1/4 of the Egg mixture on top of the Apples. Repeat two more times. Place the last wet Matzo on top of the dish, and pour on the last quarter of the egg mixture.

Grease a piece of aluminum foil, and put it on top of the baking dish. Place in an oven which has been preheated to 350 degrees, and bake for 45 minutes, or until golden brown. You can serve it right out of the oven, but this is at its most attractive if made ahead of time, and allowed to cool before being turned out onto a plate, and cut into squares.

To use other fruits:

Peaches, Strawberries, and Blueberries, all work well in this presentation. Since they are more juicy than Apples, just wet the Matzo a bit less before using, and make the fruit layer thicker, because of shrinkage. For parties, I often make a couple of flavors, and arrange the squares of contrasting colors on the serving platter.

	Kugel	
	Preparation Time: 15 minutes	(Pareve)
	Cooking Time: 45 minutes	
	4 Matzos,	
	3 large Granny Smith or Gravenstein A	pples
_	1 tablespoon Vanilla extract	
_	1 tablespoon grated Orange Peel	
	1 teaspoon ground Cinnamon	
	3/4 cup Brown Sugar	
	1/2 cup Margarine	
_	4 Eggs	

Oven-Fried Chicken

One of the difficulties with planning a Seder menu is trying to ensure that both children, and adults, will enjoy what is offered. This can be particularly difficult at holidays. Although adults enjoy new foods, children are most happy with things they recognize. This recipe was originally written for Peysakh, but has become a year-round favorite. There is an additional benefit in that, with a bit of help, the children can prepare it.

In my experience, if the little ones help make something, they will be eager to eat it. A word about doing this in a safe fashion.

It is important that the hands be thoroughly washed with soap, and warm water, both before, and after, doing this preparation. Once the hands are washed, have them don plastic sandwich bags as mittens. Because a child's hands are likely to have tiny unseen cuts, and scrapes, it is critical that they not have unprotected contact with raw meat. Do not remove the mittens, and let them go without the second hand washing.

This can be prepared the day ahead, and kept covered in the refrigerator until you are ready to bake it. It can be multiplied as needed, and can be made with Chicken Wings for use as an appetizer.

(Pareve)

Line a baking pan with Aluminum Foil.

Place the Matzo Meal, Mixed Italian Herbs, Salt, Pepper, Dried Minced Onion, and Paprika: in a large plastic bag, and shake to combine.

Coat the Chicken pieces with the Mayonnaise, and then place them in the plastic bag with the Matzo Meal mixture. Shake the bag to coat the Chicken.

Place the Chicken Pieces in the foil-lined pan.

Bake for 1 hour, in an oven which has been preheated to 350 degrees.

Serve Note:

Add a Tablespoon of Spicy Dijon Mustard to the Mayonnaise for a boost in flavor

Oven-Fried Chicken

Preparation Time: 10 minutes (Meat-Flayshik)

Cooking Time: 60 minutes

1 Chicken, cut into serving pieces

1/2 cup Mayonnaise (NOT low-fat)

1 cup Matzo Meal

1 teaspoon Mixed Italian Herbs

1/2 teaspoon Black Pepper

1 tablespoon Dried Minced Onion

1 teaspoon Paprika

How to Make Your Own "Crazy Nuts"

These days, Americans are showing great interest in how to make their meals more healthy. We are all wondering what to serve, or bring, which will be nutritious, and more appetizing than the norm, without taking a great deal of work, or breaking our budgets. I hope this recipe will help. Many of us have seen a "Crazy Nuts" candy in the store. I am going to teach you to make your own for a fraction of the cost. Nutrition authorities are agreed on the benefits of "good fats" of which nuts are a prominent source. Many chefs serve these treats atop green salads, with a bit of cheese, for a healthful dairy meal. This recipe has only 4 ingredients, and is simple enough that your children can make them as a contribution. These make wonderful gifts

Crazy Nuts

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Cooking Time: About 120 minutes

1 pound raw Pecan Halves

1 Egg White

1/3 cup Sugar

or the equivalent amount of

Sucralose-based sweetener

1 teaspoon ground Cinnamon

at any time of year. Just put them in a pretty glass dish, cover with colored plastic wrap, and attach a bow. In a large mixing bowl, beat the Egg White until stiff, but not dry, Mix in the Sugar, and Cinnamon. Pour in the Pecans, and mix thoroughly. Spray a nonstick oblong baking pan (jelly roll size) with Vegetable Oil spray, and spread the Nut mixture in the pan.

Place in a 300 degree oven for 1 hour. Turn off the oven, but don't open the door, and leave the Nuts inside for 1 more hour. Remove from the oven, and break the Nuts apart with your fingers. If there are sticky spots, heat the oven to 300, put the nuts back in, turn the oven off, and leave them for 1 more hour.

Variations

You may use any sort of Nuts, or Spice, you like. For example, Almonds taste very pleasant with Allspice. If you would enjoy making a savory snack, omit the Sugar, add 1 teaspoon Salt, and one teaspoon of a spice, such as Chile Powder, or Curry Powder.

"It was almost Peysakh. I wanted to do something for my new friends, but could not afford to make a Seder, and invite them. Certainly, the logistics of such an event would have been staggering. If I couldn't feed everyone, then I could still do something to ensure that they ate well. That is how the recipe list was born."

Excerpted from:

It's Not Just Chicken Soup

