

Get More Out of...

Produced by



HannaVision.com

# Being Jewish

ROSH HASHANAH 2009

Relevant Judaism for Modern Life

## in this issue:



May you be inscribed in the  
book of life

Can We Talk?  
Editor's New Year  
Message ..... 2

How to Choose the  
Right Synagogue..... 4

Being Jewish  
in 5770 ..... 6

Joshua's Shofar  
Debut..... 8

Fear and Chicken  
Soup ..... 10

This & That ..... 11

The Jews of China .. 12

It's About the Little  
Things and Alteh  
Geferlekh Jokes .... 13

Apple and Honey  
Challah ..... 14



## L'SHANA TOVAH

From your friends at  
[www.gantsehmegillah.com](http://www.gantsehmegillah.com)  
Jewish ideas, resources, and  
online content since 1997.



# Can We Talk?



## Being Jewish

1-1451 Rue Dorion  
Montreal, QC H2K 4A4  
beingjewishmagazine@gmail.com

Michael Hanna-Fein  
Editor and Publisher

Arnold Hanna-Fein  
Assistant Editor  
Graphics and Layout

Gil Mann  
Past Publisher

David Epstein  
Founding Publisher

Produced by  
HannaVisioN  
HannaVisioN.com

Template designed by:  
JFLMedia!

Being Jewish magazine is a cooperative effort of participating federations, synagogues, schools, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations.

Being Jewish is published in the spring, fall, and winter.

For ordering information, contact  
beingjewishmagazine@gmail.com.  
or call (514) 948-1844

Copyright ©2009. All rights reserved. Material may not be used without permission from the authors and/or publisher.

By Michael Hanna-Fein  
Editor

The Jewish people have a well known reputation for being strongly united. Our shared beliefs, common value system, and sense of fair play, are just some of the reasons we have survived the centuries of scorn, slavery, intolerance, and even the ultimate threat; genocide. I sincerely believe that without these strong and positive attributes, we would be history, rather than the important, and vital community we are today.

We Jews have a reputation for being people of strong opinions. As the old joke goes; if you put three Jews in a room together, you will wind up with four different opinions. We are not known for our reticence to express our ideas, nor do we ever cower from a "friendly" debate. Generally, in the end, we all shake hands, and at worst, agree to disagree. A growing intolerance, in recent days, has seen a dramatic departure from that general rule.

As a gentleman of a "certain age," I was brought up in the very early days of Israel's independence as a Jewish state. In Hebrew school, which I attended every day after regular public school classes, I had instilled in me a deep pride and allegiance to this new country, so far away, and yet so close in our hearts. I remember how on Israel Independence Day, and on Simchas Torah, we would march around our synagogue, and the surrounding neighborhood, waving our Israeli flags with great pride and fervor. Each week, at Shabbat services, the rabbi would lead us in a special prayer of thanks for the creation of the State of Israel, and for its success and safety in an area surrounded by nations who were, to put it mildly, not particularly friendly to its existence.

Back in those innocent days of my youth, and well into my adulthood, Israel was the one subject that always brought Jews together with a sense of pride and purpose. Many of my generation picked-up their roots and made Aliyah by leaving the U.S., or Canada, and moving to Eretz Yisroel. This was considered, by most, an admirable and courageous thing to do. I personally remained in the U.S. until moving to Canada in 1985. I now live in Montreal, a city with a very rich Jewish history, and a thriving and diverse Jewish community.

Recent engagements between Israel and the Palestinians, has caused a disturbing rift among Jews. It appears the heat of the disagreement is far greater in North America than it is in Israel itself. That is not to say that everyone in Israel is holding hands and singing Kum Ba Yah by a roaring campfire. Make no mistake, there is controversy, discussion, and hostility between these groups, but they continue to search for common ground to find a workable solution. Sadly, here in North America, there appears to be a growing dismissal, and disregard for differing opinions.

The purpose of my comments is not to take sides, or to profess a particular point-of-view, regarding these matters. There are many grounds on which intelligent people can disagree. What disturbs me however, is the intolerance born of these discussions. People on the "right" hurl insults at those on the "left," and vice versa. Those showing any sympathy for the Palestinians are often referred to as being anti-Israel, or even worse; anti-Semitic. On the other hand, people who take a strong stand in defence of Israel are often referred to as hate-mongers, and defenders of apartheid.

I can think of no worse insult than for one Jew to refer to another Jew as an anti-Semite.

I believe it is totally possible for Jewish people to hold differing opinions on the subject of the Palestinian/Israeli situation, and still, in their hearts, love Israel deeply. There is a big difference between criticizing the actions of a particular government, and wishing harm on an entire population. It is also just as true that people who feel Israel must take strong actions against their perceived enemies, do not support engaging in war crimes, or believe in apartheid. When we reduce ourselves to labelling each other in such a hostile manner, especially when we have thousands of years of a shared common belief, and a humane set of precepts, we risk deeply damaging the fabric that has held us together through thick and thicker.

I do not pretend to have the answer to the problems Israel is facing with its Palestinian neighbors. I wish I did possess such wisdom. What I can do is try to facilitate a peace between two factions that should never be fighting in the first place. We already have actual enemies who would like to see us tear ourselves apart, and just disappear into the ether. For thousands of years that has been the goal, and desire, of so many of our oppressors. Hitler, during World War II, drew up plans for what he considered "The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem." What more proof or motivation do we need to stick together as a people?

Of course we can disagree. As I said earlier in this commentary, debating ideas is very much in our DNA, but the handshake at the end of the debate must be the goal.

Trying to sway opinion is fair play, but listening to what the "other side" has to say is important. Very often in my life, when I felt I had all the answers to a problem, I would sit down and listen to someone I respected who had a different point-of-view. I would actually learn something. What I learned did not necessarily change my mind, but I gained insight and knowledge into the rationale and reasoning of the opposing argument. This alone enriched me, and added to my growth as a human being, and a Jew.

Please; discuss, argue, debate to your heart's content, but always do so with respect, and fairness. For no matter how much we may disagree on any particular subject, we must remember that we are all Jews. We are all part of the same people who struggled through hell on earth to become the productive, respected, and fair-minded people the world has come to know and respect.

We must never be guilty of tearing ourselves apart, and diminishing each other and our place in history.

I want to take this opportunity to wish all of our readers and their loved-ones a very happy, prosperous and healthy New Year. May you be inscribed in the book of life, and may you continue to earn that inscription for many years to come.

Michael can be reached at [beingjewishmagazine@gmail.com](mailto: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





# How to Choose the Right Synagogue

by: Gil Mann



**Dear Gil:**

I became a Jew in my early 30's. At the time, I was a feisty Italian-American girl who was looking desperately for some spiritual meaning and community in my life. I "discovered" Judaism after a couple of years of "service-hopping," attending varying religious services from Buddhist to Methodist to (the official religion of my family,) Catholic.

It was when I met my (very secular) Jewish husband that I began to study Judaism. Wow! I understand that in Kabbalah there are references to "Lost souls" who were meant to be Jewish - I must be one of them.

Judaism fits like a glove. I feel as though I was never a gentile (although, I'm somewhat painfully reminded at family gatherings when Granny takes it personally when I don't eat her clam chowder. "You used to love it! What's the matter?") Anyway, my husband and I are trying to make up our minds about which synagogue to attend.

Ironically, after having attended only Conservative congregations since my conversion, I must have had an impact on my husband's religious views since he is now leaning toward Conservative. I, on the other hand, am for the first time in my life considering a Reform temple! The bottom line is (and I hate admitting this) convenience. We live minutes from the largest Reform temple in our area. Most of our friends are satisfied members there and when I think of schlepping 20 minutes two times a week for religious school, well, you get the scenario

As I told my husband, if we don't like it, we can always change. He feels that it's harder to "trade up" to Conservative once you've

belonged to a Reform congregation. We've attended services at both, and like both. What do you think?  
R

**Dear R:**

Your question is shared by many Jews by birth and by choice. Deciding to join one synagogue vs. another is driven by personal preferences. From your letter I would say that at least five criteria are important to you.

Two of them are what brought you to Judaism in the first place; a search for spirituality and community. So, I would start by saying to choose the synagogue where you feel those needs are best met. Specifically, what do you think of the services, the music, the rabbi, and the congregation? Do the clergy inspire, or move you? Are people welcoming and warm? Are people singing, participating etc? I'd also check out what adult classes are offered, and if people actually attend. Similarly, you should see what kind of "kindness" committees they have...like food shelf projects, helping the sick/elderly etc.

You also indicated that schooling for your children is a factor. Visit the schools, meet the principals, observe some classes, and talk with other parents. What's the thrust of the school's curriculum? I am not big on schools that just teach skills (like Hebrew reading, and prayer, or Torah chanting.) More important in my view is teaching kids Jewish values: in other words "WHY" they should be Jewish, as opposed to just "how."

Also, I need to be candid -- Religious, and Hebrew schools are sadly famous for their behavior problems. Are the kids learning or just goofing around? Related to this, do the



kids get to know their rabbi? Is the rabbi good with kids?

You also cite convenience. This is a worthy consideration, and you need not apologize. Ideally, you will find a synagogue that you will use often. Distance, and time, will impact your usage, and your kids usage too, when its time for youth group/plays etc. Hopefully, you will not be like a person, who told me after switching synagogues, that the second synagogue was closer to his home, and he'd rather live closer to the synagogue he was not attending.

Finally, what about theology and movements? I have waited till now, because I believe one can find the things above in any of the movements. Personally, I happily attend synagogues of all the four main movements of Judaism (I am now adding Reconstructionist and Orthodox to this discussion.)

There are things in each movement that I like and dislike. I do not buy your husband's argument, however, about "trading up or down" from one movement to another. I don't view any movement as "down." Each has a different theology, and I appreciate the merit in each of them. Here's a website with some nice short explanations of the differences: [www.jewfaq.org/movements.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/movements.htm).

If you want of course, you can join more than one shul. In the final analysis I would say, rather than making a decision based on a synagogue's affiliation, chose a place where you, and your family, can call home. I hope this helps you find that home.  
Shana Tovah!  
Gil

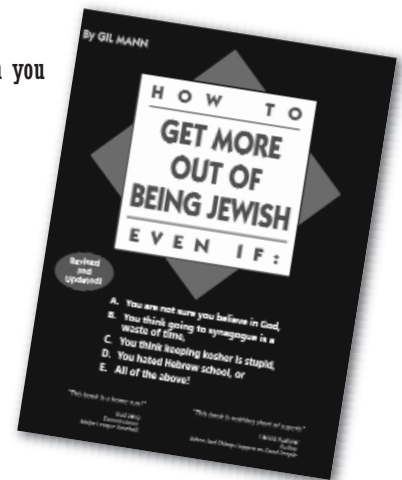
Gil's Jewish Email columns began on his popular America Online feature called "Judaism Today: Where Do I Fit?". You can read more of his columns at [www.beingjewish.org](http://www.beingjewish.org). Gil welcomes any additional questions, or comments, about this topic, or any other Jewish issue. Email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

## FREE for Internet Users!!!

If you like Being Jewish, formerly published by Gil Mann, then you will love Gil's book:

Now you can download Gil's entire book for free! Just go to [www.beingjewish.org/free-book](http://www.beingjewish.org/free-book).

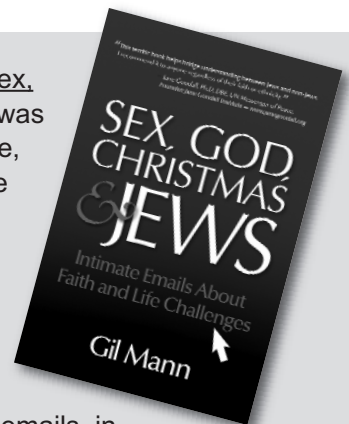
If you'd like to order a printed copy (\$10 + \$3 shipping) email [leopublish@aol.com](mailto:leopublish@aol.com) or call 800-304-9925.



Gil Mann's latest book: Sex, God, Christmas & Jews, 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: 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](http://www.BeingJewish.org).





# Being Jewish in 5770

by: Rabbi Laura A. Baum

Judaism is a religion that has constantly evolved. Biblical text shows that even our concept of God has evolved over time – the earliest Jewish people were not monotheists, as we understand the concept today.

The historical record tells us that upon the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Jews eliminated the sacrifice of animals, replacing it with prayer. During the Spanish Inquisition when the practice of Judaism was forbidden altogether, Jews found creative ways to live their religion secretly. The Jews who arrived in America in the early 20th century figured out ways to assimilate into mainstream American culture while still keeping some of the cultural aspects of their Jewish experience. When Israel was established in 1948, those who wished to live in a Jewish state had that option. Secular Jews, as well as observant Jews, created new customs in their new home. These are just a handful of examples of how the Jewish people have responded to their environment, and embraced Judaism in new ways.

In recent years, the ever-increasing pace of change has inspired Judaism to evolve as well. While some in the Jewish world may be resistant to the idea of change, others are eager for the opportunity to find new ways to express our spirituality, and faith. We appreciate innovation not only because it is the essence of the Jewish people's survival – and the reason we have flourished throughout our history – but also because new technologies and tools, create new opportunities to enhance our religious experiences.

Demographic changes have created one of the most compelling reasons for a changing approach to Judaism. The days when most people grew up and lived in the same community – and remained members of the same synagogue – are long gone. Now, according to cen-

sus data, 75% of adults under the age of 39 have moved in the last five years.

Even definitions of community have changed. In addition to our local, brick-and-mortar communities, many of us now have a Facebook community of “friends,” a Twitter community of “followers,” and several other virtual communities defined by online membership.

We also know that traditional models of community no longer speak to the majority of Jews. More than 50% of Jews in the U.S. are unaffiliated. A recent study by Steven Cohen and Ari Kelman says that “fewer younger Jews adhere to the classical benchmarks that define Judaism in the eyes of their parents and grandparents: belonging to synagogues, attending services, or identifying with a major denomination”. The organized Jewish community is generally structured around married couples with children, but there are many other people also looking for a connection to the Jewish community. There is a need for Jewish communities that welcome a variety of people, such as singles, interfaith couples, single parents, gays and lesbians, and others who have not yet felt connected to the Jewish community.

Once we recognize these changes and see them as an opportunity for the Jewish community to continue to evolve, we can develop new models to serve the needs of Jews around the world.

As the rabbi of OurJewishCommunity.org, the world's first progressive online congregation, I have had a unique vantage point from which to witness change. Our online synagogue launched on September 1, 2008. In our first eleven months we have reached more than 10,000 people in all 50 states in the U.S. and in 72 other countries. Rather than requiring people to show up at a building at a certain time,

we invite our members to bring Judaism into their homes, and their lives, in ways that meet their interests and needs.

OurJewishCommunity.org offers live, video-streaming High Holiday services, participatory streaming Shabbat services (every Friday at 6 PM EST), educational materials for adults and children, blogs, audio podcasts, video podcasts, recipes, discussion boards, eCards, book reviews, Jewish legends, and sermons.

We ask our participants to contribute their ideas, and join the conversations. Our intention is to create a Judaism that is built from the ground-up.

Our ancestors never could have imagined a Twitter Seder, an online Yom Kippur memorial service with photos submitted from around the world, a show on YouTube with edible Hanukkah art projects, iPods with brief podcasts from rabbis, or video-streamed High Holiday services being watched simultaneously by people around the world.

In my eleven months as a rabbi of an online synagogue, I have produced all of these Jewish materials using the latest tools of social media. What is most striking to me is that so many of the people with whom I interact tell me that our online congregation makes them feel part of a Jewish community. People have written to say that I am their rabbi, and OurJewishCommunity.org is their synagogue.

Through email, Facebook, and Twitter, I know when my “congregants” are ill, and when they are celebrating. I know how their families are doing, what books they are reading, and what they are wondering about. We engage in dialogue, and continue to learn more about each other as time goes on.

Many people who regularly read my blog, watch

my videos, follow me on Twitter, or visit OurJewishCommunity.org certainly interact with me more than many of my congregants at the brick-and-mortar congregation where I am also a rabbi. The tools of technology simply allow people to experience their Judaism, and connect with others when it is convenient to their lives.

Not only does OurJewishCommunity.org use the latest technology to reach people, we also have a liberal philosophy: Judaism from a humanistic perspective. OurJewishCommunity.org is a project of Congregation Beth Adam in Cincinnati, Ohio. Founded by Rabbi Robert Barr in 1980, Beth Adam is an independent congregation noted for the fact that our liturgy is written by our members.

Every day I work with people who struggle to create a Jewish experience that is meaningful for them. OurJewishCommunity.org speaks to many who want to “be more Jewish” but have not yet found a home in the organized Jewish community.

For some people, being Jewish will always mean embracing a structure and definition of Judaism that conforms to a set of rules created by our ancestors. But throughout our history, others have yearned to embrace a more liberal, progressive expression of Judaism. We appreciate our ancestors, and yet we do not feel bound by the past. We empower ourselves to create a Jewish experience that speaks to us.

At OurJewishCommunity.org, we celebrate a Judaism that allows individuals to create for themselves a religious expression that reflects who they are and what they believe.

On the eve of 5770, being Jewish is about embracing new opportunities that allow our Judaism to continue to flourish.





# Joshua's Shofar Debut

By Richard Alpert

Few moments in a Jewish parent's life are more special than when your child demonstrates that their faith is both a source of strength and joy. Last Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I experienced such a moment with my ten-year-old son, Joshua.

Our family belongs to Congregation Ahavath Sholom, where all three of our children attend religious school and services. Joshua is typical in that he loves playing games on his computer and his Nintendo Wii. He has played baseball since he was four, and shows talent for the sport that escaped me when I was growing up.

My father, Robert Alpert, died of cancer when Joshua was only two-years-old. Joshua spent a great deal of time with my dad those first two years of his life. He was the first male grandchild born to our family, and my wife, Karen, and I were determined to do what we could to help Dad have a relationship with his grandson. In spite of the illness and limitations it placed on Dad's activities, it was clear that Joshua was close to his "Papa."

My father was very active in his synagogue. He was a member of the men's choir, and held positions of leadership in the Men's Club, and in the Jewish War Veterans. He was a *mensch* in every sense of the word. He loved to dance and sing, and had no shyness about him. This is relevant to my story because I have an uncanny sense that Dad's spirit is alive in my son.

In the years following my dad's death Joshua would constantly ask me questions about his "Papa." I was not much of an athlete as a child, but my dad was athletic, and particularly loved baseball. He was a big Red Sox fan and handed down some very special autographed baseballs to Joshua. When Joshua played ball as a small child, after he made a particularly good play, or got a big hit, he said he could feel "Papa's" presence.

Joshua has always been very involved in the kid's religious services. He had a good example, by way of his older sisters, who both excelled at their Hebrew studies, and Torah reading. He would constantly raise his hand, and volunteer to participate in the

service, including portions that called on abilities beyond his reach. Being at the front of the room always put a huge grin on his face.

Last year, my wife Karen came across a small *shofar* which she brought home. Though I was unable to blow it well, Joshua, with the help of his sisters, figured out how to blow it, with limited success. As Rosh Hashanah approached he began to practice around the house. He started asking me if I thought he could blow it on the *bima* this year. At our synagogue the *shofar* is blown by the rabbi, and two to three other senior congregation members. I had no answer for Josh, and I did not really believe he would want to attempt blowing it in front of a full congregation.

The first day of Rosh Hashanah, as the time for sounding the *shofar* approached, Joshua was by my side, asking if he could blow his *shofar* on the *bima*. I told him to go ask one of the board members, who was standing a few feet away. *Shofar* in hand, he asked and received an "I don't know why not response." I suggested he just go to the front row and blow his *shofar* from there.

As the end of the service approached, the regular sounders were on the *bima*. Josh went to the front row, and one of the men waived him up. There he remained for the rest of the service, blowing with all his heart, with a huge grin on his face between each sounding. Needless to say it caused quite a stir, and brought many smiles to the faces of the congregants. It was an amazing moment that I thought could not be surpassed; but I was wrong.

Josh could not help but notice that his small horn was less impressive than the full sized ones that the rabbi, and other congregants blew. As we were leaving the services he asked if he could buy a larger *shofar* like the ones he saw in the gift shop. I told him we could not afford such a purchase at this time, but this did not deter him. He insisted he wanted to buy one with his own money. Joshua had been saving to buy an electric scooter. *Shofars* cost close to \$200, and he had \$160+ so he asked if he could use it to make the purchase. I will admit I tried to talk him out of it by pointing out there was only one more

chance to blow it; on Yom Kippur. He persisted, so I relented on two conditions:

He had to use his own money, and I had to be satisfied he could sound a large *shofar* before making the purchase.

I thought he would change his mind when the time came to part with all his savings, but I underestimated my son's resolve. That Sunday, about 15 minutes before religious school was dismissed, Josh told me he found a *shofar* he wanted to buy. I asked him how he could afford it, and he replied that the ladies who ran the gift shop would sell him one for what he had on him. I followed him into the shop, and he showed me a big *shofar*. It was over two feet long, and it was indeed beautiful.

I was still not convinced this was a good idea, and I said I wanted to hear him blow it first. He produced a long clear blast, and I lost my last excuse as he emptied his wallet onto the counter. It almost never left his hands in the days that followed, and he practiced blowing it continuously.

At Kol Nidre service, the rabbi took me aside and said he had talked to the other congregants who usually sound the *shofar*, and they had all agreed they wanted to honor Joshua with doing the final sounding solo. He asked me if I thought Josh was up to it. When I asked Josh, I saw a small crack in his resolve; but he said he would probably be able to do it.

When my wife joined me for the concluding service, she informed me that Joshua had changed his mind. She said he had been practicing all afternoon and he seemed to have lost his ability. I told her that Josh would have to explain that to the rabbi. As the end of the service approached Josh walked, with his new

*shofar*, to the front, where he got the rabbi's attention, and stepped up on the *bima*. They had a brief conversation. I could not hear what was said, but I could see Josh shaking his head apparently declining the honor. I learned later that the rabbi had conceded that Josh did not have to blow it alone, and that the rabbi and the ritual director, would help him sound the blast.



As the service came to a close, the rabbi said he wanted to share a story he had heard from the ladies at the gift shop. He related how a young man had used his "life savings" to buy, not a game, or a scooter, but a *shofar*. He then told the congregation that he had asked that young man if he would honor the congregation by sounding the final blast with his new *shofar*. He then called Josh up to the *bima*. Josh was given a stool to stand on, and a place by the microphone.

The time for the final sounding came.

The rabbi, the ritual director, and Josh, all raised their *shofars* to their lips. I held my breath as they prepared for the final blast. As Joshua began to blow, the rabbi and the ritual director lowered their *shofars*, leaving Joshua as the only one sounding the ultimate blast. It was a long, clear blast, that filled the room, and when Josh lowered his *shofar* from his lips, the smile on his face brought tears to my eyes.

I'm sure there are appropriate Yiddish words for the joy, and tears that moment brought to me, but I couldn't think of "*kvel*" and "*nakhas*" at that moment. I know the joy of that memory will be with me the rest of my life, and I admit to feeling my dad's presence in the way that Joshua had overcome his fear. Thus ends my story of a small child, and the financial sacrifice he made to share his love of his faith with his congregation, leaving his father and mother more proud than words can ever express.

# FEAR & Chicken Soup

By: Noah Lederman



I work in a fear vacuum—a New York City high school in Queens. Before my students even take their seats, they're in full frenzy.

Mister, did you hear that the kid who used to sit there has swine flu?" pointing at some empty desk as insanely as those Salem girls.

"Mister, I can't get a job this summer, all the laid-off bankers are working on my block."

"Mister, I heard the world is going to end in 2012!"

I think back to last June when fears were simple: "Am I going to pass?"

"Where did you hear this stuff?"

They heard it from the fear-mongers: their parents, the news, the neighbors, the decision-makers—in general, adults. I even hear teachers lurking in dark corners distributing fear capsules to these phobia-holics.

New York City is supposed to have a tough reputation, but they've cancelled more school this year because of faux-pandemics than they have in the last decade for snowstorms. (Try driving an hour to work in one of those things. That's legitimate concern.)

For some kids, school used to be a way to avoid the lurking terrors, like the gang on their corner, or the problems at home. Now fear is in the classroom. By the time class ends they're all worried about catching swine, losing out to MBAs working at CVS, or being incinerated in some apocalyptic conspiracy. It's hard for students to learn when they are scared stiff.

"Guys, we can't live in fear. Let's get back to the agenda." Oy!. The agenda: Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066—the forced detention of the Japanese-Americans during World War II.

"Wait a minute mister. You're saying Roosevelt gave this order because he feared Japanese-Americans when it was Japanese-Japanese that attacked us?"

Wasn't he the same guy that said 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'?"

"So he just detained them? No trial?" another asked.

"Like those guys down in Cuba. Aren't they closing that place down or something and sending them here?" someone shouted from the other side of the room.

Oy vey!. How do I tell them that Montana's Senator Max Baucus basically needed a diaper when his constituents in Hardin suggested that the Gauntanamo detainees be transferred to their empty, state-of-the-art, maximum-security prison?

As my students sat baffled by the hypocrisy of the Roosevelt administration, I thought of another former detainee; my Grandma. She also happened to live in fear.

"Noiach, where are you?" she worried when I sat in the other room.

"Noiach, what are you doing out there?" she agonized as I gazed upon Brighton Beach from her solidly cemented terrace cradled above the ocean.

"Noiach, what are you wearing?" she said (slightly scared.)

But Grandma had an excuse; she was raised on fear—real fear, with no solutions, except for Hitler's Final one. She survived while twelve thousand Jews from her town were murdered. She made it through the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. She outlasted the torture camp Majdanek, the death factory at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and was left to die in the typhus-infested concentration camp Bergen-Belsen.

"Grandma tell me about the concentration camps," I begged, a constant youthful inquiry. The plumes of human smoke hanging above Auschwitz must have returned to memory and she ran into the kitchen to smother them from her mind.



"Eat *tateh sheine*. Eat," she ordered, splashing a huge bowl of chicken soup in front of me with her quivering hands. As I slurped up the yellow broth and delicate noodles, her hands stopped shaking.

"Can you tell me about your brothers?"

"What's to tell. They were both murdered," her hands rattled. "Eat."

More chicken soup. I ate. Less quivering.

As my insistent questioning revived the fright, she extinguished the fear by filling me up. A seemingly irrational coping measure to a rational feeling; but it worked. She could defeat the terror with chicken soup.

My students, and the adults for that matter, are crippled by distress. Yet, unlike Grandma, we have solutions. We are aware of the necessary steps to reduce global warming and strategies to safeguard against terrorism. We know that the swine flu will eventually have a vaccine and down the road we will be scared of something else like swan flu. We know that the economy will bounce back, following that snaking economic curve of troughs and crests, and that the Earth's inhabitants will most likely see 2013 and 2014 and so on.

So when fear consumes us, let's unclench our legs, pull the tail out, and solve the problem rather than just scaring the bejesus out of those inheriting them. At least stop panicking. Save the alarm for when the impossible arrives.

"Man I'd be scared if terrorists were running around America blowing stuff up," one of my students said, pulling me from the depths of my flashback.

Eat a bowl of chicken soup, I thought.

Noah Lederman has published a number of essays and stories, some of which have appeared in The San Francisco Chronicle and The Cape Cod Times. Currently he is at work on a book of narrative nonfiction entitled *My Grandparents' Holocaust*. To read excerpts from this book visit [www.mygrandparentsholocaust.blogspot.com](http://www.mygrandparentsholocaust.blogspot.com)

## THIS & THAT

### Only in Israel:

Coffee is already so good Starbucks went bankrupt trying to break into the local market.

People cuss using dirty words in Yiddish, Russian or Arabic because Hebrew never developed them.

You don't have to check the ingredients on products in the supermarket to avoid eating pork.

No one cares what the rules say when an important goal can be achieved by bending them.

"Small talk" consists of loud, angry debates over politics and religion.

The leaders regularly ride busses and trains.

Graffiti is in Hebrew.

Being invited "out for a drink" means either cola, coffee or tea.

Bank robbers kiss the mezuzah as they leave with their loot.

No one has a foreign accent because everyone has a foreign accent.

Patients visiting physicians end up giving the doctor advice.

People call an attache case a "James Bond" and the "@" sign is called a "strudel."

A mysterious and mystical calm fills the streets on Yom Kippur.

People read English, write Hebrew, and joke in Yiddish.



# The Jews of China

By: Nathan Weissler

China was a refuge for many Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe. Chinese-Jewish history contains a lot more rich and fascinating detail. There are records of Jewish residents in China as early as the 7th, and 8th century C.E. and several vibrant Jewish communities developed.

The 13th century Venetian explorer, Marco Polo, recounted meeting Jewish residents of Khanblik, which is now Beijing, in the Royal Court. During the Ming Dynasty, which lasted from 1368 to 1644, one of the emperors gave China's Jews seven surnames: Ai, Shi, Gao, Jin, Li, Zhang, and Zhao. These names originate from seven Jewish clan names: Ezra, Shimon, Cohen, Gilbert, Levy, Joshua and Jonathan. There have also been rumors that the lost tribe of Israel settled in what is now China. In parts of present-day China, Judaic customs, and rituals, are practiced and observed.

One of the most well-known Jewish groups in China have been the Jewish residents of Kaifeng, commonly known as "Kaifeng Jews." In fact, even today the terminology "Chinese Jews" is thought to refer to Kaifeng Jews. Kaifeng Jews have greatly assimilated in Chinese society. They routinely intermarry with the Chinese, but their community is not recognized by the government as a distinct ethnic group. Thus, the Kaifeng Jews are not eligible to immigrate to Israel under the 1949 Law of Return unless they formally convert to Judaism.

Chinese scholar, Chen Yuan, noted that the Chinese often mistook Judaism for Islam. For instance, the Muslim mosque was known as Qing Zhen which translated into English means "Purity and Truth." Synagogues were also known as "Qing Zhen." Modern times, beginning with the mid to late 19th century, saw a flood of Jewish immigration to China. Jews immigrated to Shanghai in large numbers between 1850 and 1900. A second wave of immigration to Shanghai occurred during the Russian pogroms in the early 20th century. Following World War I, many Ashkenazi Jews immigrated to China from Europe. Since Shanghai during the Second World War lacked immigration restrictions, approximately 18,000 German, Austrian, and Polish Jewish refugees from the Holocaust settled there.



Upon the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Jewish Community was largely assimilated. However, in recent times, Jewish life in China has experienced a rebirth. For instance, on October 12, 1996, Ari Lee became the first individual to have his Bar Mitzvah in Beijing. Ari's mother recruited Rabbi Howard Kosovske, of Boston, who was formerly the Rabbi of the United Jewish Congregation (UJC) in Hong Kong, to preside at the Bar Mitzvah. She also recruited Cantor Robyn Helzner, who at the time was serving as hazzan of the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong, to sing at the ceremony.

In June 1998, during a visit to China, then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited the Ohel Rachel Synagogue in Shanghai. During her visit, a Torah scroll was dedicated to the Jewish Community. The First Lady was quoted as saying, "So, for this to be restored, I think is a very good example of respect for religious differences, and appreciation for the importance of faith in one's life."



Today, there are eight Chabad houses in China. They are in: Beijing, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Kowloon, Pudong, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Yiwu. Rabbi Shalom D. Greenberg, the Rabbi of the Chabad in Shanghai, explains on their Web site that Chabad "offers a single place for daily events, Friday [night] dinners and holiday celebrations." Additionally, the Israeli Embassy also held their 2005 Chanukah celebrations at the Great Wall. The revitalization of Judaism in China will not only benefit Chinese Jewry, but will strengthen K'lal Yisrael (unity of the Jewish people) as a whole. L'Chayim!

For more information, see the China Chabad website at:  
[http://www.chabadchina.org/templates/articlecco\\_cdo/aid/801493/jewish/The-Rebbe.htm](http://www.chabadchina.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/801493/jewish/The-Rebbe.htm)

Nathan Weissler, 16, lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He can be reached at [nathan.weissler@hotmail.com](mailto:nathan.weissler@hotmail.com)

# It's About the Little Things

By Steven Renkoff

Almost every Thursday night some friends and I get together in some café in Tel Aviv near the beach. Most of my friends are other *Olim* (immigrants) that were on the *kibbutz Ulpan* (a Hebrew language Class)



I did when I first moved to Israel in 1995.

Since we are all *Olim* from English speaking countries it is

natural for us to speak English to each other. You may not know this but Israelis love to practice their English, so they usually engage us in conversation once they hear we are English speakers. It is usually the same kind of questions, like what are we doing in Israel, how did we all meet, and why would we want to leave our birth countries to move to *Eretz Yisrael*?



I never really knew how to answer people before. I mean how do you explain that it is about the checkout girl telling me to have a good *Shabbat* when I am getting some last minute items for dinner on a Friday before the shops close? It is about not having to use

up my vacation days so that I can have off on the Jewish holidays. It is about that feeling of being in the place where I belong.

It is not a religious thing. It is not this feeling of being closer to God that brought, and keeps me here, but a connection with my past, and with the traditions of my people, and not those of where my family decided to live while we waited to return to our true home.

Sure, in the United States the drivers understand the rules of the road a bit better. The word "service" actually means you get attention rather than waiting for the clerk to finish a personal call to a friend. What I earn here in a month I used to make in a week. Even though I may have been born in America, Israel is my home.



So when they ask me why I came to live in Israel I tell them it is all about the little things.

## ALTEH GEFERLEKH JEWISH JOKES

Moshe, the owner of a small Kosher New York deli, was being questioned by an IRS agent about his tax return. He had reported a net profit of \$80,000 for the year.

'Why don't you people leave me alone?' the deli owner said. 'I work like a dog, everyone in my family helps out, the place is only closed three days a year. And you want to know how I made \$80,000?'

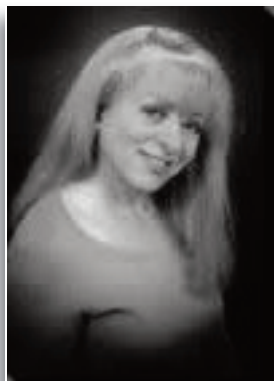
'It's not your income that bothers us,' the agent said. 'It's these travel deductions. You listed ten trips to Israel for you and your wife.'

'Oh, that?' the owner said smiling. 'Well... We also deliver.'



# Apple and Honey Challah

By: Eddy Robey



## A Fitting Welcome For The Sabbath Bride

All of life is full of happy expectations on Friday. Our best clothes are ready and waiting for us to shower and don them.

There are clean shiny surfaces and freshly vacuumed floors. Early in the day the table is set with gleaming white linen and the good china. The shiny candlesticks stand tall and wait their turn to begin the festivities.

Our noses are aware that it is almost time. The vapors of Soup and a Roast Chicken or Brisket blend with the tang of Lemon Oil on the furniture against the background of the most luxurious perfume known to man, the scent of fresh baked Challah. Though Mama is sure to dab a bit of something from Paris behind her ears, on this night, she has created the aroma of heaven with her hands. This is a Challah worthy of the Sabbath bride. As befits her status, it is flavored with Saffron, the most exquisite of spices. Let us welcome her with candlelight and singing.

### Method

If you are going to use Raisins, place them in a small bowl with enough boiling Water to cover, and set them aside to plump. In a large glass measuring cup, combine the Honey, Saffron or Turmeric-Paprika mixture, and Apple Juice. Heat for one minute in the microwave, then allow to come to lukewarm temperature. Whisk in 1/2 cup of the Flour and the Yeast. Set aside until it is foaming and growing. This step is called proofing the Yeast. Whisk the Eggs and Yolks with the Vegetable Oil, and add to the Yeast mixture.

### Challah

Preparation Time: 150 minutes

(Pareve)

Cooking Time: 60 minutes

1 1/2 cups Apple Juice

1 teaspoon crumbled Saffron, or substitute a mix of

.....1 teaspoon Turmeric & 1/4 teaspoon Paprika

1/3 cup Honey

2 1/2 tablespoons Fast-Rising Dry Yeast

2 Eggs plus 2 Egg Yolks

1/4 cup Vegetable Oil

1 1/2 teaspoons Salt

7 cups Bread Flour (approx)

1 tablespoon double-Acting Baking Powder (optional)

1 tablespoon Cornstarch, mixed with 1/3 cup Water

1 cup White Raisins, plumped (optional)

In a large bowl, thoroughly mix the Baking Powder, Salt, and Flour. The Baking Powder makes a loaf with a lighter texture than one which only uses yeast, but is not necessary, if you would like the Challah more firm.

Now we need to combine the dry ingredients with the wet ones, and there are three ways to do that. The first and easiest one is to put the dry ingredients in the bowl of your food processor, pour in the wet ones, then pulse the dough until it holds together in a ball around the blade. Continue to pulse for one minute beyond that.

The second way is to fit your electric mixer with the dough hooks, put the dry ingredients in the bowl, then the wet ones, mix at a slow speed until the dough holds together in a ball, and continue to mix for 2 more minutes.

The third way is to make a well in the center of the dry ingredients in their bowl, pour in the wet ones and mix the dough by hand until it becomes

elastic to your touch.

The end texture of the dough, no matter what the method should be very slightly sticky. Depending on ambient humidity, this dough will absorb up to 2 more cups of Bread Flour, mixed in a bit at a time, but do not make it too dry or your bread will be dry. The stickiness will disappear after the first rise.

At this point, mix in the raisins, if you are going to use them. Form the dough into a ball in a large bowl. Spray the top of the ball with a light coating of Vegetable Oil, cover the bowl with Cellophane wrap or waxed paper, and set aside in a warm place (about 80 degrees) for about an hour to an hour and a half, or until doubled in size. The top of the refrigerator is usually warm enough, or a sunny windowsill will work.

An alternative method is to put the bowl in the refrigerator overnight, where it will rise very slowly and should be doubled by the next morning when you remove it and allow it to come to room temperature before the next step. When the dough has doubled in size, uncover it and push your hand into it gently, until it collapses. This step is called "Punching Down the Dough," but do not be rough about it. Remove a small piece of the dough and set it on a bit of tinfoil. Put the foil on the floor of the oven, where it will burn. No Bread is Kosher, unless you perform this Mitzvah. Now we are ready to shape the loaves. Oil two baking Sheets. Remove about one quarter of the dough and set it aside. Divide the remaining dough in half, then divide each half into thirds, making six pieces.

Roll each of the pieces between your hands, until they form strands about a foot long. Take three of the strands and place them on a baking sheet. Pinch one end of each together, then form a braid, pinching the other ends together when the braid is finished. Tuck the pinched ends underneath the ends of the loaves so that they don't show. Repeat with the other three strands using the other baking sheet. You will now repeat that

process using the quarter of the dough you had set aside earlier, making two tiny braided loaves and placing them on the sheets at the end of the large loaves. Spray the loaves lightly with vegetable oil and cover with Cellophane wrap or waxed paper. Allow the loaves to rise again until they double in bulk.

Using a pastry brush, cover the risen loaves with a thin layer of the Cornstarch and Water mixture. Place in an oven that has been preheated to 350 degrees. When placing the sheets, make sure that the small loaves are near the door of the oven. After 30 minutes, open the oven door and quickly remove the two small loaves with a spatula. Do not try to use your hands, as you will get burned.

Close the oven again and allow the two larger loaves to finish baking for another 30 minutes. They are done when they are a rich golden brown and give a hollow sound when thumped with your finger. No matter how wonderful they smell, allow the loaves to cool on a rack for a minimum of 30 minutes before cutting. The fibers are very fragile when loaves first come from the oven and will turn to mushy paste if they do not have time to firm whilst cooling. This will give you the two full size and two miniature Challahs needed for Shabbas.

### Special Notes

The burnt offering should be wrapped in a bit more foil and discarded respectfully. It is not to be eaten.

The Bracha for a larger batch is this:

*Boruch atoh adonoy,  
elohaynu melech ho-olom,  
asher kidshonu b'mitzvosov  
v'tzivonu l'hafrish challah  
min ha-isah.*

Excerpted from:  
**It's Not Just Chicken Soup**

**GantsehMegillah  
dotCom**



**EDITOR'S COMMENT** 14 December 2007

**Chai Life**

Shalom My Gantseh Megillah Family and Friends

Welcome to the last issue of the Gantseh Megillah. The year 2007. Our Megillah family grew by almost twenty percent this year, and our friendships and bonds continue to strengthen. The initial concept of the Gantseh Megillah was to be a mechanism for Jewish people and our friends to have a haimish and interesting gathering place for information, ideas and communication. Needless to say, this has been realized.

**Chai L**

**Features**  
**ould Jews**  
**istmas tree**

**Letters to the Editor**

**ASK**  
**Rebbi Dan**

**News and shmooze for today's Jews**