

THE JEWISH STAR

Independent and original reporting from the Orthodox communities of Long Island

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IN MY VIEW

Sailor's role in the birth of Israel

BY DR. RAFAEL MEDOFF

His neighbors don't know it, but on the quiet, palm tree-lined streets of Port Saint Lucie, the Mets spring training headquarters on the South Florida coast, lives an unsung hero of the fight for Israeli independence.

Jeno Berkovits, 90, was one of the gutsy American veterans of World War II who, instead of taking a well-deserved rest after returning from the war against Hitler, chose to sign up for a tour of duty in another war. He is among the dwindling group of American veterans of the battle to create Israel. On the eve of Israel's 61st birthday, he agreed to his first-ever interview about those days.

Berkovits came to the United States from Hungary with his family in 1930. They settled in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, and Berkovits attended the Boys & Girls High School of Brooklyn. Lena Horne was a classmate; Isaac Asimov was one year behind them. "But what happened to a lot of boys in those days happened to me too," he recalls. "My family needed me to help make ends meet, so I dropped out of school and went to work alongside my father in a factory making neckties."

When America entered World War Two, Berkovits became a Merchant Marine. He spent the next five years on ships in various locales from the California coast to the Caribbean to Europe. The world war finally ended, but in British Mandatory Palestine a Jewish war raged. Home for less than a year when "I read in the newspaper one morning that a group called the American League for a Free Palestine was looking for sailors," Berkovits says. "They wanted us to help bring Holocaust survivors to Palestine. How could I not go?"

The League, better known as the Bergson Group, was a political action committee that used full-page newspaper ads, rallies, and lobbying in Washington to mobilize support for creating a Jewish state. Now the



The S.S. Ben Hecht, packed with Holocaust survivors, as it left Port de Buc, France.

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Dr. Medoff is director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies and author of *Blowing the Whistle on Genocide: Josiah E. Dubois, Jr. and the Struggle for a U.S. Response to the Holocaust*.

Understanding the past

March of the Living hits a raw note



Photo by Yossi Selinger

March of the Living participants walk along railroad tracks inside Birkenau death camp in Oswiecim, Poland.

BY RACHEL BLADY

I knew three things when I departed for Poland. I knew that all four of my grandparents are Holocaust survivors. I knew that I knew barely anything at all. And I knew that I wanted to know everything.

It is difficult to describe the feeling of knowing how important something is, but not absorbing the power of it. Arriving in Poland for the March of the Living was like returning to the place I would have called home. The nostalgia was not quite there, but the personal significance of the place made the trip worthwhile. I spoke to my grandpa twice while in Poland. Hearing him ask me, "How is my homeland?" made me realize that were it not for the Holocaust, I might just as easily have been the

one to say that.

I was shocked to go from Auschwitz 1 to Birkenau to Majdanek with barely any emotion, only breaking down into tears in my cousin's arms in Majdanek out of frustration about not knowing anything about what our shared grandparents had been through. It seemed that the trip would not touch me unless I knew exactly how to relate to what had happened. Unfortunately, my grandparents have refused to discuss and rarely acknowledge what they went through. Perhaps all of the Holocaust education I have received — the speakers, the stories, the movies, museums, statistics — had taken up all of the tears and left me raw.

Several days later it finally hit me, after all of the concentration camps and memorials, while taking a

tour of the Warsaw ghetto. We had been told that the city was completely destroyed during the war, with very little left to see that was of Jewish significance. Our tour guide showed us an apartment building that was home to many Jews during the time of the ghetto. We walked into the courtyard of the building, surrounded on four sides by the windows of Polish residents.

After standing in this courtyard for about five minutes, witnessing life going on normally as people walked into their apartments and dogs barked out of windows, we were surprised to hear some music. A catchy song was being played in one of the apartments, and the volume was slowly being raised. It was not until we were all

See UNDERSTANDING, Page 3

Read about Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut in local yeshivot — online at www.thejewishstar.com

Swine flu spreads worry but low risk

BY MALKA EISENBERG

If you haven't had the flu vaccine yet this year, don't bother on account of the Swine flu.

"It's too late to get the vaccine for the flu and the current vaccine would not give any benefit against Swine flu," said Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt, a spokesman for the Infectious Diseases Society of America and president and CEO of New Island Hospital in Bethpage, LL.

"The good news is that it's very sensitive to the treatments that work against it. The regular influenza that came out was resistant to Tamiflu; this is not resistant to Tamiflu and there is enough available."

Symptoms are standard for flu: fever, fatigue, aches, cough, sore throat, chills, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Precautions include avoiding areas and those infected, covering one's mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, discarding used tissues, washing hands thoroughly or properly using hand sanitizers, and staying home if you do not feel well.

"There is no need to panic," Dr. Glatt stressed. People "should be aware of the potential risk" and, if sick, stay home from work or school to avoid transmitting the disease to others. If the person is sick enough "he or she should see a physician."

"It's not necessary to wear masks, not shake hands and avoid gathering in public places," he said. "There is no reason not to go to shul or school."

In Mexico more than 150 people had died in the Swine flu outbreak as of Tuesday afternoon; dozens have been sickened in the United States.

See SWINE FLU, Page 6



Shua Brick of West Hempstead (far left) traveled to Israel with nine fellow MTA sophomores as part of a unique student exchange program.

Trading places

MTA students on exchange program in Israel

BY YAFFI SPODEK

A select group of MTA students visited Israel for two months this year as part of the inaugural Yeshiva University High School for Boys (YUHSB) - Makor Chaim Exchange program.

"Even now that I have returned, I still cannot believe I went," said Shua Brick of West Hemp-

stead, one of the participants. "Foreign exchange programs seem to only exist in movies, a distant concept that does not occur in real life."

Exchange we can believe in
First person account
page 3

Thanks to the vision of MTA Head of School Rabbi Mark Gottlieb, and the program's director, Mrs. Tova Rosenberg, the concept became a reality on Rosh Chodesh

Shvat, Jan. 26, when 10 MTA sophomores traveled to Israel.

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Shabbat

Candlelighting: 7:33 p.m. ■ Shabbat ends 8:37 p.m.
Torah reading: Parshiot Acharei Mot- Kedoshim

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That's Life

Edited by Miriam L. Wallach

Dear That's Life,

Night and Day:
A recent article in the New York Times Magazine recounted the abuse one Washington Post

columnist consistently takes on the paper's web site by people who post responses but do not sign their names. Because of the loose manner in which posters can record their disdain or

approval of something printed in the paper and because people do not have to sign their names to what they've written, people write whatever they want.

There is a real ownership of one's words when you sign your name to something. Accountability, pride, 'owning up,' responsibility or however you might like to term it, this paper will not print a letter without confirming the writer. Anonymous letters are not printed and e-mail addresses are not enough. If you have something to say, we would love to hear from you — but sign what you write. We always do.

A response posted on line to my story about the incident in the "luxury item" store ridiculed my behavior and said that I was the

one with the problem and not the store. The letter was not signed. A different letter said that I should be embarrassed by how I acted and called me a name. That was signed, although the writer declined to have it printed. Kudos to him for having the guts to put his name to paper.

The issue with my experience in that store was not that I had to wait — it was that there was no accountability by someone else for his behavior; no remorse or even regret. That was the problem. I sign my name every week and account for the things I do and say and just appreciate when others do the same.

Those who believe I overreacted or missed the point by thinking that the essence of the story was that I do not like to be kept waiting, may appreciate this incident instead:

Treating myself to a manicure and pedicure, I made a Friday appointment. Being moved from the waiting/sitting area in a manicure place to a pedicure chair with running water is like being moved from the waiting area in a doctor's office to an exam room. You know you're closer to being seen. But when the water is running and there is no

one there to meet you at the chair, you know the file is being put on the door of the room but the doctor will not be there any time soon.

The store was very busy and when my appointment finally began 30 minutes later, I no longer had time for both the manicure and the pedicure. I told them I changed my mind about the manicure because of the time; I had given myself an hour for my treat but my time was almost up: Shabbos was coming. The owner was informed and he asked me if I was sure that I could not stay any longer but I said I could not — too much to do at home and the sun was setting.

"Miriam," he said, "I am so sorry — we just got backed up." Really appreciating his response, I told him it was fine. "Can you come tomorrow?" he asked. "We are open tomorrow." Smiling, I shook my head that in fact, I could not come the next day. But before I left, he apologized again — a sincere apology. Not being able to believe the difference between my two experiences in the last couple of weeks, and really appreciating the difference between them, I looked at him and said, "Not to worry. I'll see you next week instead."

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- Engagement of Nechi Kleinbart (Brooklyn, NY) & Binyomin Whitman (Lakewood, NJ) — April 20, 2009
- Engagement of Mindy Adler (Gateshead, U.K.) & Simchi Jakobowitz (London, U.K.) — April 19, 2009
- Engagement of Rachel Catallo

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IN THE JEWISH STAR

- (Seattle, WA) & Joshua Russak (Seattle, WA) — April 19, 2009
- Engagement of Michelle Feintuch (Great Neck, NY) & Shimmy Klein (Woodmere, NY) — April 18, 2009
- Engagement of Shoshana Seif (Lawrence, NY) & Ari Nissim (Morris Plains, NJ) — April 18, 2009

Bris

- Bris of Jacob (Akiva Ori) to Yael (Hefetz) & Dovi Greenberger (Kew Gardens Hills, NY) — April 22, 2009

Births

- Birth of Baby Girl to Chavie (Roth) and Aryeh Dachs (Bayswater, NY) — April 18, 2009



Michelle Feintuch & Shimmy Klein



Rachel Catallo & Joshua Russak

To view entire galleries, please visit www.onlysimchas.com

IN MY VIEW

Continued from Page One

League was opening a new chapter in its battle. In late 1946, it had purchased a 150-foot yacht that it named the S.S. Ben Hecht in honor of the journalist and screenwriter who was one of the Bergson Group's leading members, and began outfitting it in Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal.

"They interviewed me in their office in Manhattan, and soon afterward called to tell me I was accepted to join the crew," Berkovits recalls. "Officially I was listed as a Messman, someone who serves food, but in practice almost everyone in the crew had to do all kinds of things."

On December 26, 1946, the Ben Hecht sailed for France with a remarkably diverse crew of volunteers. "We had 20 men, with 20 different reasons for joining up," Captain Robert Levitan said later. One was Walter "Heavy" Greaves, a beefy, tattooed professional sailor who survived three torpedo attacks during World War II. Shaken by a postwar visit to a Displaced Persons camp, Greaves took note when he read "that the Jews wanted a state of their own." He thought to himself, "Why not, goddamit?" and signed up for the S.S. Ben Hecht.

Another was Walter Cushenberry, a tall African-American in his thirties, with whom Berkovits became particularly friendly. "As a black man, he knew what it was like to be kicked around, and he didn't like seeing the Jews get kicked around," Berkovits said. "We had a crew member who was Irish Catholic and hated the British. We had a Jewish crewman who was religious and put on tefillin every day, and there were

others, like me, who weren't so religious but just wanted to help the Jewish cause."

There were also two young Norwegians, Haakom Lilliby and Erling Sorensen. "They didn't speak much English and nobody knew quite why they were there," Berkovits says, "but when the engines broke down, they worked 24 hours straight to get us going again."

In Port de Buc, France, the ship took on six hundred Jewish refugees. Conditions on board were difficult, but food was never in short supply, thanks to the two thousand pounds of kosher salami donated by a Bergson Group supporter. "It seems to me that we had salami sandwiches every single meal," according to Berkovits. "But nobody complained."

On March 8, everything changed. "That afternoon, I happened to be stationed on deck, at the steering wheel," Berkovits relates. "I still remember how good it felt — how the air smelled different as we got close to Eretz Yisrael. We were less than 10 miles from the coast of Tel Aviv, when three British destroyers approached and a British patrol plane circled overhead. I grabbed this flag, it had a big Jewish star on it, and hoisted it up the mast to show them that we were proud to be Jews fighting for our land."

British soldiers wearing red berets — "we called them 'red devils'" — jumped aboard. They shoved Berkovits aside and quickly took control of the ship. The crew and the passengers were brought to a detention camp in Cyprus where they would end up staying for more than a year, until after Israel's creation in May 1948.

Dealing with the American crewmen was a more delicate question. While the British government weighed what to do with

them, the Americans were taken to the Acre Prison fortress, where they were jailed alongside members of the Irgun Zvai Leumi and Lehi (Stern Group) underground militias. The British authorities would soon regret that. The Irgun men had been planning a break-out, and only one obstacle remained: how to take photographs of the would-be escapees in order to make false identity cards so they could get past British roadblocks. Captain Levitan who had smuggled a small camera into the prison solved that problem.

To London's dismay, the detention of the Ben Hecht crewmen became a lightning rod for criticism from members of Congress, the American press, and the U.S. Jewish community. After holding the seamen for a month, the British decided they were more trouble than they were worth, and put them on a ship bound for New York.

But even after returning home Berkovits and his colleagues continued to make trouble for the British. As a result of the contacts he made with the Jewish underground members in Acre, Berkovits and fellow crewman Harry Herschkowitz established an "American Friends of Lehi" organization. Operating out of a small office in Manhattan, they raised funds and published a newspaper called "Freedom" which sought to rally public support for ousting the British from Palestine.

Today, Berkovits, one of three surviving members of the Ben Hecht crew, recalls the events of 1946-1947 with satisfaction. "I am proud of the small role that I played in what happened back then," he says. "We did what we could, and we did the right thing."

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Celebrating our 10th Year!

Exchange we can believe in

A local participant reflects on his experience

BY SHUA BRICK

The unique Makor Chaim experience started immediately on the first day, Rosh Chodesh Shvat, when Hallel is said. The Hallel at Makor Chaim is unlike anything that I have ever seen. It is done with instrumental accompaniment, and every paragraph is followed by breaks for dancing. The guitar seemed out of place around the neck of the shliach tzibur (the leader of the service), but when the bongo came out, the 10 Americans immediately knew that this trip would be interesting.

This is only one example of several incidents that would never happen in most modern, Jewish high schools. The Israeli students have a love for their religion. There is no dress code, nor anything close to a Dean of Discipline. The Makor Chaim students have a great amount of freedom which they use to strive to get closer to G-d. They sing Hallel not because they are forced to or because it is routine but because they want to. And they enjoy it.

They have such a love for things we take for granted, and they have worked hard for it too. Last year, only two weeks before the attack on Mercaz HaRav, they had their own terrorist scare. Two terrorists breached the school's security dressed as security personnel. Luckily, the room they decided to attack was where the armed staff members were, and not the weakly defended Study Hall where all the children were gathered that Thursday night for the weekly mishmar learning program. There were only minor injuries among the staff which quickly healed, though you can never heal the sense of fear that these attacks cause.

The most important philosophy that we learned in Makor Chaim, which fuels their pas-

sion for Torah and religion, is Beli Tzinyot, without mockery, shortened to Blit"z. The unique social contract of Blit"z is what allows the Makor Chaim students to observe Judaism in their unique way, such as their singing during weekday prayer services, a practice which would be scoffed at by the typical American high school student. The only way, in my opinion, one can experience Judaism in such an unusual yet laudable fashion is without the fear of whether or not you will receive your peers' approval.

Without fear of being scorned, anyone can do anything. Without the worry of onlookers and their judging eyes, or invasive, disheartening comments, one is able to experience Judaism any way they like. It is a completely different society in Israel, and that environment is what allows them to enjoy life and their religion, even if it looks weird or different. They have no need to worry about being judged, nor do they find the need to seek approval from others.

While I traveled around the globe to seek such a society, my friends and I began to wonder why this passion and freedom of worship cannot be found closer to home. Only then did it become apparent to us that this is the exact reason why we were sent: to return and spread our knowledge of what could be, and hopefully will be.

Shua Brick, 15, is a sophomore at Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA). In addition to the two months he spent in Israel on the Exchange Program, he also traveled to Germany and Israel in January as a member of the Woodmere-based Lev Leytzan volunteer clown troop. Shua lives in West Hempstead.

TRADING PLACES

Continued from Page One

mores traveled to Yeshivat Makor Chaim, a high school in Gush Etzion. In exchange, four juniors from Makor Chaim came to study at MTA. The program ran through March.

Brick described the program as "the opportunity of a life time, a chance to experience and benefit from a culture different from any other Israeli high school, let alone an American one."

"The school's ideologies have no appropriate label, except unique," he observed. "There isn't any place like it. They have a refreshing perspective on educational methods, Judaism and life."

In contrast to other exchange programs where students simply continue their regular activities and classes in a new location, MTA's goal was to completely immerse both sets of students into their new surroundings.

"Our program was unique because we were fully integrating the kids into the Israeli system," explained Rosenberg, who heads the Hebrew language department at MTA and at its sister school, Central. "Our 10 guys were fully integrated into the limudei kodesh classes at Makor Chaim, and the Israelis attended regular shiur at MTA. In Israel, for the second half of the day we provided four English speaking teachers to supplement the curriculum."

Beyond the experience of the new academic environment, the exchange students lived in the dormitories of their host schools, and enjoyed tiyulim (trips), shabbatonim (weekend gatherings), chesed projects and other special activities. The Americans were particularly intrigued by the unique style of learning practiced by their Makor Chaim peers, and by their rousing prayer services, specifically the Hallel on Rosh Chodesh accompanied by guitar and bongos.

Brick, who is part of the Woodmere-based Lev Leytzan clown troop, brought along his



Tova Rosenberg, the program's director in New York with the four Israeli exchange students.

clowning costume and props and volunteered in Israel over Purim to bring cheer to others. He and the other MTA students were taken on trips around Jerusalem and Tzfat, and made weekly visits to YU's Gruss Kollel in Bayit Vagan to learn with the head of the kollel, Rabbi Dovid Miller.

The Israeli students traveled all over New York City and to Philadelphia, and made their presence felt at MTA. On Rosh Chodesh Adar, they decorated the library and transformed it into Achashveirosh's palace, "really bringing their spirit of their school into our school," Rosenberg observed.

"I envisioned it to be a life-changing experience and I am hearing positive feedback from both sides of the ocean," she told The Jewish Star, reflecting on the program's success. "We live in a global world and I see these boys from both sides as future leaders of Jewish communities. It is very important for them to be acquainted with what's going on in the modern Orthodox world in Israel and the United States, and to be part of the culture. The kids really want to bring the experience back to their schools, and it will impact them for the rest of their lives."

MTA plans to continue the program in future years, and

hopes to expand it to include girls from Central as well.

"We had a vision and it turned out to be better than we

expected," Rosenberg noted. "It was a tremendous success and we absolutely want to run the program again."

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Dale Pianko, PhD - Founder/Director
 Yocheved Pianko Felnerman, M.A. - Program Director
 Rivke Pianko Kalman - Sports Director

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Still in Mitzrayim

Guest Editorial

The weekend before Pesach, as Jews scurried around the Five Towns preparing for their annual Passover exodus to points around the globe or completing their home makeovers, my friend was also preparing. His travel plans were simple. He was, as always, planning to spend the night in Cedarhurst. His kitchen was easy to kasher — he has no kitchen. His sale of chometz at his place of work was unnecessary — he has no job. And he was unable to sell his chometz at home — he is homeless.

And he was actually not preparing for Passover just yet. Although just days away for most of us, for him Passover was far off. He was more concerned with where he would get his next meal, in which bank lobby would he spend the next night, and which bathroom would next be open to him.

A shomer mitzvot man wanders through town (in fact five towns) and is invisible. But I don't think he goes completely unseen. His large black yarmulke is on his head all day long as he sleeps on benches throughout the area. He is not a newcomer to the area.

People recognize him from his childhood. But when asked, "How are you?" no one really listens to his answer.

The sketchy details I have been able to garner have him living in the area for nearly 40 years. His father owned businesses here. His education stopped at the sixth grade. He spent 30-plus years with a family, not his own. They were a well-known couple in the community who provided him with room and board. In return he helped care for the couple; the man suffered from polio. The couple died, the home was sold. My friend was homeless.

As we prepared to celebrate our redemption, my friend remained unredeemed. Or did he?

My friend passes the time writing sayings. Some are very funny and some not. Some are very insightful; others deeply moving. A personal favorite that I have often repeated: "A Jew can never be in shadows, for we are light." Whenever I think of this statement it gets me wondering... Who is still in Mitzrayim? Is it my friend who has nothing of

value; no home, no silver, and no seat in shul, but who has the emunah to write such an affirmation of his faith? Or is it us as we hurriedly prepare for Yom Tov and complain about our back-breaking work?

Who is still in Mitzrayim? Who is redeemed and who still awaits redemption?

The Saturday night before Pesach I wrote letters to seven local rabbis. My friend needs help. Is there a place at a Seder table... any Seder table? I received one response from a rabbi who "is aware of the situation." No place at a Seder.

As we count the days to the ultimate act of our redemption, the revelation at Sinai, we have the opportunity to reveal our goodness. Please let us all shine our light on our fellow Jew, on my friend, so we can all come out of the shadows. And his light, his faith, can shine on us.

— By Mitch Krevat
 President & CBO (Chief Burger Officer)
 Burgers Bar
 Cedarhurst, NY

Letters

Defending the Vaad

To the Editor:

I must say I disagree with your editorial re: the Vaad (Change Needed at Vaad HaKashrus; April 24, 2009). Rabbi Yosef Eisen has done a tremendous and difficult job of upgrading the level of kashruth in many Five Towns establishments and many more members of the community are confident shopping and eating in a number of places.

Although the Streit's episode may have been ill-advised, I do not feel that his name should be dragged through the mud and this is certainly not a reason to demand his resignation or firing. I know that this is a hot topic, but I think a little restraint is in order. We don't need more machlokes and animosity in the community.

VIVIAN OSTROV

Not far enough

To the Editor:

As pointed out by your editorial (Change Needed at Vaad HaKashrus; April 24, 2009), the very best that can be said about the actions taken by the Vaad HaKashrus of the Five Towns &

Far Rockaway in the Streit's matzo fiasco is that they were done in a most unprofessional manner. The editorial sorely underestimates the stakes, for the risk extends well beyond the observant Jewish community losing faith in kosher food supervision and becoming less kashrut-conscious as a result.

The Jewish community — observant and otherwise — has seen an organization which supposedly embodies the best of Jewish values threaten (and perhaps actually deprive) the livelihoods of Jewish individuals and businesses for the sake of what most strongly appear to be personal political considerations. The unspoken fear of all Jewish businesspeople in the community is that they, too, might be subject to the fickle political vicissitudes of the rabbis who are looked to by the community to maintain Jewish values and Jewish integrity.

Accordingly, it is not merely a risk limited to children hearing their parents say things such as "don't worry about the kosher supervision, it's all politics," but rather, a risk that children will hear their parents derisively dismiss the rabbis, the Jewish institutions themselves, and Jewish observances generally as nothing more than money and politics.

And so, while certain personnel changes may well be in order at the Vaad HaKashrus of the Five

Towns & Far Rockaway (and the Vaad HaRabbonim of Queens, for that matter), the rabbis of the Vaads need to publicly admit their failings in the matter, so that they might regain the confidence of the Jewish communities whose best interests they purport to advance.

KENNETH H. RYESKY
 East Northport

Mea Culpa

To the Editor:

Last week your editorial (Change Needed at Vaad HaKashrus; April 24, 2009) called for the dismissal of Rabbi Yosef Eisen, the rabbinic coordinator of the Vaad HaKashrus of the Five Towns. Your editorial also featured a quote from me which accurately portrayed my criticism of the Vaad's decision to not allow Streit's Matzo products to be carried in Vaad stores before Passover. Despite your clarifying comment that my remarks did not direct blame at anyone, a significant number of people inferred that I had called for Rabbi Eisen to step down. That is absolutely not true.

In fact, in my synagogue speech, I directed the blame to myself, as a community rabbi who is a part of the Vaad, and to whomever of my rabbinic col-

leagues who are also part of the Vaad and share my point of view. Furthermore, I indicated that it was the community rabbis who must fix the flawed system which they tolerated and which allowed the Streit's decision to be implemented so close to Pesach.

I continue to believe that Streit's of 2009 is no different from Streit's of 1979. Five Towns and Far Rockaway consumers are intelligent and concerned about Kashrus. Each has their rabbi to direct their choice of products for Passover. If Streit's was on the shelf, you were not forced to buy it. But those who wished to purchase it should have been given the opportunity to do so in a Vaad store.

Furthermore, our Vaad did a disservice to the Streit's company by banning the matzos so close to Pesach without making any effort earlier in the year to try to correct the problem which precipitated the ban.

In fact, the process of self scrutiny of the Vaad has already begun. Some meaningful steps are being implemented to enable the community rabbis to be more vigilant, aware and involved in making quality of life Kashrus decisions. Hopefully, errors like these will be prevented in the future and will enable an imperfect Vaad in an imperfect world to continue to provide the generally excellent and responsible Kashrus

supervision that it renders to our community.

RABBI HERSHEL BILLET
 Young Israel of Woodmere

Wants apology to Vaad HaKashrus

I applaud Rabbi Eisen and the Vaad HaKashrus for taking a stand and promoting the highest level of kashruth for the community (Change Needed at Vaad HaKashrus; April 24, 2009). Imagine the outrage if it was reversed and they did not make a decision to protect us from potential chometz; after all, the punishment is korais (early death).

Not all pertinent and delicate details that are known should be told to the press, there are many halachic and legal ramifications. We put our trust in the Vaad to make halachic decisions on our behalf. Do the right thing; make a public apology instead of a chilul Hashem.

MENACHEM KRAMER
 Far Rockaway

Editor's note: Neither The Vaad HaKashrus of the Five Towns and Far Rockaway or the Vaad Harabonim of Queens said that Streit's Matzo was chometz; on the contrary, con-

sumers who had already made purchases were told it was acceptable for use and need not be returned. Therefore, in no way did this episode represent "taking a stand and promoting the highest level of kashrus." To suggest otherwise is to misrepresent the facts.

Thanks for caring

To the Editor:

Thank you for making the Streit's Matzo issue important to The Jewish Star (Change Needed at Vaad HaKashrus; April 24, 2009). It is refreshing to have a Jewish newspaper discuss newsworthy items and issues important to the community. Keep it up.

JACK RUBIN
 Cedarhurst

Playing chicken with kashruth

To the Editor:

For your on target editorial (Change Needed at Vaad HaKashrus; April 24, 2009) you deserve a pullet, sir. Hopefully, it will come with a hechsher you can trust.

BENNETT WERNICK
 Lawrence



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FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BENCH

A Passover miracle

In a few hours, the Boeing 767-200 would touch down at JFK as I eagerly awaited my level bed and unleavened bread. Don't get me wrong — this was one of the most enjoyable Passovers in at least a year. Nevertheless, there is something so great about my home, my bed and my wife's cooking.



David Seidemann

It was truly a memorable Passover spent with my wife's family out West. We also reunited with friends she grew up with and friends I have made over the years during our frequent visits to the City of Angels, and with one of my childhood friends — now the rabbi of the shul where my wife's family daven.

We enjoyed the second seder at his home and then returned for lunch on Shabbos. The meal lasted for five hours as we reminisced about growing up together in Columbus, OH and highlights of our time at Ner Israel Rabbinical College of Baltimore, MD.

We had a house to ourselves and use

of a car as we "swapped" with a family that came to Lawrence for Pesach. The house was a 15 minute walk from my wife's brother's house, 10 minutes from the shul, and four houses down the block from our friends, Irv and Cynthia, two of the most giving people one would ever meet. Irv, a doctor, also has a keen sense of

humor, both important traits as they relate to the following story.

Approximately four hours before Yom Tov my wife took our four daughters on a walk around the neighborhood. I decided to take a nap and removed my shoes, socks and shirt. No sooner had I laid my head upon the pillow when I heard a knock on the door. I assumed one of my daughters had forgotten their sunglasses and opened the door sans shoes and socks.

To my surprise, I stood eye to eye with a middle-aged Russian woman sporting a portable manicure, pedicure and massage center. "I here for present"

she stammered in Russinglish. My first thought was that Irv and Cynthia were treating us to a pre-seder siesta. I was about to invite her in (for my wife!) when my second thought took hold. Oh, I still thought it was Irv being Irv, but the comic Irv. I figured he was setting me up — waiting outside to send the lady in just as my wife and kids had left. But how would Irv know they would be leaving for a walk?

Thought three paid a visit. It wasn't Irv at all. It was his lovely wife Cynthia who had sent the masseuse not for me, but for my wife. That hypothesis was furthered when "Helga" said, "no, not you — I here for the Mrs." Should I have her come in and wait or should I tell her to come back?

Thought four made its entry. Cynthia knew we were coming for Pesach but didn't know we had swapped houses with one of her neighbors. Or did she? I asked the lady if she was sure she had the right house. She answered in the affirmative. "Yes — they tell me house with black car in driveway." I looked outside and noticed neighbors' homes to the left

and right with black cars just like the color of the car we were using.

"What is the name of the woman you are looking for?" I asked. "I'm not sure," she answered. "What is your wife's name?" she asked. "Jane," I answered. "What is name of lady of the house?" she said. And now I was trapped. You see my sister-in-law had made all of the arrangements with my wife and the lady of the house in which I was standing barefoot. "I don't know," I said sheepishly. "You don't know the name of the lady in the home you in? What is family name?" she asked accusingly. When I answered 'I don't know' to both, she reached for her cell phone like a sheriff reaching for his gun. "Why you in house of family you know no name?!" and she began to dial.

Thought five. My wife will be home any minute and I'll be standing here barefoot with a Russian pedicurist and the police! While the scene was transpiring between an overly animated and suspicious Russian masseuse and a barefoot New Yorker pleading that there was no need to call the police, guess who just happened to drive by? You guessed it — Irv. Irv had witnessed the entire exchange, didn't recognize the lady, and

wasn't sure if it was me or not, but knew something was amiss. The fact that he didn't call the police on both of us was a Passover miracle in itself.

Cooler feet prevailed and I persuaded the lady to try a different house in search of her customer. As it turned out, another neighbor (neither Irv nor Cynthia) had engaged the services of this woman for the benefit of a neighbor next door to the home I was in, who had just given birth.

When I told my wife what she had missed, she wasn't sure if perhaps I exaggerated a bit. But when Irv confirmed the entire story at lunch on the second day of Pesach, I was "redeemed." I have learned my lesson. I will never open the door barefoot for a Russian pedicurist if I am using a black car in a home which is next door to a woman who just gave birth who also owns a black car and who lives three houses to the right of a doctor named Irv who happens to be married to a woman named Cynthia.

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.



PARSHIOT ACHAREI MOT-KEDOSHIM

Distinctly sanctifying His name

Over the course of one week, Jews around the world commemorate the destruction that was the Holocaust, pay tribute to all the fallen soldiers who gave their lives for the State of Israel, and celebrate Israel's independence. In the aftermath of the Pesach holiday, a celebration of our first redemption, it is a roller coaster of emotional turns.

In a sense, the three dates are classic examples of a concept which is perhaps unique to the Jewish experience — the sanctification of G-d's name, also known as "Kiddush Hashem."

We begin mourning over the tremendous destruction of Jewish life and Jewish lives, as we contemplate numbers we cannot comprehend, numbers that have yet to begin to show signs of recuperating. And we think of those who died with a "Kiddush Hashem" whose sole "sin" was having been born a Jew.

We express our everlasting debt of gratitude to Jews who, on a different side of "Kiddush Hashem," took their Jewish identity into battle, on the front lines, to create and preserve a country that has arguably done more for humanity in its short life-span than any other nation in the history of the world ever accomplished in sixty years of existence. And we celebrate the existence of this little country, whose presence in this world has opened a heightened respect, in civilized countries, for the once-hated and vilified Jew. Anyone who does not appreciate the lifestyle we live, as Jews, crediting the State of Israel for giving every Jew a landmark we can be proud of and always call home, is not a very good student of history.

The second half of this week's "double parsha" begins with the commandment of "Kedoshim tiheyu" — that you, the Jewish people, should be separate and distinct from the nations of the world (some will translate "to be holy"), "for I," G-d says, "am 'Kadosh.'"

It is this separation, this uniqueness, which marks the difference between us and the rest of the world. "Different" need not translate to "superior." That is an arrogant approach to Jewish "chosenness" which is an ingredient for bad PR.

But distinction can be marked by different behavior and different values and ethics, all of which are dictated to us in the Torah. Whether Jews are Torah-observant does not take away from the world's perception of how Jews ought to behave.

No one will argue that Israel's government is guided by religious Jews. But because everyone knows it is a Jewish state, it is held to a different kind of scrutiny in the global media.

Why? Perhaps the concluding sections of Acharei Mot and Kedoshim can shed some light on the subject. Each parsha ends with a list of behaviors anathema to Jewish values and life before it gives its sum-up conclusion. Vayikra 18:25-30 concludes: "The land became defiled, and when I directed My providence at the sin committed there, the land vomited out its inhabitants. You, [however,] must keep My decrees and laws, and not become involved in any of these disgusting perversions — neither the native born nor any foreigner who settles

among you. The people who lived in the land before you did all these disgusting perversions and defiled the land ... Keep My charge, and do not follow any of the abominable customs that were kept before you [arrived], so that you not be defiled by them. I am G-d your Lord."

Vayikra 20:22-26 reaches a similar conclusion "Safeguard all My decrees and laws and keep them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to settle will not vomit you out. Do not follow the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, since they did all the above mentioned [perversions] and I was disgusted with them. I therefore said to you, 'Take over their land. I will give it to you so that you can inherit it — a land flowing with milk and honey. I am G-d your Lord who has separated you out from among all the nations ... You shall be holy to Me, for I, G-d, am holy, and I have separated you out from among the nations to be Mine...'"

The Jewish people represent G-d and all that is holy about G-d. It is a glorious task, not to be taken lightly, and a tremendous responsibility. The three commemorative days are a snippet of what we are all about. How do we make the remaining 362 days of the year into days in which we model "Kiddush hashem" and demonstrate our distinction through the values of the Torah we espouse through observance of its statutes?

This is the ultimate challenge and mark of the Jewish people.

Avi Billet and The Jewish Star welcome your comments on our web site, www.thejewishstar.com.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

Continued from Page One

enjoying it that we realized the song was proclaiming "Heil Hitler!"

In shock, I knew this was a situation I needed to get out of. Deciding to go with passive resistance, I immediately left the courtyard, joined by only three other people. One of the chaperones thought it would be a better idea to respond, and began clapping and trying to sing a Jewish song. As I stood outside with the other people who seemed to possess the common sense that I believed was appropriate in this situation, I saw something sprinkle down between us. I soon realized that this was not, in fact, someone watering their plants, but rather an apartment resident spitting on us.

The experience was the most powerful one I felt all week. Though I do not really know my grandparents' stories, I do know

how to relate to their experiences. Growing up in America, I never once felt my life threatened by anti-Semitism. But these Poles were visibly uncomfortable with Jews interrupting their daily lives. It is debatable as to what would have been the correct reaction. But I certainly understand how the people who opted for clapping and singing felt at the time. Later in the day, we visited memorials for the people who organized the Warsaw ghetto uprising — young people about my age who decided to be active in a situation filled with passivity. It made me wonder what kind of response I would have had if my life were really in such danger. The truth is, I really don't know.

I do not know if those apartment dwellers were armed or if they really did agree with what Hitler did. But I did know, finally, what it was like to know that there

are some people out there who hate you not for what you look like or what you believe in, but purely because of the blood that runs through your veins.

March of the Living was slightly disappointing, in part because the organization that ran it seemed to be emphasizing putting an end to genocide, rather than focusing on the past. Sitting in a ceremony listening to worldwide dignitaries, I expected some attention to be paid to the gas chamber and crematorium standing in shambles right beside their stage. I sat in Birkenau that day not for the future, but because of the past. I came to learn about my family, my history, and my culture. This March was relevant to me, finally, because now I understood.

Rachel Blady is a senior at North Shore Hebrew Academy and an occasional contributor to The Jewish Star. She lives in North Woodmere.

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ON THE Calendar

For a complete listing of upcoming community events, including items that didn't make it into the print edition, go to www.thejewishstar.com.

Lawrence - Kulanu's Keren Eliana Parent Advocacy and Resource Center (P.A.R.C.) is sponsoring a free resource fair for parents of children with special needs on Sunday, May 3 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon at HAFTR, 33 Washington Ave. At 10:30 a.m., Margie Hoffman, Director of Project D.O.C.C. (Delivery of Chronic Care) will speak about parent empowerment and how to approach professionals when seeking services for their child. For more information, please contact Mark Hoffacker, P.A.C. coordinator at (516) 569-3083 or mark@kulanukids.org.

Atlantic Beach - Chevra Hatzalah of the Rockways and Nassau County will hold its Annual Community-Wide Barbeque celebrating 28 years of saving lives on Sunday, May 3 at 6:30 p.m. at the Sands At Atlantic Beach, 1395 Beech Street in Atlantic Beach.

Great Neck - The Sid Jacobson JCC is offering regents review classes on May 3, 10, 17, 31, and June 7 and 14. Intensive preparation for the June 2009 Regents will be given for six weeks during 90-minute review sessions. Classes include Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Integrated Algebra, Geometry, Math B, Global Studies, US History and Spanish and will be offered in Great Neck and Roslyn on Sunday mornings and weekday evenings. The cost is \$329, or \$269 for JCC members. For more information, check jccreview.com or contact Julie Hollander at (516) 484-1545, ext. 117, or jhollander@sjcc.org.

Lawrence - Emunah is hosting a fundraiser basketball tournament on Sunday, May 3 at 12 noon in memory of Diane Taragin, z"l, to be held at HAFTR Lower School, 33 Washington Ave. Women of high school age and above will team up to play and receive trophies. The afternoon program includes Zumba/ aerobics, body sculpting, pilates, jump rope conditioning and

belly dancing. Proceeds will benefit women in Israel who are helped by the Emunah RESCUE (Reach Educational Success Care Unit). For more information or to sign up, please call Suzanne Segal at (516) 410-6639.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns' K kosher Culinary Institute will host Personal Chef Jordana Hirschel on Wednesday, May 6 at 10 a.m. at 207 Grove Ave in Cedarhurst. For fee information and reservations, please call Sheryl at (516) 569-6733, ext. 222.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns, Orthodox Union and Jewish Community Council of the Rockaway Peninsula have scheduled a three part-series called "Navigating the Financial Crisis," presented by Five O'Clock Club Certified Career Coaches. The dates are Wednesday, May 6, Wednesday, May 13, and Thursday, May 21. All three seminars begin at 7 p.m. and are being held at the JCC, 207 Grove Ave. Admission is free. For more information, please call (212) 613-8188 or visit www.ou.org.

Manhattan - The Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst sisterhood is organizing a day trip to the Lower East Side of Manhattan on Wednesday May 6. The trip will depart from the shul (8

Spruce Street) at 10 a.m. for a walking tour and a visit to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. For information, please contact Mimi Schreiber at (516) 295-1199 or at mimirabilia@aol.com.

Manhattan - The Mel & Phyllis Zachter Institute for Advanced Professional Education at OHEL presents "ADHD: Building Support and Resilience," a full-day community conference on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in children and adults on Wednesday May 6, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. The forum will feature world-renowned experts Russell Barkley, PhD. and Robert Brooks, PhD. and will take place at Baruch College, Newman Conference Center, 14th Floor, Room 220, 55 Lexington Avenue (corner 24th street) in New York City. Advance registration required. For more information, please visit our website at www.ohel.org/adhd or call (718) 851-6300.

Manhattan - The National Council of Young Israel (NCYI) will host its 97th Anniversary Dinner on Thursday evening, May 7 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Place in Manhattan. The theme of the dinner is "Honoring our Past, Impacting the Present." For more information or to make reservations, send an e-mail to dinner@youngisrael.org, or call (212) 929-1525, ext. 100.

Agudah opposes Child Victim Act despite conflict

BY MICHAEL ORBACH

Agudath Israel of America acknowledged a possible conflict of interest but will oppose legislation to allow victims of child sexual abuse currently beyond the statute of limitations to bring their cases to court.

Agudah and educational affiliate Torah Umesorah, the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools, said last week they would not object to legislation "designed to give victims of abuse greater recourse against perpetrators." However, they "vigorously oppose" doing away with the statute of limitations, even temporarily for a year, since that "could subject schools and other vital institutions to ancient claims and capricious litigation, and place their very existence in severe jeopardy."

Agudah acknowledged a conflict related to a lawsuit against Yeshiva Torah Temimah in Brooklyn, and longtime rebbe Yehuda Kolko. The Agudah-owned Camp Agudah, Inc., is a defendant in a 2006 suit filed in Brooklyn Federal Court that alleges that David Framowitz, identified as John Doe No. 1, was molested by Kolko at Camp Agudah in the summer between seventh and eighth grade.

"It is not anything that was ever hidden," explained Rabbi Dovid Zwiebel, Agudath Israel's executive vice president.

"The camp is the same name. Notwithstanding that this group of rabbonim who sat on this question for the last number of weeks is among the most senior and respected rabbonim and roshei yeshiva, when you get to that level, chances are you're going to be affiliated with institutions that operate programs that young people participate in. It's impossible to imagine a question of this nature should not be considered by the leaders of the community

simply because they are affiliated with institutions."

Rabbi Zwiebel added: "If we're sinister, we should surely do a much better job of covering our tracks."

Agudath Israel's position applies across the nation, according to Rabbi Zwiebel. It pits Agudah against the Child Victims Act, sponsored by Assemblywoman Marge Markey (D-Queens) that would extend the civil statute of limitations by five years and open a yearlong window for civil cases currently beyond the statute. Agudah supports a competing bill by Assemblyman Vito Lopez (D-Brooklyn) to extend the civil statute by two years; it does not include the yearlong window.

Critics refer to the Lopez legislation as "The Hide the Predator Act." Cardozo law professor Marci Hamilton called the Agudah position "indifferent to the safety of children." Similar laws in California and Delaware led to the identification of 360 previously unknown sexual predators, she said.

"Without the window, the predators remain in the shadows so that they can groom more children for abuse," she explained. "A stand against the window is a stand for the predators."

Rabbi Yosef Blau, mashgiach ruchani (spiritual guidance counselor) at YU's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, said "the old system does not work" and the only way to fix it is "a communal responsibility to bite the bullet."

"This is the only way that institutions will take responsibility and abusers will not be given the opportunity to move from one place to another," he asserted. "Institutions that have been completely negligent should be sued."

Adapted from a longer report online at www.thejewishstar.com

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THE KOSHER BOOKWORM

Yom Ha'atzmaut, Zionism and us

There is almost never a day when the State of Israel does not draw some attention somewhere in the world. This has become the norm. Yet, not so long ago, mentions of our holy land were restricted to a few lines in our daily prayers. To past generations the land of Israel was a dream, an ideal to be prayed for and hoped for. For us an independent Jewish republic in the holy land is a reality and a responsibility.



Alan Jay Gerber

This year's independence commemorative is in a climate of crisis and stress. Our responsibility to help assure the state's continued existence and security is a never ending task. Literature reflecting upon our devotion to that cause has continued to be a labor of love to both the writers and readers of our people.

This week's commemorative began with a day of memorial for those who fell in defense of the land, people and state. This hazkarah does not reflect upon them exclusively, but also upon all who fell victim to our adversaries. Among these are eight young men murdered on March 6, 2008 at Jerusalem's famed Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav. Even young students sitting in a bais medrash are legitimate targets for murder in cold blood.

Recently, an English translation was published of fellow students' tributes to those eight young men. Titled "Princes Among Men" (Feldheim, 2009) it richly depicts, through verse, prose, essays and beautiful pictures, their lives, further demonstrating the enormity of the loss that they represented to their fellow students, their families and our nation.

Three of the eight were students at Mercaz HaRav; five were students at Yeshivat Yerushalayim L'Tzeirim (Yashlatz). According to the school's communications director, Yaakov Cohne, "a few days after the attack, the 12th grade class at Yashlatz sat together and tried to

think of a way to memorialize their friends which would also touch upon the difficult period they had just been through, recording their memories of their pain. This was not the pain of discouragement, but a pain characterized by prayer, growth and spiritual ascent. Their efforts not only led to the publication of the original Hebrew edition that was widely acclaimed and is already in its second printing but also spurred an English translation that will serve to help inform others of the tremendous trauma suffered by our yeshiva and the Jerusalem community at large of our precious loss."

The book is a wellspring of deep inspiration and tribute for all Jews to read about as part of our literature detailing our ongoing struggles to preserve our people's rights in Eretz Yisrael. These tributes read as a kinot for Yom Hazikaron.

"Eretz Yisrael in the Parshah" by Moshe Lichtman (Devora Publishing, 2006) is a valued and practical anthology of references to the presence and role that Eretz Yisrael plays in our weekly Torah readings. Organized in weekly parsha installments as well as cameo holiday appearances, Rabbi Lichtman, a musmach of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and Yeshiva University, describes in detail many of the halachic, aggadic and midrashic elements of the Torah texts that relate both directly and indirectly to the laws and history of Eretz Yisrael. Also enumerated within these pages are all the major players found in the Torah and of their roles in the history of our people during our formative

years. Rabbi Lichtman himself puts it best by stating that the Torah text provides for us the proof that "living in the holy land is more than a dry, halachic question."

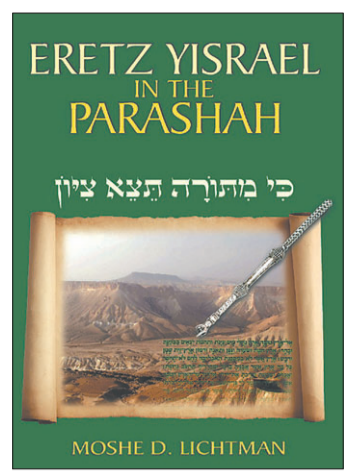
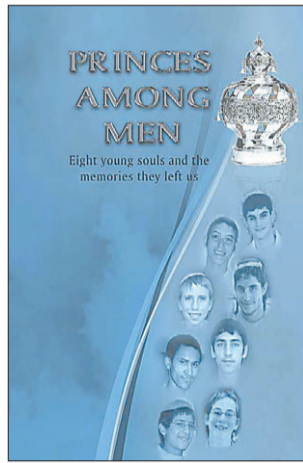
"It is a fulfillment of the deep yearnings of millennia of Jews, to come to the land in order to perform all of G-d's commandments especially those that depend on the land. This is the true meaning of Zionism: loving and yearning for Zion, an ideal that all of our sages, throughout the generations espoused."

This book filled with Eretz Yisrael-oriented divrei Torah will make an apt addition to both the Shabbos and Yom Tov table for all the family to use.

Another book of divrei Torah of the same literary genre is titled "Torah Through a Zionist Vision," (Gefen Publishing, 2008) in two volumes by Rabbi Avraham Feder of Jerusalem. These volumes are a bit more expansive and are highly intellectual in their presentations. Based upon his many sermons at Moreshet Yisrael, Rabbi Feder provides a deeply thought out series of Torah shiurim that consistently reflect his passion and eloquence on behalf of both Torah and Israel. Taken together with his keen analysis of each parsha's varied themes, they make for more than just a casual read, meant to be learned and studied.

Rabbi Feder's work was recently recognized by Bar Ilan University where he was honored with the Menachem Begin Prime Minister's Award for his many years of teaching Torah and Tefilah (chazanut) as well as for his love for Israel.

We conclude with the following observation from Rabbi Avraham Feder:



an Israel! And the Israel we have offers us as a people another chance — another chance to work at fulfilling a covenant we agreed to eons ago ... Do we have a Torah adequate to the task and are we adequate to the task? Our answers to these questions should be in the affirmative. The long exile cul-

minating in the Shoah insists that our answers be in the affirmative. But are we certain? That, dear readers, is our challenge every day. It is for us to learn from our sacred writings, and the books we read them in, and to apply it to our daily lives.

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SWINE FLU

Continued from Page One

more than half in New York, with several schools closed and a number of people hospitalized. A "suspect case" was being investigated in Nassau County though health officials did not release further information before The Jewish Star's Tuesday evening press deadline.

At least two cases were con-

firmed in Israel where a health official, an observant Jew, announced that the illness would be referred to there as Mexico flu, avoiding the swine reference.

Swine Influenza is caused by the type A flu virus. It manifests itself as a respiratory illness that is common, but not very deadly, in pigs, often in the fall and winter, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Humans rarely contract swine flu, but those in contact

with pigs, at county fairs or in the swine industry, are most likely to have it. Twelve cases have been reported in the United States between December 2005 and February 2009.

"There have been no fatal cases in the US in the last three to four years," noted Dr. Glatt, who is also assistant to the Rabbi at the Young Israel of Woodmere and the assistant rabbi at Congregation Anshei Chesed.

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