

# THE JEWISH STAR

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**Small crowd,  
big idea**

## Lawrence hosts Chaim Dovid and Que Swing Urbano

By Michael Orbach

In front of the crowd in Lawrence Public High School, Jewish musician Chaim Dovid spoke about the Messiah.

“All the nations will come worship with the Jewish people at the Third Temple” Dovid explained.

If the Messianic visions bothered the few Hispanic and non-Jewish families that were dispersed through the auditorium, they didn't let on. A group of Lawrence High School students whispered and texted to one another in the back row, occasionally whooping along with one of Dovid's songs.

The concert, which featured Dovid and the Latin Meringue band, Que Swing Urbano, was a benefit for the Five Towns One Community Fund, an organization founded by community leaders and board members of the District 15 public school to help poorer members of the Five Towns community and promote a spirit of unity. The sparsely-filled auditorium in the high school seemed to be the greatest endorsement of the organization. Blamed on the blizzard, the timing or bad PR, the event that was meant to showcase the community coming together, instead showed how far apart the community actually is. Downstairs, a large group of Lawrence students watched a wrestling match and

*Continued on page 3*



Photo by Ourit Ben-Haim

## The renegade

### *Kicked out of Shas, Rabbi Chaim Amsellem is on his own*

By Michael Orbach

Rabbi Chaim Amsellem, a member of Israel's Knesset, does not speak English. At a speech he gave on Saturday night at a shul in lower Manhattan, the shul rabbi translated

his words. Though even in translation, the urgency could not be mistaken.

“We cannot have a wooden heart,” Rabbi Amsellem told a receptive audience of around 50 who gathered to hear him on Jan. 8 at Magen David of Union Square.

Rabbi Amsellem was on a brief tour of America after he was kicked out of the Sephardic Shas party for an incendiary interview he gave the Israeli daily Maariv. In the interview, Rabbi Amsellem was highly critical of

*Continued on page 3*

**Shabbat** Candlelighting: 4:33 p.m. **Shabbat ends** 5:37 p.m. **72 minute zman** 6:05 p.m. **Torah Reading** Parshat Beshalach

THE JEWISH STAR



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**Inside**  
**THE JEWISH STAR**

Ask Aviva	6
Classified Ads	10
Kosher Bookworm	5
Letters to the Editor	8
On the Calendar	4
Parsha	8
That's Life	11
The Other Side of the Bench	9

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# Shooting in Arizona, memories of LIRR

By Michael Orbach

The shooting in Arizona on Jan. 8 that left six dead and 14 injured, including Representative Gabrielle Giffords, brought back memories for Rep. Carolyn McCarthy.

"The parallel for whatever reason probably hit my family stronger than some of the other shootings," McCarthy said.

In 1993, Colin Ferguson opened fire on a Long Island Rail Road commuter train. Six people died in the incident, including McCarthy's husband, Dennis. Her son, Kevin, was seriously injured. Frustrated by a lack of gun control laws, McCarthy ran and won the 4th Congressional seat in 1997 and is currently serving her seventh term.

McCarthy said Giffords, who is still in critical condition, is "one of those people you gravitate to."

"She's a very happy person," said McCarthy. "She was just someone who you want to know."

McCarthy said she is working on a law that would ban the sale of large capacity clips, clips that can hold between 15 and 33 bullets.

"I still have a hard time understanding why someone would need the large capacity clip," McCarthy explained. In the worst case scenario, McCarthy said, having fewer bullets give civilians a better chance to survive.

She added that she hopes this will change some of the language used in politics.

"I would like to see Congress and politicians turn down the rhetoric," she said. "That doesn't mean we should not have healthy debate, that's what makes our democracy strong."

Doctors believe that Giffords will recover and McCarthy was looking forward to working with her again.

"There's always hope," McCarthy said. "No one gave my son a chance to live. He lived. You can't give up hope until you know what the final results are yet."

However, she cautioned from personal experience, recovery is a long ordeal.

"Many things can still happen," she said. "We pray and hope that she will come through all this in a speedy recovery. When we say a speedy recovery, it may be several months, it may be a year."



Carolyn McCarthy

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# Rabbi Amsellem is on his own

Continued from page 1

his party and its leadership. Rabbi Amsellem also spoke out against the Israeli rabbinate for making conversions difficult. He also took aim at the proverbial sacred cow of haredi politics: stipends for yeshiva students.

For his remarks, he was heavily criticized by the Shas party and eventually kicked out. Shas party spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadya Yosef demanded he resign. Rabbi Amsellem refused, and some have contended that the now unaffiliated politician is Israel's greatest hope; a moderate haredi voice.

During the speech he said that his comments came from his need to be "truthful to himself."

"I asked myself is it possible for people from Russia, who were persecuted because they were Jewish and now we say they're goyim and they die for the sake of Israel?" He said. "We cannot accept this."

Currently, converting to Judaism inside Israel is an arduous process, especially for the estimated 400,000 Russian immigrants who made Aliyah to Israel since the Soviet Union fell. A bill designed to allow local rabbis to do conversions while giving a final say to the Israeli rabbinate did not make it through the Knesset. A second bill, allowing the military to facilitate conversions, is on hold for six months.

Rabbi Amsellem spent four years researching his book, "Zera Yisrael," Seeds of Israel and came to a conclusion. To illustrate the point of his book, he asked the audience a series of questions about the halachic status of a child born to Jewish and non-Jewish parents.

A child born to Jewish parents?



Photo by Ourit Ben-Haim

Rabbi Chaim Amsellem spoke at Magen Dovid in Manhattan on Jan. 8.

"Jewish," the audience answered.

"Non-Jewish parents?"

"Goy."

"Jewish mother and non-Jewish father?"

"Jewish."

But the case of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, Rabbi Amsellem said, falls into a new category.

"He is a goy from the seed of Israel, then what?"

Unlike other converts who according to Halacha, are supposed to be driven away,

children born to a Jewish father must be "brought closer," Rabbi Amsellem said.

Furthermore, he argued for a more lenient idea of conversion.

"If he accepts the mitzvot, can he fulfill them all?" Rabbi Amsellem asked. "Even tzaddikim don't fulfill all the mitzvot."

Rabbi Amsellem maintained that he had tradition on his side, in the work of early Sephardic rabbinical figures from Turkey and Iran.

From there he segued into his next topic,

forcing the haredi public to get jobs. Currently, 60 percent of haredi men do not work according to Israel's Economic National Council in Jerusalem. Again, Rabbi Amsellem cited tradition.

"All of the rabbis were tradesmen," Rabbi Amsellem said. "Hillel was a woodchopper."

"A father is obligated in Bris, Pidyon and teaching his son a trade... If the father does not, who will teach him?"

Though, he was clear that some should learn, just not everyone.

"There are always goanim," he said. "Who is like the goan of Vilna? Ovadya Yosef, who can be like him? ..."

Jacob Fine, 35, a financial journalist, who said that he liked the idea of a "unifying voice for Israel politics and the Jewish people."

"It sounds like the religious establishment is controlled by the Charadie elements, so he's probably facing an uphill battle," he said.

Another attendee, Yona Gindi, 31, whose husband is Syrian, found the topic interesting.

"When I hear about conversions, they're not accepted into the Syrian community," she said. "For me to sit here and listen to this against the Syrian point of view made me happy."

Her husband, Morris, a commercial photographer, wasn't too sure about Rabbi Amsellem's reception in the Brooklyn Jewish community.

"Brooklyn would throw tomatoes at him," he said.

He concluded his speech by talking about the two different lands of Israel: the land of Bnei Brak and the land of Tel Aviv.

"Israel cannot survive like this," Rabbi Amsellem said.

# Lawrence hosts Chaim Dovid and Que Swing Urbano

Continued from page 1

mulled around the hallways.

Gary Schall, the deputy superintendent of the Lawrence Public School and the former director of music for the schools was open about the poor turnout but was optimistic about the event's consequences.

"It's a small crowd," he said. However, he added, "there are student leadership here that will deliver the message of unity ... This is just the beginning."

"The possibilities are only limited by imagination," said Dr. Asher Mansdorf, a former president and current member of the school board.

The concert was a respite from the normally acrimonious politics that surround the District 15 school board. Chaim Dovid performed first for half an hour with one band member of Que Swing Urbano playing the bonga drums. Afterwards Que Swing Urbana performed a Latin set and the two acts joined together briefly for a third performance.

Blair Spieler of North Woodmere said she felt, "something was happening."

"It's cool to bring people together through music," she said.

Midway through the concert, students from several of the local schools were brought on stage and given an award for community service. One of those students was Yaakov Hawk, a student at Davis Stahler Renov Yeshiva High School for Boys, who runs Philanthropy for the Future, a group that encourages teenagers to volunteer.

While he said he didn't really like Latin music, he thought the idea of the joint concert was a good one.

"It brought together yeshiva students who



Photo by Claudio Papapietro

Chaim Dovid, center, rehearses a song with members of Que Swing Urbano before a concert at Lawrence High School on Jan. 5. Pictured from left are Willie Beato, Fefo Espinal, Henvel Mateo and Brian Gonzalez.

don't know non-Jews," said Hawk. "It gives us an opportunity to see non-Jews."

Brittany Beyer, 17, a senior at Lawrence High School and the president of the school's Key Club, stood outside the event collecting money for a Lawrence graduate who was in-

jured in a car accident.

"It's a lot more than we expected," she said about the crowd.

Several students stressed the work Schall does inside and outside of the school.

"Gary's work is so profound he's trying to

bridge the gap," said Haley Desettie a student at Fashion Institute of Technology.

The crowning moment of the concert came at its end, when Dovid was joined with Que Swing Urbano. Together they sang one of Dovid's trademark songs, "Open up."

# January 13

## Farbrenge

CHABAD OF THE FIVE TOWNS will be holding a Farbrenge Dinner for men and women at the Chabad House at 8:15 p.m. to commemorate the day the late Lubavitch Rebbe assumed leadership of the movement. Farbrenge will be led by Rabbi Yossi Paltiel, Director of Inside Chassidus. For further information & reservations call 516-295-2478 or visit [www.chabad5towns.com](http://www.chabad5towns.com).

# January 15

## Speaker at Beth Shalom

CONGREGATION BETH SHOLOM, located at 390 Broadway in Lawrence, will host Rabbi Saul Berman as a scholar in residence on Shabbat, January 15. Rabbi Berman will speak at 11 a.m. on the topic of "Why do we bless children with Birkat Kohanim?" and at 4:30 p.m. on the topic of "A study in self-definition: the weekday Amidah." Rabbi Berman is on the faculty of Stern College and Columbia Law School. Rabbi Berman has extensively contributed to women's Jewish education, to the role of social ethics in Synagogue life and the understanding of the applicability of Jewish Law to contemporary society.

# January 16

## OU Conference

THE ORTHODOX UNION will be holding its "One Day Conference on Jewish Life" at The Hilton in Woodcliff, New Jersey. The Convention will be divided into three tracks and two plenaries from 10 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. Participants will be able to choose five sessions with presentations by Rabbi Moshe Elefant and Rav Hershel Schachter of the OU; Dr. Shira Weiss, Rebbetzin Yael Weil, Rebbetzin Rookie Billet, Rabbi Dr. Edward Reichman, Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman, Rabbi Dovid Fohrman; OU Chairman of the Board Harvey Blitz with panelists Jerry Silverman and Rabbi Herschel Billet; and Rabbi Shaul Robinson.

The Convention will bring to a close the six-year OU presidency of Stephen J. Savitsky, with the installation of his successor. An announcement will be made prior to the Convention of who will follow Mr. Savitsky as the chief lay leader of the OU. The entire slate of OU Officers and Board members will be elected at the Convention. It will also be the first Convention at which Rabbi Weil is Executive Vice President. Both he and Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, now Executive Vice President, Emeritus, will play leading roles in the programming and learning sessions.

# ON THE Calendar

Submit your shul or organization's events or shiurim to [jscalendar@thejewishstar.com](mailto:jscalendar@thejewishstar.com).  
Deadline is Wednesday of the week prior to publication.



Courtesy of Yeshiva of South Shore

## South Shore at NY State Senate

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (center) Rosh Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore gave the invocation at the Swearing in ceremony of the newly appointed NYS Senate majority leader, Dean Skelos' swearing in ceremony. "The Senator," remarked Rabbi Kamenetzky "always has found a way to find common ground with his constituents. When I asked Dean what could be the common ground of the son of a religious Greek immigrant with the son of an immigrant Lithuanian Rabbi, the Senator quipped back. 'Simple, we are both Orthodox!'" Left to right: Senator Skelos, Rabbi Kamenetzky, Rabbi Dovid Kramer, Exec. Director, Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore

The Convention will conclude with a gala dinner at which the OU's new leadership will be installed.

For further information, including costs, and to register for the Convention, go to [www.ou.org/convention](http://www.ou.org/convention) or Frank Buchweitz, Convention Co-Director, at [frank@ou.org](mailto:frank@ou.org), or 212-613-8188.

# January 19

## Job search

THE FRIEDBERG JCC, located at 15 Neil Court in Oceanside will be holding a panel presentation on "Conducting a Successful Job Search in this Competitive Market" with four certified career coaches. The panel will begin at 10 a.m. and is

free. For more information call 516-634-4010 or via email at [plerner@friedbergjcc.org](mailto:plerner@friedbergjcc.org)

# January 22

## Making Tefillot more meaningful

THE ORTHODOX UNION DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE VAAD HARABANIM OF QUEENS will present "Making Our Tefillot More Meaningful and Personal," a free communal tefillah symposium. It will take place Motzoei Shabbat, January 22 at Congregation Nachlas Yitzchok, 141-39 73rd Avenue, Kew Gardens Hills, starting at 8:30 p.m.

Speakers will be HaRav Noach Isaac Oelbaum, the Rabbi of the congregation; HaRav Mordechai Finkelman, Mashgiach of Yeshiva Ohr Hachaim of Kew Gardens Hills; and Rabbi Moshe Schwerd, Maggid Shiur of the Kew Gardens Hills community.

For more information on tefillah materials and program, contact [community@ou.org](mailto:community@ou.org).

# January 23

## Hatseller and the Monkeys

THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE - A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST, located at 36 Battery Place in New York City, welcomes families for The Hatseller and the Monkeys, a special Tu B'Shevat program for families featuring storytelling, songs, and arts and crafts that celebrate the New Year of Trees.

Following the performance, children are invited for holiday-themed craft activities. This program is for children ages 3 to 10. Tickets are available online at [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org) or by calling the Museum box office at 646.437.4202.

# February 1

## Bereavement group

THE JCC OF THE GREATER FIVE TOWNS is pleased to announce the beginning of a NEW phase I Bereavement Group. The initial stages of grief can be painful and lonely time. You are not alone in those feelings and should not be alone in your grief. If you are coping with the loss of a spouse please join the JCC for support, guidance, information and friendship. This 8-week group will begin on February 1, from 3:00- 4:15pm at Temple Israel, 140 Central Ave, Lawrence. Pre-registration is a must. For more information please call Tara Fried or Rebecca Steinmetz at (516) 569- 6733.

# February 7

## Dinner and comedy for singles

THE ORTHODOX UNION SINGLES CONNECTION will present "An Evening of Dinner and Comedy" featuring actor/singer/comedian Stuart Rappaport, a past recipient of kudos as the "Best Jewish Comedian of New York." He will perform on Monday, February 7 at 7:30 p.m. at Traditions Restaurant & Deli, 302 Central Avenue, Lawrence.

The event is directed to singles 40 and above. Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$36 at the door. RSVP to 212-613-8188.

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## The Kosher Bookworm

# 25 essays in honor of Rabbi Saul Berman

Recently a very special book was issued in honor of a very special man. The book is "Mishpetei Shalom" [YCT/Ktav, 2010], and the man that it honors is Rabbi Dr. Saul Berman, who will be speaking at Beth Sholom in Lawrence this Shabbos.

As to who exactly Rabbi Berman is, well, that would take more than this essay to describe. But one thing is certain, Rabbi Berman is one of the premier Modern Orthodox rabbis in the world today. He is also a very nice guy, a first-rate talmid chochum, theologian and most important of all, teacher.



Alan Jay Gerber

Born over 70 years ago in the Bed-Sty neighborhood in Brooklyn, Rabbi Berman was fortunate to be a student at Yeshiva D'Brooklyn and at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas where he was an early and gifted talmid of Rav Avraham Pam, of blessed memory.

His father, a product of the Slabodka Yeshiva in Lithuania, was a rabbi in Brooklyn for over 40 years. It was his father's example that led him to his career and life's work in the rabbinate.

After graduating high school, Rabbi Berman entered Yeshiva College, earned a B.A. in English and entered the semicha program learning under Rav Paleyeff and Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, both of blessed memory.

In addition to his semicha, Rabbi Berman

also earned a law degree from New York University, and an M.A. in Political Science at Berkley.

To his lasting credit, Rabbi Berman was an early pioneer and supporter of the Soviet Jewry movement at a time when most rabbis shunned participation. I personally witnessed his leadership at the many rallies that were conducted on behalf of our fellow Jews, then held captive under Communist tyranny.

In 1971 Rabbi Berman was appointed chair of the Department of Judaic Studies at Stern College. Under his leadership this department grew into the largest undergraduate Jewish Studies program in the United States. This program and its methodology were to serve as the model for others both here and in Israel.

In 1984 he was appointed to the post of senior rabbi at the Lincoln Square Synagogue, where he served till 1990. Afterward he returned to academic life, serving in numerous positions teaching Jewish law, thought and rabbinical guidance. Currently, he is a Tikvah and Berkowitz Fellow at the Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization at New York University.

The book, a tribute for Rabbi Berman's 70th birthday, is a collection of 25 scholarly essays and Divrei Torah, most written exclusively for this volume by friends and former students. The subject matter ranges the full gamut of Jewish scholarship and learning and exemplifies the finest meaning of Torah U'maddah. To whet your appetite, here are the titles and a brief description of a few essays in the volume.

"The Impact of Biblical Thinking on Criminology" by Professor George P. Fletcher of Columbia University. Given the unfortunate events in Arizona, a good reading of this essay would have great relevance to many of us.

"Orthodoxy, Modern Pluralism, and the Christian Other: Rabbinic Positions and Possibilities," penned by Rabbi Eugene Korn of the Beit Morasha of Jerusalem. This essay can truly serve as vital tool for us to better understand the deep relevance that our tradition has for our Christian neighbors and friends.

Rabbi Alan J. Yuter's contribution is titled, "The Two Contemporary Varieties of Orthodox Judaism." This should be read by every Jewish leader to help them understand the nuances of Orthodoxy and how our difference can unite us.

Other contributors to this work are such academic and rabbinic luminaries as Rabbis Marc Angel, Yaakov Elman, Shlomo Riskin, David Shatz, Michael Broyde, Nathaniel Helfgot and the Honorable Rabbi Dr. Dov S. Zakheim, a former Under Secretary of Defense whose contribution has the intriguing title, "What Happened to the Ten Lost Tribes? An Overview from Biblical Times to the Present." Who better than a former Pentagon official with a rabbinical degree to come up with a solution to this most vexing problem. Go buy this wonderful work to find that out what really did happen to those 10 tribes, and, at the same time help pay tribute to a great Jewish spiritual leader, Rabbi Dr. Saul Berman.

This coming Wednesday, the 14th of Shevat will mark the 29th yahrtzeit of one of the greatest Jewish scholars and educators of our generation, Rabbi Aryeh Eliyahu Moshe ben Shemuel Kaplan, zt"l.

To state openly that he was the greatest rabbi that I ever knew would be an understatement. One of my proudest moments in Jewish organizational life was working together with Reb Aryeh on his first part of what was to become a momentous career in Jewish literature. This project was known at that time, in the mid-1970's, as the five booklets of The Young Israel Intercollegiate Hashkafa Series: "Belief in God," "Free Will and the Purpose of Creation," "The Jew," "Love and the Commandments," and "The Structure of Jewish Law."

These five works, representing some of the finest and clearest interpretations of Jewish theology ever written, can be found today in, "The Aryeh Kaplan Reader: The Gift He Left Behind" [Artsroll, 1983]. It is to this lasting legacy that this book has witnessed numerous reprints since its first print shortly after Rabbi Kaplan's untimely passing at the age of 48. The book can be purchased at just about any Jewish bookstore.

This year will mark the beginning of preparations here on the South Shore to commemorate Rav Kaplan's life work on the occasion of his 30th yahrtzeit. I am certain that this commemorative will surely help to enhance his legacy and the vital messages and literary gifts that he left behind for all of us to treasure.

T'hei Nishmato V'zichro Baruch.



Photo: Getty Images

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## Ask Aviva

# Stop bullying my granddaughter!

**Dear Aviva,**

My granddaughter is in 3rd grade and is being bullied by Chani, a neighbor of hers. I have personally witnessed it and it is clear that my granddaughter, Tzippi, is not at fault. Thankfully, this bully is not in class with Tzippi, but they are on the same bus. Tzippi is teased mercilessly and it breaks my heart. My daughter has contacted the school, but I think that she should be calling Chani's mother. My daughter says that it's not worth it, but I think that it's the only way to see a change. I was wondering where you would stand with this matter. Your advice is much appreciated.

— *Bubby Against Bullies*

**Dear Bubby Against Bullies,**

I would hate to have to tangle with those ruthless Bubbies who are actually pro-bullies. Ouch! I'm glad you're on the right side of the fence here. But let's make sure that you are fully against bullies. If you don't mind, I would like to ask some tangential questions before addressing the meat of the Tzippi/Chani issue. How often do you talk to your daughter about the bullying? Who brings it up, you or her? And how is it brought up? What is your body language when you are talking? Are there raised voices? Any name-calling or threats?

You can guess what I'm getting at: Is it, per chance, possible for you to be engaging in bully behavior with your daughter? Does your daughter seem to bristle whenever you bring up Chani? Does she try to end the conversation? I don't mean to imply that this is actually the case with you. However it would benefit you, your daughter and granddaughter to see if this bully label resonates with you. If it does, then you need to step back and let your progeny muscle up when they feel ready. I know how you feel though. Therapists are often in a situation like this when they counsel victims of abuse. On the one hand, I want to grab that person and get them out of the danger zone. On the other hand, if I am the one who aggressively "helps" the victim, I am merely mimicking the abuser. I, too, am controlling the victim. The victim will not learn any lessons or build up resistance and strength if I am the one swooping in and fixing everything. In fact, if I were to play superhero and orchestrate some dramatic hostage break, I will likely be needed to save this victim again once some other abuser pounces. Instead, as a therapist, I have to bite my tongue (unless the victim is a child or is in clear and present danger) and I have to wait. I wait until the situation becomes too intolerable for the victim, until the victim is motivated to change the rules of this game. Then, I am there to assist the victim. But it is the victim who is in the driver seat here. And with this formula, the victim is less likely to be a victim again. Empowering the victim is all the rage these days.

Yes, it is not the best analogy here because the victim that you are dealing with is a child. But, it is not directly your responsibility. The only way that it would be ok for you to take the reins is if your daughter is incapable of handling the situation. It sounds like she is involved — she contacted the school. It is also possible that she knows something and doesn't want to tell you. She may be privy to some personal detail that's going on with Chani's family, which would explain why Chani is acting out.

But that doesn't mean that Chani is off the hook. Bullying is a serious matter. Sometimes

victims of bullying can withdraw and become depressed. Look out for sullen signs and mood changes. A depressed pre-pubescent can be of equal danger to him/herself as a depressed adult. If you see signs, calmly alert your daughter and let your daughter decide how she wants to proceed.

If you want to help Tzippi, I recommend praising her and letting her make her own choices (by letting her choose which headband she should wear or which flavor ice cream to buy). Then compliment her choice.

If you want to go all out, cultivate one of her interests or talents. Buy her a journal if she likes to write. Teach her some drawing techniques if she is a doodler. It doesn't matter if you think she's good at these things. It just matters if she is interested in the area. This method may not seem like it has anything to do with the bully issue, but it actually can directly mitigate the problem. You will be giving her a booster shot of confidence. And confidence to a bully is like garlic to a vampire. So do everyone a favor and start baking

garlic bread with your granddaughter. And don't forget to praise the heck out of her egg-cracking skills.

—Aviva

*Aviva Rizel is a Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice who can be reached at AvivaRizel.MFT@gmail.com.*

ב"ט



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# Opinion

## Parshat Beshalach

# Elevating Religiosity

Every time I hear a chillul Hashem story involving so-called religious Jews going to prison, I contemplate what the term “religious” means. I will not be one to say that people are perfect and don’t make mistakes. And perhaps, some people are in the wrong place in the wrong time, and are drawn in for the unfortunate ride.

And, of course, there’s always room for teshuva.

But when the media refers to a person, going to or already in prison, as “a religious Jew,” who demands kosher food, and the need to have a minyan, or to attend his son’s bar-mitzvah or his grandson’s bris, I can’t help thinking that there’s something very very wrong with this picture. While in oppressive regimes and anti-Semitic cultures it was common for a Jew to be put in prison under false pretenses, in the United States it is extremely difficult to present such an argument.

And so I arrive at the conclusion that these are not really religious Jews, because a religious Jew is supposed to live a life that will never end with him in prison.



Rabbi Avi Billet

Perhaps the flaw lies in the fact that a rote and systematic form of “religious practice” does not speak for the soul of the human being, does not answer for how a person feels, and how his Jewish practices are supposed to enter his heart.

This is an extremely important lesson that the Israelites learn in the events leading up to the splitting of the sea.

The Torah tells us that “As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites saw the Egyptians marching at their rear, and they became very frightened (“Va’yi’r’oo me’od”). The Israelites cried out to God.” (14:10) The source of their fear is the Egyptian army, which causes them to cry out.

Moshe rebukes and encourages the people, and then splits the sea. When the Israelites cross the sea the Egyptians follow them and the Egyptians finally recognize G-d and as the walls of water come tumbling down upon them.

Then the Torah tells us the words that have become so familiar because they are part of the Shacharit service. As the Egyptians lay dead at the seashore, “The Israelites saw the great power that G-d had unleashed against Egypt, and the people were in awe of G-d (“Va’yi’r’oo ha’am et Hashem”). They believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe” (14:31). The Hebrew word for “fear” in 14:10 is the same Hebrew word for “awe” in 14:31.

## Religion is not a checklist. The Torah we study, the acts we perform and the faith we have are meant to mold our character.

The problem the people faced initially was that while they were ready to cry to G-d when things seemed not to go their way, their fear was misplaced. They feared Egypt, when they were supposed to fear, revere and stand in awe of G-d.

Only after they witnessed the miracle of their physical salvation were they able to recognize that their fear, until that moment, had focused on the wrong object.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes “Fear and belief are the two basic qualities that are always to pulsate in the heart of the Jew who stands before G-d. There is only one Being Whom we should fear and trust at the same time, and that is G-d, the one sole G-d, Who is as loving as He is just, as just as He is loving, and equally omnipotent in the exercise of His love and justice... Just as this moment attests to God’s hand acting omnipotently with mercy and with justice, so, too, it is everlasting testimony to the authenticity of the mission of His servant Moshe.”

Moshe was and remains our guide to living and leading a proper life. Fear of God is essential, while fear of the Egyptians is wrongly focused. Perhaps the only good quality of fearing Egypt is that it caused our ancestors to show how “frum” they were — to cry out to God.

If fear of authorities will cause our co-religionists to live lives that are only “Kiddush Hashems” (sanctifications of G-d’s name), perhaps it would be good enough. Sadly, and too often, it is not enough of a deterrent to prevent illegal activities.

This is why we need to take the fear of G-d to a new level. We will not likely witness miracles of the nature of the splitting of the sea. But like the people who believed in Moshe, G-d’s servant, we too can reopen the five books of Moshe, learn from our master teacher, and arrive at the kind of fear of G-d that gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Religion is not a checklist. The Torah we study, the acts we perform, and ultimately the faith we have, are meant to mold our character and teach us how to be model, law-abiding human beings.

## Letters to the editor

### Banning the ban

To the Editor:

I had never heard of “Vos Iz Neias” (living as I do in Israel) but the instant I read that it had been banned by the self appointed “gedoilim” (“The truth about the ban”; January, 7, 2010), I added it to my email list.

I have no idea whether I will enjoy it. I have no idea whether it will anger me. I have no idea whether I will applaud or disregard any or every item they publish.

But I do have a simple idea and a simple concept. No self styled “godol” is going to dictate to me what I can read or what I can think. I am responsible for myself and if I err — it is because I have erred.

My children and grandchildren (boys AND girls) served — are serving — and will serve in the Israel Army — defending our nation (including the “gedoilim” that live in my country). Those kids are the gedolim.

Jay A Friedman  
Ra’anana, Israel  
(formerly of Far Rockaway)

### Saying what needed to be said

To the Editor,

I would like to commend the Jewish Star for publishing both their original article regarding the Rubashkin rally (“Shining a light on Iowa”; December 31, 2010), and even more so, the editorial “About Rubashkin” in the Jan. 7 issue. You have stated eloquently what needed to be said, namely that although the community is united in support of an appeal for Rubashkin for the unduly harsh sentence and improprieties at the trial, many of us are troubled by the “deification of Rubashkin” that has been going on for some time now, particularly as portrayed in the Yated Neeman. Rubashkin may have done many kind things, but he did knowingly break the law and cause a huge Chillul Hashem that has caused great harm to Orthodoxy in general and the reputation of Kosher supervision standards in particular. He deserves to pay a price for his actions, much as any other lawbreaker. Some of the ads that have come

out in support of him have, frankly, nauseated me, such as the full color ad that ran for a few weeks encouraging people to give to his defense fund while citing verses in the Torah in which the Israelites were asked to give to the building of the sanctuary. I found that perverse and sickening, and sending the worst message to our co-religionists, in that a comparison could be drawn between the holy duty of donating to the Mishkan and defunding a convicted lawbreaker.

It further troubles me that all this effort is being expended for Rubashkin, with no similar level of action from our community in support of an appeal for Jonathan Pollard, who is at least as worthy of our support and help at this time — a time when all the political mavens say is an especially auspicious one given the official support (finally) of the State of Israel for his appeal.

Thank you for helping to inject a note of sanity and propriety in this painful episode. I join with you in the hope that Rubashkin’s appeal will be successful, and his sentence reduced to what is fair and reasonable.

Rabbi Yehuda L. Oppenheimer  
The writer is the rabbi of the Young Israel of Forest Hills.  
This letter does not represent the shul’s official position.

### Unfair about Rubashkin

To the Editor:

Your Jan. 7 editorial “About Rubashkin” lacked any real credibility not by what you said, but by what you did not say.

In summarizing the case, you completely left out the fact that the judge — who imposed the 27-year sentence that you agreed was ridiculously severe — worked closely with the prosecution leading up to the trial. It could be debatable whether this is an example of anti-Semitism, but there is no question that it means the trial was not even close to being fair and impartial.

It was as defective as your editorial.

David J. Glenn  
Brooklyn

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### Correction

An advertisement that was featured in last week’s issue of the The Jewish Star inadvertently upset readers. We apologize.



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## Intervening before it's too late

**W**hat a week. We transition from Ted Williams to the shooting in Tuscon, Arizona. For those of you who missed it, Ted Williams is, or should I say was, a homeless unemployed former radio station employee who had hit rock bottom. Drugs and alcohol had taken over his life and he spent his days panhandling on the streets of my hometown, Columbus, Ohio.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BENCH



David Seidemann

He carried a sign which boasted of a gift he had from G-d, a magical voice tailor-made for TV and radio. A passing motorist who just happened to work for the local paper, the Columbus Dispatch, gave Ted a few dollars and asked to hear his voice. Within a day the Youtube video went viral. Ted was flown to New York, appeared on "The Today Show," "The Jimmy Fallon Show" and was flooded with new job offers.

Over 11 million people have seen the video and heard his voice.

Hard knocks turned into firm offers including a job with Kraft Cheese and the Cleve-

land Cavaliers. If you want to cry, google his interviews with "The Today Show" staff. If you want to ball uncontrollably, view the video of him reuniting with his mother who he hasn't seen in 20 years. She is in her 90s and they wept as they embraced.

There are so many potential heroes in that story: Ted, his mother, those that offered him employment or the driver who passed by and gave Ted two dollars and videotaped him. This is one of the all-time greatest feel-good stories I've ever heard.

Fast forward a few days. Six dead, 14 injured in one of the all-time feel-bad stories in recent memory.

Two troubled individuals: Ted Williams and Jared Lee Loughner. The warning signs were there years ago for both of them. One was able to extricate himself from destroying himself before it was too late, the other couldn't be reached before he destroyed countless lives.

Problems rarely pop up overnight. Troubled adults usually start off as troubled adolescents or children. We are not all trained professionals but certain indications, certain trends, certain behaviors should raise our antennas and demand some sort of intervention or response.

And so it pains me to a degree to share the following, but I feel it necessary so perhaps intervention can take place.

A few weeks ago I attended a meeting

with 25 clergy members from the greater New York area. I was speaking about the increase in domestic violence among certain religious sects. All but one agreed that it was a growing problem that needed to be addressed.

"Abuse shmabuse," the man said. "Just like modesty differs from one community to another so does the definition of abuse."

Those were his words. An immediate intervention took place as thankfully every other clergy member in the room shouted him down. Makes you wonder what he witnessed in his home growing up or what takes place in his home now.

Story number two, again true and painful. A recently divorced woman who was a victim of domestic violence was a guest at someone's home for lunch. As the meat was being passed around the table, the 14-year-old son of the host family remarked, apropos of nothing, that he can understand why sometime a husband would hit his wife.

The guest froze in her seat, the lady of the house ran into the kitchen and cried, and the husband, the father, asked his son to pass the soda. I heard this episode from the divorced woman herself.

That 14 year-old child and his father need an intervention. All the signs exist: there is a disconnect between socially accepted behavior and a problem that might explode in more than one household today, tomorrow

and into the future.

What did this father, who by the way is a teacher, what did he witness in his home growing up? What is going on in the home that he leads now? What will transpire in the home of the 14-year-old boy when he marries and has a wife?

The Arizona shooter told one of his friends a while back that he wanted to see the world burn. Years ago he was singled out as a troubled boy who needed mental health intervention. There is no record that he was afforded any such help before his world went up in flames.

Ted Williams told himself and his friends that maybe, just maybe, "Today" would be the day that he can turn his life around. Williams was waiting to reunite with his mother until the time he could make her proud. He has taken that step.

We all know people headed in a different direction and we see the signs years before the problems become unmanageable. Moments in time like this give us great pause to direct proper intervention to those who need it the most.

David Seidemann is a partner with the law firm of Seidemann & Mermelstein. He can be reached at (718) 692-1013 and at ds@lawofficesm.com

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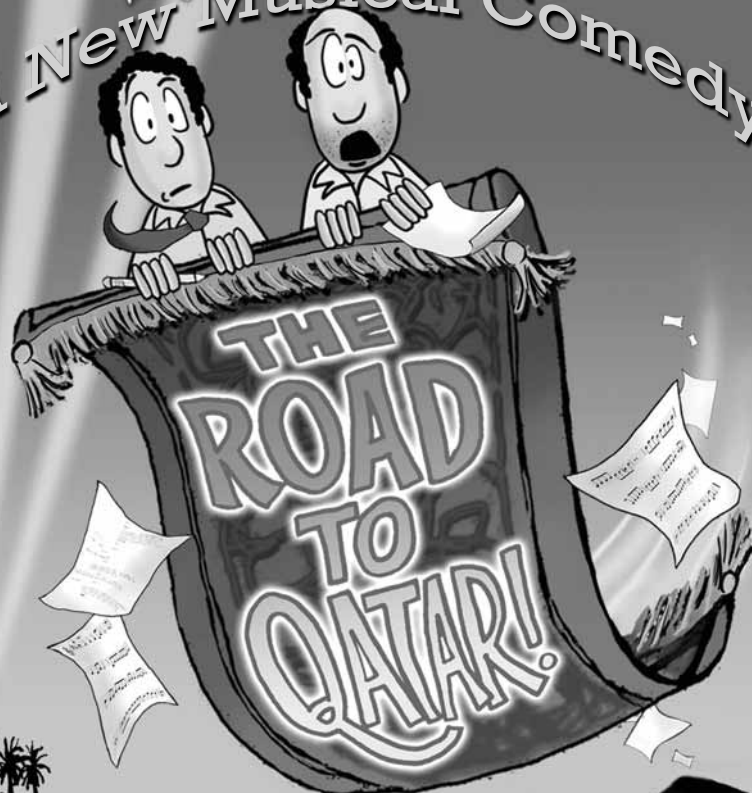
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# That's life

Edited by Miriam L. Wallach

## Dear That's Life,

There are a number of different conveniences that help us through our everyday lives. Some come at an extra cost and some are free of charge. There are multiple dry cleaners who will pick-up and deliver to your door. Some restaurants and businesses in the area will bring your order out to your car so there is no need to find parking. That's besides the stores that already deliver to your home or the supermarkets that take your order by email and then, as if there were Grocery Fairies, bring the boxes to your home. Either way, these numerous conveniences not only give one business a leg up on each other but they also curry favor with the many people who do not like to leave their cars.

We are all busy and some of these conveniences tend to become necessities. On the other hand, sometimes you have to wonder just how lazy/spoiled/entitled we have become. Someone in retail once told me that there is a customer for everything. I'm not sure who is looking for the "gourmet kishke" I saw in the supermarket the other day, which, on some level was a concept I even found seriously disturbing and partially oxymoronical. I do, however, completely appreciate the newspaper deliveryman and, if I wake up Shabbat morning so early that my paper has not yet even arrived, I long for his arrival.

I have very limited understanding, however, of the cash-only businesses. That means greenbacks and silver — nothing else. Forget that you cannot pay with credit cards, you cannot even pay by check. I have stopped doing business with establishments that do not offer such conveniences to their customers, and the fact that I never have cash on me unless I find a \$5 bill in my skirt pocket is beside the point. In reality, the acceptance of a credit card or a personal check as a means of payment should not even be considered a convenience but rather, the cost of doing business. If a cup of coffee or school tuition can be paid for with an Amex, then buying a pie of pizza with plastic should not be that difficult. It is 2011. At some point, I'll be able to pay for my shoe repair with PayPal. Mark my words — we'll get there. Until then, I will enjoy the other conveniences that the world provides.

There are other forms of customer service that I find very valuable. Sometimes just be-

ing ignored when you enter a store is enough to say "Thanks." New Yorkers do not want to be hounded. Often the attitude is, "If I need help, I'll ask for it, but otherwise, please leave me alone." Many stores appreciate that and advise their associates to be hands off until they need to be hands on. Ever go shopping out of town? You could suffocate from their niceness and helpfulness. It is a fine balance, however, because if I finally am going to ask for your help, I will expect you to be nice about it — not annoyed that you have to help me. There's a real difference between the stores whose associate tells you in which aisle the item you're looking can be found and the associate who actually brings you to the aisle and helps you find the item on the shelf. It is the little things that count.

Few things make me feel like I belong in a trailer park than walking out of a liquor store holding a brown paper bag. The bag could have the most expensive bottle of champagne in it but it does not matter — I have that bag in my hand, and I might as well be married to a man who has a heart tattoo that says "MOM." The feeling was even worse when I was pregnant, as if people were staring at me and judging me for the alcohol I must have been consuming while, of course, I was not. Even now, it makes me feel weird. When I left the store the other day with a bottle of tequila — for cooking, not drinking — I could only imagine the stares I was getting as I walked to my car when, in reality, no one was watching, no one cared and nothing I was doing was illegal.

I came home and put my bag on the counter. My daughter decided to help me unpack and took the bottle out. "Tequila?" she asked, inquisitively. I explained I needed it to cook with which was the truth. She then took out something else from the bag — a calendar the store had included with my purchase, free of charge. Looking over the calendar and some of the information that the store provided, she found something interesting.

"Look!" She said. "They deliver!" Not really paying attention to her, I perked up when she added, "Having tequila delivered to your home — now that could come in handy."

Very funny, I thought. It just might come in very handy after all.

MLW



Courtesy HAFTR

## Haftr helps fire victims in Israel

HAFTR seniors Elianna Kaufman and Mikhayla Bibi baked and sold over 60 challahs and together with donations from the local community, raised \$1,275 for victims of the Carmel fire. The money will go to the Jewish National Fund, Rambam Medical Center and Yemin Orde, the orphanage that was burnt down in the fire.

From left to right: Rabbi Gedaliah Oppen, principal of Judaic Studies at HAFTR High School; Elianna Kaufman, Mikhayla Bibi and Ms. Naomi Lippman principal of general studies at HAFTR High School.



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