

MINYAN MONTHLY

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Tammuz-Av 5753

REFLECTIONS ON TISHA B'AV

by Sharon L. Williams

The gift of memory is one of the most precious ever given to the Jewish people. The day of national mourning we observe this month epitomizes this better than any other day in the Jewish calendar, despite or perhaps because of its solemn nature. Even Yom Kippur, certainly a solemn day, is known as "the White fast," while Tisha B'av is called "the Black fast". Does any other people memorialize its greatest tragedies this way? The usual human tendency is to bury one's failings and defeats and never talk about them, in private much less in public.

My own history of observing T'isha B'av is uniquely tied to the Library Minyan. I had never been to a T'isha B'av service before 1987, the year I moved to Los Angeles and began attending the Library Minyan on a regular basis. I came that evening, knowing almost no one, and was immediately swept up in the drama, the sense of community that permeated our small chapel, packed to very walls.

Finding myself a cramped seat on the floor, I listened in awe to the reading of the Book of Lamentations, a moving performance of "Cranes Over Hiroshima," poems by Holocaust survivors, and a description of the last days of the Second Temple. Closing my eyes, I felt as if I had participated in these tragedies, in spirit if not in body. I could almost taste the despair of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, dry as dust, as they faced what seemed to be the end of the world, if not of their lives. Is there anything in my life I can compare to such an experience, that would give me empathy for them? Not even the death of my father, sorrowful as that was, compares to this scale of tragedy.

Tisha B'Av is an opportunity to connect to the Jewish community across the continuum of time. It is empowering to participate on an experiential level in the losses and tragedies our people have yet managed to survive and even transcend.

BACK IN THE GOOD OL' DAYS

The History of the Minyan
According to Rabbi Joel Rembaum

As told to:
Michelle Krotinger Wolf

Almost 25 years ago, in 1970, the Minyan was started by a small group of newly-ordained rabbis who had come to settle in Los Angeles. They collectively sought a worship experience that was less formal and more participatory than the standard service of the time.

Initially, discussions were held with the temple's leadership about changing the tenor of the service, but it was eventually decided, with Rabbi Pressman's strong support, to hold services in the library. The early group of founders included Stewart Kellman, Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Dr. Steve Spiegel, Ronny Levine, Rabbi Shelly Dorph and Dr. Shoshana Gerson, whose daughter had the first Bat Mizvah in 1974 (in which she chanted both Torah and Haftorah, but wasn't permitted to be Shaliach Tsibur).

At that time, most of the founders had small children and wanted a service that was hospitable to the unique characteristics of that age group (and they wanted a service that started late, so at least one day a week they could take their time leaving the house in the morning).

One surprising fact is that, initially, the Minyan was not egalitarian. Around 1982, a major turning point occurred when a lack of available Torah readers, combined with a new

Conservative Tshuvah on allowing women to read Torah, coincided. In a most democratic fashion, the members voted to grant women the honor of Ba'al Koreh. It was not until the mid-80's, however, that women were allowed to participate fully.

In the late 70's the library was getting increasingly crowded. Kids were getting older, and more and more newcomers were showing up each Shabbat. A few founders petitioned the shul to use the Brownstein Building (the old Youth Building) and until 1981, the multi-purpose room there doubled as the home of the Minyan. Eventually, of course, even that got to be too small, and the Minyan asked for the use of the chapel, then used by the Jr. Congregation, where it will no doubt remain until further notice.

The "main shul" followed the pace set by the Library Minyan, and women were gradually allowed to take on all religious honors. In July of 1985, Rabbi Rembaum became the Senior Rabbi of Temple Beth Am, and thus a direct (high) connection to the shul was created. Today, Library Minyan members are closely linked to the on-going leadership structure of Temple Beth Am and serve on the Board of Trustees, Executive Committee and fundraising efforts, including the most recent Capital Campaign.

Asked to comment on the voluntary nature of the Minyan, Rabbi Rembaum said, "If the Library Minyan seeks to maintain its self-sufficiency, it must inspire a high level of volunteerism. It's a mitzvah to give of your time and resources."

A Response to David Eliezrie

--by Norman H. Green

By now, regular readers of the Jewish Journal know that people and organizations can be attacked in its pages not only for what they say and do, but also for no reason at all; knowledge is no prerequisite for such attacks.

One of the latest victims of slander based on ignorance is the Beth Am Library Minyan. Chabad Rabbi David Eliezrie (May 14), usually one of Chabad's most articulate spokesmen, responding to a widely misunderstood column by Marlene Adler Marks (April 30), suggested that the Library Minyan (along with Liberal Judaism generally) has turned its back on Torah. He claims that learning and spirituality are not to be found at the Library Minyan, because it is not based on the principle of Torah mi-Sinai, that God gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Sinai.

The fact is, Rabbi Eliezrie knows little of the Library Minyan. His assertion is based on ignorance. He apparently has neither visited the Minyan nor discussed the matter with a reasonable selection of the Minyan's members, neither reviewed the minutes of its steering committee nor engaged in any other research. He has carelessly aimed his poison pen and condemned. In His infinite wisdom, God gave the Torah to the entire Jewish people: Not only to the rabbis; not only to the men; not only to the Orthodox. "Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? The one who learns from all people." (Mishnah, Pirke Avot 4:1). Torah learning and

understanding benefit from the contributions of both conventional and unorthodox scholarship, from insights of both Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jews. Indeed, no one form of Judaism has a monopoly on truth; no single approach is likely to meet the fundamental spiritual needs of all Jews.

At its core, the Library Minyan is a group of people that spend considerable energy grappling with the written and oral Torah; both its Halachic and Aggadic aspects.

The question of whether God gave the Torah to the Jews at Sinai need not be central to our understanding of its fundamental principles; the substance of Torah learning and its application to our lives are far more important than theological contention over articles of faith.

Let Rabbi Eliezrie and the rest of his Chabad congregation in Yorba Linda pursue theological purity; let the rest of us struggle with God, strive to determine how to fulfill His demands on us today, seek to do justice, and search for spiritual meaning in our daily lives, in our worship services and in Torah.

BRAUNS' NEW ADDRESS

Bob and Sandra Braun have moved to a new home. The new address is:

6516 Whitworth Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90035
(213) 934-2321

MAZAL TOV!

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE
NEW MINYAN TREASURER**

Dale Bodenstein

who will be replacing Sandra Braun. Many thanks also to the numerous members who responded to Sandra's cleverly written Help Wanted Ad in last month's Minyan Monthly. Don't be discouraged, your talents, energies and abilities are needed in other places. A child care coordinator is still being sought, and one need not be a parent to qualify!

**"An Evening of Music
and Memories"**

Mona Golabek and Renee Golabek Kaye will be giving a piano recital in honor of Tria Mintz' retirement as director of Beth Am's nursery school.

Don't miss this exciting event. Watch for your announcement and send in your reservations now!

CHAIR'S COLUMN

-- By Norm Green

The High Holy Days are fast approaching. People interested in attending the Minyan's services must have tickets, which can be obtained through the synagogue office. Minyan tickets generally are reserved for Minyan members, namely those members of the congregation who regularly

participate in the Library Minyan's services and who volunteer to serve the Minyan in one way or another, such as leading services, assisting in child care, setting up Kiddushot or participating on other committees of the Minyan. Almost as important as renewing membership, please notify the synagogue office if you are planning not to renew your membership.

Special thanks to Leon Rogson. For the last few years he has maintained and printed the Minyan list, a time-consuming and often unappreciated task. Coordinating his efforts with the Shul office, various committee chairs and other officers of the Minyan, he produced valuable lists of people interested in the various specific tasks of the Minyan. I hope he enjoyed the work, because the immediate rewards were undoubtedly few. Mitch Miller is taking over as coordinator of the Minyan list. Please contact him by mail at the address below for any requests or changes.

In regards to child care, while a coordinator for parent-volunteers is still needed, it should be noted that we have a strong and effective child care committee, including Teri Cohan Link, Fran Grossman and Matt Chazanov.

Let me take this opportunity to wish all of you a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

MINYAN LIST UPDATES

Please mail all changes to Mitch Miller at:

315 S. Beverly Dr. Ste. 501
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

**WHY IS THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY
IMPORTANT FOR THE MINYAN?**

--by Eric Lesin

In recent weeks we have heard a series of drashim regarding the acceptability of homosexuality in Judaism. The most recent by Rachel Adler made me realize how different are the realities we live in. Rachel is a very imposing scholar who made a very strong case for her position. Her speaking strategy seems to be a didactic technique of not supplying the conclusion but letting the audience reach their own. It was obvious by the response that many in the shul reached their own conclusions. I too have reached my conclusion.

To examine the Torah or other works in the light of today can always result in the discovery of inanities and hideous plots which fit the reader's agenda. We must read our root literature with eyes to the original meaning.

By Ms. Adler's own numerological count the Torah deals with homosexual acts twice in the total of 55 prohibitions. That may be because, then as now, homosexuality is confined to a very small minority. What is different is that now we are all being asked to legitimize this small minority.

I am also troubled by her extension of this sparse treatment of homosexual issues to the apparent dismissal of the laws laid down in the Torah as some kind of a plot to subjugate women. I will not dispute that women have been at the low end of the power levers throughout history. In fact, those laws

were a reflection of the then prevailing attitudes and issues; it is not surprising that they may relate numerologically in kind to the issues of the day.

In addition, her assertions about father-daughter incest and that it is lightly dealt with may be due to the possibility that it was not widely known. Just as today, our own legislators only make laws after a problem is identified--only those things that cause scandals are the subject of prohibitions.

Her point seems to be that, until we recognize our incorrect point of view and treat homosexuals affirmatively, accepting their way of life within our structures, they remain as victims. In our society we have too many people claiming victim status. A kind society can afford to comfort and protect certain people. If, however, everyone fits a class of victim, where will the non-victims be found to support the rest? We must raise our standards, expecting the best from all. This way people will live up to a greater potential, creating and leaving more resources for those who are truly in need. Where a specific wrong can be identified, the wrong should be righted if possible and then they should get on with their productive lives as far as possible. For those who cannot help themselves we should provide help according to our means. We cannot adopt every difference and call it a problem in need of addressing. I do not accept the idea that homosexuals are societal victims.

There are other problems in need of addressing of which we have

(Lesin, cont.)

not spoken at the same length, maybe because the solutions appear difficult. I am thinking specifically of the not-so-gradual decline in the numbers of affiliated Jews in the world today. In fact, this particular debate on the acceptability of homosexuality not only diverts our energy but seems to justify a lifestyle that is anathema to the family structures that have helped us get this far.

In conclusion, I feel that people who rail against others in order to define themselves are somewhat like a young child whose only way to differentiate itself from the parent is to yell, "I am not like you"... they have not become comfortable saying, "I am me." Please do not continue attributing the sins of some men to all males. Please do not make us sit through harangues showing how we can live better through someone else's enlightenment. The central fact is that Judaism is in trouble. We are losing adherents through intermarriage and assimilation. I don't care about homosexuality except that it subtracts from the Jewish national problem of the the continuation of Am Yisroel. We are here today in part because a strong Jewish family got us through the first three millennia. How does sanctioned homosexuality add to our chances for the next millennium? Please give me discussions of how we attack the larger problems that confront us. The rest are just diversions.



MODERN HEBREW POETRY CLASS

A Modern Hebrew Poetry class, with Professor Jacob Somerman, meets on the first and third Shabbat of each month from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. It is held at the home of:

Marshall and Hannah Kramer
6406 Lindenhurst Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90048

(3 blocks north of Wilshire, 2nd house west of La Jolla).

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Tricycle - for ages 2-3, red metal, \$10 obo.

Kiddy slide - 3 ft. tall, red and yellow plastic. \$15 obo.

Plastic sit-and-push car, yellow and red. \$20 obo.

Wading pool, 5 ft. diameter, one foot deep, hard molded plastic, \$25 obo.

"Baby Songs" Video Tape Series, \$6 each.

For any of the above items, call Carl or Tove Sunshine (213) 934-7889.

PLEASE SEND YOUR ARTICLES TO THE MINYAN MONTHLY

Care of: Sharon Williams
9114 Olin Street
Los Angeles, CA 90034
Or Call: (310) 838-1316 (H)

MINYAN COMMITTEES/CONTACTS

Chair, Steering Committee
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 Minyan Treasurer
 Dale Bodenstein(213)937-7443
 Reading Torah or Haftorah
 Lida Baker (213)934-3663
 Gabai'im-Shabbat/Holiday Services
 Torah Honors
 Alan Broidy (213)933-8894
 Stan Goldstein (310)837-5503
 Art Metz (310)276-6905
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 Child Care Volunteer Coordinator
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 Hospitality
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 Lida Baker (213)934-3663
 Shiva Minyans
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EDITOR'S COLUMN

--by Sharon L. Williams

Well, there are many "hot topics" to be discussed in this issue of the Minyan Monthly. Since it's so close to Tisha B'Av, I felt some thoughts on this national day of mourning were in order. On page 2, see Rabbi Rembaum's recollections of the early days of the Minyan. If you would like to be interviewed in this ongoing series, please contact me or one of our associate editors, Michelle Wolf or Dianne Winocur.

Don't miss Norm Greene's response to David Eliezrie's critique of the Library Minyan on page 3. I was tempted to respond myself, only Norm did such an excellent job! I would like to share an incident which occurred at the Library Minyan the day after Rabbi Eliezrie's article came out in the Jewish Journal. When informed of Eliezrie's assertion that the Library Minyan does not accept Torah Mi-Sinai, one member immediately responded, "But we don't!" and almost simultaneously another member stated, "But we do!" I could only laugh, because the exchange symbolizes exactly what I love about the Library Minyan, and why it does continue to meet my spiritual and intellectual needs, contrary to Rabbi Eliezrie's expectation. Such exchanges are typical in the Library Minyan, and are indicative of the "freedom to disagree" we enjoy. I appreciate the fact that there is no one person or committee that enforces some kind of "party line", and censures any members who do not adhere to it.

 DON'T FORGET WE'RE STILL
 COLLECTING FOODSTUFFS FOR
 SOVA

(Editor's Column, cont.)

In the same spirit, see Eric Lesin's article on page 5, and Diane Winocur's response to it below (to which I also contributed). As he himself acknowledges, Eric's opinions may not represent the consensus here in the Library Minyan. Nevertheless, his presence here is welcome and his opinions valid and valued. Anyone else wishing to respond to the issues he raises is free to do so in these pages.

MITZVAH CORPS COMES TO TBA

Temple Beth Am is establishing a "Mitzvah Corps" for volunteers to help out in the day-to-day functions of the synagogue, such as clerical tasks, assistance with mailings, and other important jobs.

Please return the flier you by now have received from the Temple and help in any way you can.

CELEBRATING SIMCHAS

--by Cathy Engel-Marder

At the Library Minyan, your simcha is our simcha. Whether it be an aufrauf, a bar or bat mitzvah (yours or your kid's) or any other occasion on the books, let us be a part of your joy. We'll help you plan a truly soulful Shabbat service and a kiddush hopping with good friends, good cheer and plenty of good things to eat. The memories are worth it--not just for you and your family, but for the entire Minyan community.

To get the ball rolling, here's all you need to do:

1. Give us at least two weeks lead time.
2. Phone Lida Baker (213-934-3663). She's the one who'll ink your date onto the Minyan calendar. She'll also slip you the name of the gabbai on duty the day of your event.
3. Give the gabbai a call to plan aliyot and any other honors that come to mind.
4. Call Mark Rothman (310-659-0269) to coordinate a drash.
5. With the service safely arranged, phone Judy Weinstock (213-933-1772) to coordinate and budget your kiddush.

Remember... there's no better place to hold a celebration than here. We'll fill your service with soul, your kiddush with down-home friendship and your plate with the tastiest goodies in town.

YET ANOTHER VIEWPOINT ON HOMOSEXUALITY

--by Dianne Winocur

We on the Minyan Monthly editorial board would like to begin the practice of responding to columns within the same issue in which they appear, since this is our privelege as editors. Anyone wanting to join the board and have a say in such efforts is welcome.

(Winocur, cont.)

We begin this trend with a response to Mr. Lesin's essay on homosexuality and recent efforts to encourage Library Minyan members reconsider their positions on the topic.

"How does sanctioned homosexuality add to our chances for the next millenium?" he asks. He feels homosexuality is a diversion from the larger problem of the continuation of the people of Israel. We would question, what is the purpose for the continuation of Am Yisrael? Whatever our views on this, it seems to have something to do with humanizing humanity. If this is true, then how we treat homosexuals and others who are "different" is a benchmark which shows how we are progressing.

We need to be consistent in supporting the underdog and opening our arms to anyone willing to pray with us. Doing so, we may see an end to the abandonment of Judaism by our gay family members and friends, and regain others who have rejected Judaism as exclusionary and reactionary. While we agree with Lesin's assertion that homosexuals may not be "de facto" societal victims, when denied jobs or housing or other basic rights they do become situational victims due to our own inhumane policies.

Lesin seems unaware that gay couples are raising families these days. It is the dream of many Jewish gays to raise a family of Jews. But if there is no Jewish community for such a family, what chances do the children have of maintaining their parents' identity?

This leads to the question of gay synagogues. Why are they needed, some may ask. Obviously, for just this reason. Other congregations, even the Library Minyan, may claim open-mindedness on the subject of homosexuals' legitimacy as Jews. But we do not actively seek membership by gay families. We do not accept, let alone conduct, gay "marriages." We rejoice at the aufraufs of heterosexual couples in our midst, but have not made a policy of celebrating gay couples' commitments.

The problem with gay synagogues seems to be the wide variation in members' backgrounds and preferences for worship. Since the only movements open to gay members have been Reform and Reconstructionist, those with more traditional backgrounds or interests have nowhere to go.

Until now, our darshanim have focused on the narrow point of rethinking the Biblical mandate, "Do not lie with a man as with a woman." The traditional interpretation of this verse is that homosexuality in any form must be rejected. As our darshanim contend, this view may be historically and contextually inaccurate, and could be a recent understanding of the text. But one thing is certain, gays and lesbians are here to stay. They are individuals with rights and spiritual needs the same as every other member of the community, and we must take a stand one way or the other.

It may be time to move ahead -- to take action. Perhaps a bridge to the gay community can be forged at the Library Minyan.