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Olam Tikvateinu

***A place for individual congregants
To share their Torah***



Congregation Olam Tikvah

3800 Glenbrook Road

Fairfax, VA 22031

RABBI DAVID KALENDER
הרב שמחה צבי בן שמואל ויוכבד

1 Tishrei 5764

Dear Olam Tikvah Family,

In the spring of 2003, Cary Schwartzbach and Lisa Friedman approached me with the idea of publishing an intellectual journal called *Olam Tikvateinu* (our Olam Tikvah, or Our World of Hope). After much discussion, planning, and thoughtful, hard work by a number of people, you are holding the first edition of that journal in your hand.

Conceived as a supplement to the existing experiences of Jewish study and reflection central to our community, the journal's statement of purpose is as follows:

Olam Tikvateinu, our Olam Tikvah, our world of hope, is a place for individuals of our congregation to share their Torah. It is to be a forum for original ideas and thoughts on Jewish themes— Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), Talmud, Jewish history, philosophy, ethics and actions/behavior.

Its motto is:

ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר

For the sake of God's righteousness, God desires that Torah grow and be glorified.

—Isaiah 42:21

Our current thinking is to publish the journal twice yearly:

- ◆ **Tishrei** for subjects including High Holidays through Purim (include Elul, Chanukah, Tu B'Shevat).
- ◆ **Nissan** for subjects including Pesach through Av (include Yom Hashoah, Lag B'Omer, the Omer, Yom Ha'atzmaut, Yom Yerushalayim, Shavuot and Tisha B'Av).

Please consider submitting your article by February 1, 2004, for Volume 1, Number 2, to be published 1 Nissan 5764.

Articles should be typed, double spaced, in MS Word and submitted by e-mail to Lisa Friedman, Lisafriedman@cox.net. Write "Olam Tikvateinu" in the subject line. The *upper* length limit is 1500-2000 words (6-8 pages).

May we all continue to study and teach Torah, and may Olam Tikvah continue to be a home for sharing our learning with each other.

Rabbi David Kalender

Olam Tikvateinu

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Please contact Rabbi Kalender to discuss making a contribution to ensure the continued success of this publication.

The Month of Elul

By

Cary Schwartzbach

As summer draws to a close and school and routine return, we find ourselves changing our daily rhythm. As Jews, we are also beckoned by the shofar, to change gears and to return—to do t’shuvah. The month of Elul calls for introspection and examination of our commitments, ideals, actions, motives, beliefs and goals. In a sense, it initiates the process of spiritual elevation necessary for the High Holidays that begin at month’s end.

Historically, the New Moon of Elul marks the day that Moses returned up Mount Sinai. After descending the first time (on the 17th of Tammuz), breaking the Tablets of the Law and destroying the Golden Calf, he successfully petitions God’s forbearance for Israel’s iniquity. Moses is then told to ascend a second time and returns 40 days later on Yom Kippur with the second set of Tablets. Thus Elul is a propitious time for penance.

One may ask, “Why Elul? Can’t God be sought at any time?” Our sages answer by way of a parable about an earthly king. When he sits in his palace with his royal retinue, he may seem rather unapproachable. But for one month a year, he travels throughout his lands to be near his subjects and hear their petitions. So, too, our King of Kings. For much of the year, He may seem so transcendent that one is reticent to seek Him, but during Elul, He is “out in the field,” immanent and approachable.

Although Elul (spelled Aleph Lamed Vav Lamed) is not mentioned in the Bible, hints to it are sought by locating an appropriate quartet of letters with the same initials. The most famous is that of *Song of Songs* 6:3, “Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li—I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” Another reference comes from *Esther* 9:22. After their victory over their foes, “they [the Jews] sent food parcels ‘each to his neighbor and

gifts to the poor”—“Ish L_re’ehu U_’matanot La’evyonim.” The former reminds us of our devotion and duty to God; the latter reminds us of our social responsibilities. Both are equally mandated by our covenant.

Traditions abound in Elul. Penitential prayers, S’lichot, are said by Sephardim all month long and by Ashkenazim from the Saturday night preceding Rosh Hashanah. The shofar is blown every morning, as a clarion call to do t’shuvah and as a reminder of the shofar blast that heralded Moses’ return up Sinai. We also recite Psalm 27, *L’David Hashem Ori*. This heartfelt psalm attests to God as our salvation, movingly requests to be drawn nigh unto Him and reminds us that if we are strong in our faith in God, He will give us the courage and means to overcome our challenges. The psalm also makes reference to the three holidays in Tishrei.

Thus we, as His beloved, are given a probationary period, during which we may demonstrate our commitment to t’shuvah by being diligent in our performance of mitzvot. All through the month of Elul, He is calling for our return. It is up to us to heed that call.



Photo by Arthur Feller

The shofar is blown every morning, as a clarion call to do t’shuvah and as a reminder of the shofar blast that heralded Moses’ return up Sinai.

Olam Tikvah member Cary Schwartzbach founded this journal. He attended modern orthodox day school and high school and spent two years in Israel in Yeshiva. Currently an orthopaedic surgeon, his first love is Jewish studies.

Why Yonah on Yom Kippur?

By
Stuart Marks

Yom Kippur and the Days of Awe are a time for people to confront themselves and God, a time for introspection and contemplation about our relationships with each other, with God and with the community. These ideas are fundamental to our faith as Jews. Repentance, forgiveness, justice and mercy are core concepts from which the Jewish world view is shaped and which gain special significance on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Therefore, HAZAL's (the early Rabbis') choice of the Book of Yonah as the Haftarah for Mincha of Yom Kippur is significant, for they understood that this book stresses specific ideas central to the Days of Awe. We should note that the story of Yonah is not about the repentance of the Ninevites, for when asked to repent, they obligingly do so, without argument or objection. So what is the story about, and what is doing here?

The Humanity of Hashem's Prophets

One idea expressed in the Book of Yonah that is specific to the Yamim Noraim is the humanity of Hashem's prophets.

As the story opens, God charges Yonah to go to Nineveh, but Yonah doesn't want to go. God's prophet doesn't want to go? The question arises: why?

In *Sefer Ha'Agadah*, a story is told that years earlier, Yonah is charged by God to call the people of Yerushalayim to repent or be destroyed; a significant proportion repents, and nothing happens. The scoffers then laugh at Yonah and call him a *navi sheqer*, a false prophet. As an ordinary human being—albeit one with a special gift—one can imagine how mortified Yonah must have felt. In fact, however, Jewish theology teaches us that what has actually happened is that Hashem showed the face of rachamim (mercy) to His people.

Traditionally we receive greater merit in the Olam Haba (the world to come) for doing mitzvot we find difficult to perform than for those we find easy. It is my thesis, therefore, that this was Yonah's test and, as occasionally happens with all human beings, he stumbles and begins a long spiritual descent!

It occurs to me that we are also ordinary human beings who seek not to be singled out, but at Yom Kippur we must be singled out and accountable before God. So Yonah is offered to us as a model of ourselves.

Yonah's Descent

As we read the story, we find an interesting use of language: for example, in verse 3, we read the words *yored Yaffo*, he goes down to Jaffa, and as Hashem sends the storm we read in verse 5, *Yonah yored yaraktai hasfina*, and Yonah goes down into the hold of the vessel. He then descends even further, by falling asleep. Yonah is running from the face of the Almighty—an act that cannot be achieved! Yonah's physical descent is also a metaphor for his spiritual descent. HAZAL tells us that in order for a person to rise spiritually, she must first descend, and that life consists of ascents and descents.

As we all know, Yonah is eventually thrown overboard and swallowed by the great fish, inside of which God makes him understand what being cut off from the Almighty really means. During this time, he prays from the depths—an idea that originates in Psalm 118 in *Hallel* and resonates in the Rosh Hashanah t'filah in the meditation before sounding the shofar: *min hameitsar karatiyah*, from the depths I called unto You. He answered and He set me free.

The Almighty hears Yonah's prayer and uses the fish to take him to Nineveh, at which time Yonah is released from the fish and charged once again with going to Nineveh.

Rachamim

The city is saved, and Yonah ascends a hill, where Hashem provides a tree for him to sit under. But in the morning Hashem destroys the tree with a worm. Yonah becomes very upset and wants to die. *Why?* Because he is still selfish, after all that—

does he still not get it? God admonishes him for caring about a tree he did not create and asks, *should I not care for a city with 120,000 souls each of which I created?* God in effect is asking Yonah, where is your sense of rachamim?

Why Yonah on Yom Kippur

How does the story of Yonah relate to us in this day and age? First, Yonah is represented as an ordinary person: he has the normal reactions we all have to difficult situations, whether we show our feelings or not. The similarity of his reactions to ours indicates that human nature has not changed much from Yonah's time to ours; neither has our relationship with God. We are always unsure and or afraid of the unfamiliar or possibly dangerous. Like Yonah, however, we have no choice as to whether we face our fears. What is important is not what happens to us, but rather our reactions to our situations.

We may take from the Book of Yonah three fundamental teachings. First, do not cut yourself off from God—for, as Yonah learned, if we succeed in doing so we will be truly lost and alone. Second, do not cut yourself off from the community—that connection is also part of what it means to be Jewish. And finally, in the words of the prophet Micah (6:8), “Seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.”

Stuart Marks is Principal of the Olam Tikvah Religious School. A Jewish educator with more than 30 years of experience, he is a student of advanced Judaics, currently working on his third degree, with special emphasis on the creation of spiritual awareness in teens and on the application of Halachah (Jewish law) to modern life.

Purging Azazel: Seeking the Roots Of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah

By

Paul S. Forbes

Evolution of Jewish Beliefs

It's hard to believe there was a time when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur did not play a central part in Jewish life. Yet as the Torah itself relates, our belief system evolved over hundreds of years, from the Exodus period through the return from the Babylonian captivity. During this time, the Israelites came under the influence of the great civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Inevitably the ancient Israelites adopted some Egyptian and Mesopotamian customs and beliefs.

The influence of pagan civilizations on ancient Israel should no longer be surprising. Our religious beliefs and practices were and continue to be products of their time and surroundings. For example, today Judaism is commonly divided into Ashkenazim and Sephardim. While both are part of normative Judaism, each has evolved its own distinct character, based on the cultures of which it was a part. So it was in ancient times. But it has been the peculiar genius of the Jewish people to transform ritualistic beliefs of pagan societies (as well as of its own) into today's great moral religion of Judaism, and other religions have derived inspiration from it.

The Feast of the Trumpets

The first mention of Rosh Hashanah (literally in Hebrew, *head of the year*), in the Holiness Code of the Torah (*Leviticus* 23:23-25), dates back at least to the time of the Deuteronomic reforms of King Josiah, c. 622 BCE, and probably even earlier than that. The Holiness Code refers to Rosh Hashanah as "The Feast of the Trumpets," because it was the time when trumpets were blown.

In pre-Exilic times, the New Year was celebrated at the closing of the old and the beginning of the new harvest, on the tenth (later the first) day of the sabbatical month of Tishrei. During the Babylonian exile, the Jews adopted the date of the great Babylonian

New Year festival—the first of Nissan in the spring—but also continued to celebrate the autumn festival. The Tishrei celebration gained greater solemnity when it was remembered that Jews who returned from Exile brought sin offerings to the newly-erected altar in Jerusalem on the first of Tishrei, when Ezra read the newly-codified Torah to the people. The sin offering was known as “the purging of Azazel,” the biblical scapegoat.

The Rite of Azazel the Scapegoat

According to *Leviticus* 17:7, the Israelites sacrificed in the open fields to two classes of demons, the “se’irim” and the “shedim.” The se’irim (“hairy beings”) were satyr-like demons. Azazel, the goat-like demon of the wilderness (*Leviticus* 14:10 *et seq.*), belongs to this class, probably as the chief of the se’irim.

The Torah relates (*Leviticus* 16) that on the tenth day of Tishrei, the High Priest presented two sacrificial victims for the sins of the people—a ram for a burnt offering, and two young goats for a sin offering. The High Priest brought the goats before YHWH at the door of the Temple and cast lots for them, one lot “for YHWH” and the other “for Azazel.” The goat that fell to YHWH was slain as a sin offering for the people. But the goat of Azazel (now usually known as the “scapegoat”) was made the subject of a more striking ceremony.

The High Priest laid his hands upon its head, confessed over it the sins of the people, and handed it over to a man standing ready for the purpose. Laden with the sins of Israel, the scapegoat was “led forth to an isolated region” and released into the wilderness to return to Azazel. According to Yoma 67b and the Rabbis, however, the scapegoat was not released, but was thrown off a steep cliff to its death. This ancient ritual traces its roots to pre-Babylonian times.

Babylonian Parallels

The elaborate, week-long celebration of the Babylonian New Year had been developing since about 3,000 BCE and was emulated throughout the ancient Near East. It retold the story of creation, the battle between the forces of good and evil and the divine triumph of order. This celebration had counterparts in the

nature religion of Canaan, and indeed in the religion of Israel and Judah, which shared many Canaanite beliefs and practices.

To the Babylonians, the New Year festival was the occasion for national and personal renewal. Normal activity was suspended during the celebration, in sympathy for the confinement of the god Marduk in the land of the dead. In a rite closely resembling the Temple-period Jewish rite of Azazel, the Babylonian priests on the ninth day heaped the King's and the people's sins on a sheep's head. The accursed head was then severed from the body and thrown into the Euphrates River, to be swept away from the city and its residents. This rite of atonement was called *kupparu*, the Akkadian word for atonement.

Comparison of Babylonian and Jewish Traditions

The similarities between the ancient Mesopotamian rituals and Jewish observance are striking. Like the Jewish tradition, the Babylonian observance began on the first day of the New Year, which had an agricultural connection (spring planting for the Babylonians, harvest time for the Jews) and culminated with the transferring of the community's sins to a sacrificial animal. Even the names *kupparu* and *kippur* have the same Semitic root. The differences are also noteworthy, however. Although the Babylonian observances were, as far as we can tell, ritualistic and based on magic, the Jewish version ultimately evolved into something far more humanistic. Later sages stressed that even the atonement of the Azazel goat was only effective for one who sincerely atoned for his sins. There is nothing like this in the existing archaeological record of Mesopotamia.

Sources

The information for this article was adapted from *Near Eastern Mythology*, by John Gray, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, by Madeleine and J. Land Miller, and *The Jewish Encyclopedia, CD-ROM Edition*, published by Judaica Multimedia, Ltd.

A student of comparative religion and Biblical archaeology for over 60 years, Paul S. Forbes has taught Biblical archaeology courses at OT. His writings have appeared in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, and he has made possible the acquisition of a rare, fourth-century BCE archive of Aramaic documents by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Who Stole the Chanukah Haggadah, and Why?

By

Eric Rozenman

A Reinterpretation of Chanukah

We have it on good authority that Chanukah is a minor festival. Louis Jacobs writes “Chanukah is a minor festival ... which celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in the second century BCE over Antiochus’ attempt to destroy the Jewish religion.”

But if the Jewish revolutionaries had not won, Judaism might well have been destroyed. How can the commemoration of this triumph be only “a minor festival”?

Actually, the history of Chanukah is so convoluted, so full of internecine Jewish conflicts that, like the pain from an old but unresolved trauma, repressing and “reinterpreting” the holiday might be a necessity.

Hellenized Judeans

By the time Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to power in 175 BCE, tiny Judea—perhaps the size of a couple of northern Virginia counties—had been under the control of Alexander the Great and his successors for more than a century-and-a-half. Judea enjoyed the status of a semi-autonomous state, and many Jews, including some of the upper class and senior priesthood, appreciated much of the new Hellenistic culture introduced by Alexander.

But for Judea and Judaism, that culture pitted the ideal of the Greek *polis* with its philosophy, polytheistic tolerance of (subordinate) minorities and their gods, and the educational/athletic institution of the gymnasium against archaic temple states. One emblematic result, as Professor Raymond Scheindlin writes, was that “many Judeans gave up the practice [of circumcision], or, at the cost of painful surgery, had their own

circumcision undone to avoid appearing provincial or backward.”

Philosophically, even Kohelet, writer of *Ecclesiastes*, “shows himself torn between new foreign ideas and his inherited piety, between the critical spirit and conservatism,” asserts historian Paul Johnson. “The impact of Hellenization on educated Jews was in many ways similar to the impact of the enlightenment on the eighteenth-century ghetto.”

Antiochus IV apparently cared little at first about the religions of his subject peoples. In any case, in Jerusalem the affluent, urban Hellenizers appeared as natural allies. Also present in Judea, says Johnson, was “a broad group of pious Jews ... [who] did not object to Greek rule, in principle, any more than they had objected to the Persians,” so long as in return for their taxes they were left free to practice their religion. “Isolationists,” who regarded Jerusalem even before Antiochus IV as hopelessly corrupt, included the Essenes and desert fundamentalists like those at Qumran.

Financial Pressures Spur Antiochus’ Reforms

Like previous rulers in his Greek-Syrian Seleucid dynasty, Antiochus IV needed money for local wars and to resist Roman expansion. To improve his cash flow, he continued the policy of looting the temples of subject peoples—including the Jews’ Second Temple in Jerusalem. Since the Temple also functioned as a central tax depository and the office of the priesthood was intermingled with a tax-collecting function, Antiochus viewed accelerated Hellenization as a revenue enhancement. He replaced the high priest with Jason (a Hellenized version of Joshua) and, writes Johnson, “the reformers became identified not only with the occupying power but with oppressive taxes.”

In 171 BCE Antiochus, to further squeeze the Temple treasury, dumped Jason in favor of Menelaus. The latter advocated even faster Hellenization or “extreme reform” of the old, obscurantist laws and sacrifices. In 167 BCE, secular law replaced Mosaic; the Temple was made a place of ecumenical worship, and a statue of Olympian Zeus was installed. Over-

reaching by Menelaus and his patron also included the requirement of non-kosher animal sacrifices and Antiochus' insistence that he himself be worshiped as a god (in a rationalist Greek view, perhaps, merely a gifted "god among men"). These actions provoked widespread outrage.

Jews Against Jews

Here the first problem posed by the Chanukah events becomes clear. It was not just Jews versus Greco-Syrians, good guys against bad, but Jews against Jews. Traditionalist, even fundamentalists—Johnson terms them "the rigorists"—often rural, versus many of the urban elite, the affluent, the radical religious "reformers." That's why, Scheindlin notes, "the rebellion was begun [in 165 BCE] by an obscure family of conservative country priests, headed by a "certain Mattathias in the village of Modein."

These backwoods fundamentalists—brilliant and often successful guerrilla warriors—were the Maccabees. They and their followers would liberate Jerusalem, purify the Temple, and restore Jewish religious practice and national independence. The Maccabean (Hasmonean) dynasty would rule a renewed Jewish commonwealth from 140 to 37 BCE.

The success of the fighting Maccabees endured across the millennia to inspire Jews. Two thousand years later, when Gerald Green's *The Holocaust* aired as an American television mini-series, a doomed but ecstatic character sniping at Nazi soldiers in the Warsaw Ghetto cries melodramatically, "I feel the blood of the Maccabees in my veins!" Not the blood of the Vilna Gaon, or Maimonides, or Spinoza, but of the Maccabees.

Yet the Hasmoneans quickly offered proof that power corrupts. Decadence, intolerance, brutality—Alexander Jannai crucified 800 Pharisees, or members of the rabbinic party, Professor Steven Bayme reminds us—marked the dynasty. So did renewed Hellenization.

The initial Chanukah miracle, in part a triumph of the bumpkins over the sophisticates, fundamentalist zealots over reformist zealots with pragmatists choked in the middle, gets

lost. Hard for it not to, since (speaking of repressed bipolarity or multiple personality, a collective Jewish disorder since the Golden Calf) in a sense it was a victory of them over us.

During the United States' Bicentennial celebration, pollsters asked Americans if they agreed with certain Bill of Rights tenets like freedom of religion, press, speech, freedom from self-incrimination and so on, without revealing the questions' constitutional basis. Many respondents said no. A few members of Congress admitted that, had they lived in revolutionary America, they might have been Tories.

Chanukah Raises Uncomfortable Questions

Chanukah raises a similar uncomfortable question: Had we been there, whose side would we have chosen? And if, like Passover and Shavuot, Chanukah is to speak to each generation as if we had taken part, then whose side are we on now?

A second troubling issue raised by the historical Chanukah: Does the Diaspora strengthen or weaken the Jewish homeland, particular in times of trouble?

Only a minority of Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity 400 years before, and by the time of the Maccabean revolt, Babylonian Diaspora thrived under Parthian rule. Simultaneously, Hellenized Egyptian Jewry grew and prospered. According to Scheindlin, by 200 BCE there were probably more Jews living in Diaspora than in Judea.

Meanwhile, though dominant, the Jews were hardly the only people occupying their homeland. By the time Rome displaced the Seleucids as the major outside influence in the middle of the first century BCE, they found a large non-Jewish minority, including Greeks and Arabs. And as Roman proconsuls would record, the Arabs hated the Jews and looked for opportunities to do them harm.

Would a larger Jewish population in Judea have lessened Seleucid influence, hastened a successful revolt—or found a satisfactory accommodation with Hellenism that avoided violent confrontation in the short run but blunted Judaism's distinctiveness in the long run? Would it have been able to

finesse Roman influence or, intoxicated by self-regard, rushed faster to calamity?

History is full of imponderables, of diverting “what ifs?” But this much seems clear: over millennia, Jewish communities often have been too big to avoid attention, too small to protect themselves. The ebb-and-flow between homeland and Diaspora, among other things, has left both vulnerable. So it was at the first Chanukah.

This “minor festival”—without which we might not exist as a people—suffers obvious rabbinic revisionism. The example of the Maccabees’ vital activism is plain, yet we sing in “Rock of Ages” (written in the 1200’s) that God’s strength, not our own, availed us. Much earlier, the Talmud shifted focus from the brothers to the cruse of oil. Judah, Jonathan and Simeon and their Maccabee comrades might ask, “What were we, chopped liver?”

Consequences of Rabbinic Revisionism

Given what became of the Hasmoneans, and their ultimate connection to direct Roman intervention, the kingship of Herod, more internecine Jewish zealotry and the destruction of the Temple, a rabbinic rewrite is understandable. But transforming the historical Chanukah into a spiritual event virtually devoid of human agency might have cost Diaspora Jewry.

Self-effacement—individual, political, national—was a survival tactic in a long and often hostile Exile. A low-profile target is harder to hit. To be worthy of God’s help, however, one must, like Nachson at the Red Sea or Mattathias in Modein, be ready to leap forward in both faith and action. Perhaps so long as we tell ourselves that Chanukah is a minor holiday, so long as we celebrate it with a couple of blessings, a few spins of the dreidel, and latkes—without a service or a text—we can submerge its ever-fresh and troubling reality.

OT member Eric Rozenman is author of the new novel *Total Jihad* (RavensYard Ltd., www.ravensyard.com), and Washington director of CAMERA—the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America. The opinions expressed above are his own, and do not necessarily reflect any position held by CAMERA.

Giants in the Sky: *A Meditation on Jewish Ontology*

By
Lisa Friedman

Concepts of Time, Place and Person

At mid-twentieth century, important insights occurred in the philosophy of religion. Mircea Eliade described and defined certain general attributes of the world's religions. At the same time, Abraham Joshua Heschel applied similar concepts to Judaism, focusing mostly on time. These philosophers' distinctions help us to understand more about Jewish ontology—the theory about the nature of being, here applied to matters of time, place and person—which further illuminates what it means to have “ruach,” or to be spiritual.

Extrapolating from virtually all primitive cultures with religions, Eliade describes religious man (*homo religiosus*) as inhabiting both profane (linear) and sacred (circular and reactualizable) time. In most religious thought, profane time is lived through and tolerated, while sacred time is considered the only reality. *Homo religiosus* accesses sacred time by enacting myth and ritual: each myth or ritual takes place at the time of the creation of the world (*in illo tempore*—in that time), and its performance transports *homo religiosus* back to that time, where he becomes the ancestor or god who originated this piece of sacred history. Such sacred moments renew religious man; they give his existence meaning and purpose. Without this revivifying process, Eliade suggests that mankind exists in the “terror of history,” a kind of existential anxiety, a paralysis brought on by the meaninglessness and unconnectedness of individual life in the face of the definitive nature of death.

Heschel applies some of these concepts to Judaism, pointing out how, at various spiritual moments, Jews stop linear time and participate in sacred time, or God's time. The Shabbat is one of his clearest examples, and closest to Eliade's model, for

there we enact the very behavior of God on the seventh day of creation—we rest. Linear time fades away, and we inhabit the same timeless moment God inhabited. At one with Him within the Shabbat, we are renewed.

Unlike other religions, however, Judaism also considers profane time an important reality. After each Sabbath observance, Jews return to the everyday world, celebrating not only our mundane status but also the separation between the two aspects of time. This difference is key to understanding Jewish ontology. An unlikely but useful example for comparing Jewish ontological thought with that of other religions may be found by contrasting Jack and the Beanstalk's visit to the giants in the sky (as imagined by Stephen Sondheim, below) with Jacob's reaction to his dream at Bethel.

Giants in the Sky

Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's 1987 musical, *Into the Woods*, is set in "Once Upon A Time," where a group of fairy-tale characters live in proximity to and interact with one another. We immediately meet Cinderella and her family, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, his mother and their cow, two princes, and a childless baker and his wife, who live next door to the witch who is mother to Rapunzel. Someone in each small group has a wish, requiring him or her to enter the adjoining woods to accomplish a specific goal. Anything can—and does—happen in the woods, which quickly develops as a figure for the world of experience.

In the middle of the first act, a freshly enlightened Jack returns from his first trip up the beanstalk and shares these observations with the other fairy-tale characters:

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| When you're way up high | And you scramble down |
| And you look below | And you look below, |
| At the world you left | And the world you know |
| And the things you know, | Begins to grow: |
| Little more than a glance | The roof, the house, and your |
| Is enough to show | Mother at the door. |
| You just how small you are | The roof, the house and the |
| | world you never thought |
| | to explore. |

And you think of all of the things you've seen,
And you wish that you could live in between,
And you're back again,
Only different than before,
After the sky.
There are Giants in the sky! There are big tall terrible
awesome scary
wonderful Giants in the sky!

Giants in the Sky, Into the Woods

Jack compares the points-of-view from above and below, from within and outside of his normative experience. Despite his moments of wonder, he ends feeling small, lost and unsafe. The experience prompts him to action—stealing the giant's gold. As a result, he kills the giant (to save himself) and returns home materially richer than he was before.

Perhaps the very next Shabbat, however, in synagogue, we may open the Torah to Parashah Vayetze and experience the Jewish ontological perspective. Having fled his parents' home in fear for his life, after stealing his brother's birthright, Jacob lies down by the side of the road:

He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. ... Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!" Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven."

Beresbit 28:12-18, italics mine. Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures, (Philadelphia, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society) 1985

Like Jack, Jacob marvels at the awesome beings from the sky. But Jacob's contact threatens no peril; rather, it imparts comfort, context and meaning. While Jack is moved to steal the material wealth of the sky, Jacob extracts a spiritual insight. Returning to the everyday world, Jacob respectfully marks the setting of his dream, as a here-and-now place where God is

invisibly present. Implicit in his response is the realization that as God has been in this place, so will He be in every place Jacob will frequent. Jacob's task will be to preserve this moment's dual perspective, to live in particular places at particular times and remain always aware of God's sacred, invisible existence and eternal time. This moment at Bethel provides us with a paradigm of how we are to live Jewishly in time and place.

The remainder of this discussion focuses on the multiple Jewish perspectives on time, place and person.

Time

Throughout the Torah and the liturgy, we are instructed to live in linear, chronological (historical) time, which is to be neither denied nor devalued. Rather, it is to be consecrated—imbued by each of us, from moment to moment, with an awareness of each holy aspect, created and inhabited by God. The best example of this attitude is Heschel's discussion of the separation between the Shabbat and the rest of the week.

Furthermore, repeatedly throughout the chronological year, we step ritualistically into eternal time—festivals such as Shavuot, Pesach and Rosh Hashanah are the obvious examples. On each occasion, we renew ourselves by entering a particular past moment, coming into contact with God and our ancestors, and bringing that awareness back into our present time. New beginnings emerge continuously. For example, the Jewish year begins at least twice—Nissan and Tishrei—and the Jewish day is measured both from evening to evening (like the creation) and from morning to morning (the daily cycle of prayer).

Place

In Jewish thought, place is a clear subset of time. At each sacred moment, we enter the beginning places. We stand with our ancestors, living what they lived—leaving Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, receiving the Torah—or, at Shabbat, resting with God on the seventh day of the creation.

Celebrating the separation (*ha'mavdil*), we acknowledge that we are meant to inhabit both aspects of time, to travel

back and forth, maintaining the tension between them. Similarly, every place we occupy is sanctified, as Bethel is for Jacob, as we allow ourselves to become aware of God's presence in it.

Person

As we meditate on our dual relationship to time and place, our many simultaneous roles as Jewish adults emerge as well.

We are first our historic selves, unique individuals, responsible for our own self-care and choices. This was told to us at Sinai:

See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish. ... I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—by loving the Lord your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him.

Devarim 30:15-19, *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*,
(Philadelphia, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society) 1985

Simultaneously, however, we are community members, responsible for the maintenance of that community. We are so identified with the community as to hold responsibility for each others' sins, as the High Holy Day liturgy repeatedly reminds us. Additionally, tradition tells us that as we participate in the renewals of sacred time, we are no longer our historic selves, but Jews of another era, walking among the patriarchs, laboring enslaved in Egypt, fleeing, freed, and standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai as Moses delivers the Torah.

Our Jewish task is to maintain these dual relationships—living in both the sacred and the profane, moving back and forth between historical time and timelessness, mundane and holy space, our individual, historic selves and our selves in community now and from the beginning of time. Attempting this task, we are protected and blessed by God. As Samson

Rafael Hirsch concludes in his essay on the Jewish calendar, we spend our lives as an object-lesson of *barukh*; we become a blessing.

Whatever you see and hear, whatever you receive or lose, the benefits you enjoy and the activities in which you indulge, nothing will find you void of thought: everything rouses and admonishes you, and strengthens you in the resolve to be in everything and with everything not only blessed but yourself a blessing, to become a being that in blessing furthers the will of Him Who is all around you ... So will your whole life be spent as an object-lesson of that one word which He spoke to your ancestor, *heyeh barukh*, become a blessing (*Genesis* 12:2).

"The Jewish Calendar," in *Modern Jewish Thought*,
ed. Nahum Glazer, New York: Schocken Books, 1977. Pp. 44-45

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The author wishes to thank Cary Schwartzbach for reminding her of Mircea Eliade's work and its relevance to Jewish thought.

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Jewish Revival on the Silk Road

By
Lesley Weiss

A Synagogue Dedication in Baku

The crowd jostled and pushed to enter the narrow entrance of the new synagogue in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. It was a momentous event: the opening of the first synagogue to be built in Baku in nearly a century. I was there by invitation of the government of Azerbaijan and the Baku Religious Community of European Jews (BRCE).

I was pushed and prodded up the packed stairs to the women's section, where I found a dense crowd of mostly elderly women steadfastly guarding their front-row spots in the balcony overlooking the sanctuary. Below, a crowd of Azeri, Israeli and European men milled about in preparation for the opening speeches.

The synagogue dedication brought together government representatives from Azerbaijan, the United States, Israel, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Poland and China. The ceremony included greetings from the First Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, the Chairman of the Azerbaijan National Committee for Religious Associations, and the heads of the Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities. Jewish representatives included the head of the Baku religious community, President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, from Kazakhstan, and one of Russia's two Chief Rabbis, Rabbi Berel Lazar. Representatives of other Jewish organizations from across the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Europe also attended. As one of only two representatives of an American Jewish organization (NCSJ): Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic State and Eurasia), I was evidently an honored guest. The extent of the honor was brought home to me as we reached the top of the stairs, whereupon Solmaz Yusifova, a community leader, suddenly shrieked in Russian, "*It's Lesley Weiss from*

Washington, D.C.! Move out of the way!" causing the elderly ladies in front to eye us curiously.

Religious Activity Around the Former Soviet Union

Such celebrations have been occurring in cities throughout the FSU, as official atheism is replaced by an upsurge in religious and communal activity. Despite massive aliyah to Israel, 1-1.5 million Jews now live in the region. Russia has the world's fourth-largest Jewish population. Synagogues and schools seized during the Communist period are slowly being returned to their original purpose, cemeteries and Holocaust sites are beginning to be protected, and Jewish children are again learning the faith, language and culture of their Jewish heritage.

However, the Jewish life emerging after 70 years of oppression is fragile, and the communities remain desperately poor. The economic disintegration that followed Communism's demise has left tens of thousands of elderly Jews living in conditions of tremendous poverty and suffering from various degrees of ill health and isolation.

Jewish Revival in Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, the situation is particularly acute. This predominantly Muslim country has a Jewish population estimated at 25,000, concentrated in Baku and in the mountain region of Quba. The community consists of Mountain Jews, Ashkenazim and Georgian Jews. Mountain Jews, comprising nearly 90% of the total Jewish population, claim their ancestors were among the ten tribes exiled from Israel in 722 BCE, who settled in the Caucasus Mountains, then part of Persia. Others claim that their ancestors migrated three centuries ago from what is now Iran and established the Jewish settlement of Evreiskaya Sloboda ("Jewish village") in northeastern Azerbaijan. These Jews were isolated from the Jewish world until Russia annexed Azerbaijan in the 19th century. The remainder of the population is made up of Ashkenazi Jews who arrived with the expansion of the Russian empire, and a smaller community of Georgian Jews.

The Jews of Azerbaijan have historically enjoyed friendly relations with the Muslim majority, primarily Turkic Shiites, and Judaism is officially protected as a “traditional” religion. Azerbaijani-Israeli relations remain strong, and Israel has an embassy in Baku. Jewish relations with other ethnic and religious communities are also generally positive. Azerbaijan’s Jews have not experienced the overt anti-Semitism suffered by Jews in some of the other former Soviet republics. One member of the community told me that anti-Semitic feelings do exist just below the surface, and periodically emerge. But the Azeri population has thus far remained unaffected by the surge of Islamic fundamentalism taking place in some neighboring states.

Jewish Communal Organizations in Azerbaijan

As in other countries of the FSU, Jewish communal organizations in Azerbaijan are in the early stages of development. The vision, energy and commitment are present, but the resources are lacking. The Jewish organizations in Baku are supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and individual donors, primarily Jewish business leaders from Baku. Outside of the major cities, Jewish communities are struggling to maintain their communal services, and life for individual Jews is often desperate.

The Havva welfare center, headed by my colleague at the synagogue opening, the iron-lunged Solmaz Yusifova, provides medical aid and Jewish educational services to single mothers and children. With the country’s high rates of unemployment, many of these women are completely dependent on the social support and financial assistance provided by the center.

Before leaving the capital, I attended a Saturday evening Havdalah service at the Baku Hillel center, where the Azeri Jewish teenagers were curious, above all, to know what it is like to live in the United States and what I thought about Azerbaijan. They proudly led the service for their guests and 20 young Jews.

Jewish and Muslim Communities Coexist Peacefully

In the following days, I traveled to the northern city of Quba and the town of Krasnaya Sloboda (the communists changed the town's name from Evreiskaya Sloboda to the current "red village"). Located in the highlands of northern Azerbaijan, a three-hour drive from Baku, Krasnaya Sloboda is populated almost exclusively by Mountain Jews, the only town in the FSU that is almost entirely Jewish. The town of Quba, located across the river, is entirely Muslim. The two communities coexist peacefully, and the Jewish community has, for the most part, remained distinct.

Two hundred Muslims, 260 Jews, and a handful of Turkish and Russian students attend the state school in Krasnaya Sloboda. Hebrew instruction is offered in the first grade for all students, together with exposure to both the Jewish and Islamic holiday traditions. Both Jewish and non-Jewish students greeted me with, "Shalom." Despite donations from the community, the school is in acute need of renovation. There is no heat, and most of the classrooms are in disrepair. The director lamented the lack of computers and English books. He added that, although lunch is available for students to purchase, many students cannot afford it. Despite the economic difficulties, however, the school is a remarkable example of positive Jewish-Muslim coexistence.

I had an opportunity to witness this cooperation after the school visit. A Muslim leader joined us for lunch. After the cordial meeting, the Muslim and Jewish leaders embraced and expressed good wishes to each other. The Jewish leader was eager to know if I was surprised at the friendliness and warmth expressed between the two groups.

Jewish Needs in the FSU

The Jews of the former Soviet Republics have endured Stalinist purges, the Holocaust, and years of religious persecution under the Soviet regime. Their numbers are drastically reduced from their pre-war levels. Today, however, the American Jewish community has an historic opportunity to foster a

revival of Jewish tradition in these lands. We can connect with Jews who want to learn about Judaism and be part of the world Jewish community.

This Jewish revival needs our encouragement and support. These communities depend on our political support and advocacy and the continued attention of the United States and other Western governments. This means working with local governments to combat anti-Semitism and religious intolerance and to protect the right of Jews to reestablish their communities in safety and security.

Community-level involvement provides an immediate impact. The Jewish population in this region responds enthusiastically and warmly to active partnerships with American Jewish communities. These initiatives provide a wide range of support, such as education, social services, improving health-care, and providing a center for community institutions.

A Personal Statement

Like many American Jews, my family's roots are in the former Soviet Union: but for the events of history, my family and I could be living there, among those in need. One tenet of Judaism is to care for those who need help; another is to ensure the survival of Jewish communal life. After the great losses of the Holocaust, I feel an obligation to take care of the survivors and to enable new generations to know and practice their Jewish heritage.

Lesley Weiss is NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs. She coordinates community education and outreach efforts and promotes partnerships between American Jewish communities and communities in the former Soviet Union.

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