

MINYAN MONTHLY

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Against Universal Peace?

--by Mitchell Miller

Who could be against universal peace? The very thought is enough to subject one to anathema. To question the desirability of modifying the Kaddish to include a prayer for universal peace suggests that one is a hawk, nay, virtually a warmonger. But not every splendid thought needs to be expressed at each and every point in our daily speech, let alone in our prayers.

Not only do we have before us a proposal to add "peace for the whole world" to the Kaddish Shalem, but it has been advanced that we ought to make the addition of such a phrase without even considering it a change in the liturgy. (Is the proposal intended to eventually extend to all Kaddishes? To any additions the Sh'liach Tzibbur wishes to make? We do not know.)

A few historical, procedural and substantive points in response to the proposed addition need to be made:

First, the adoption of Siddur Sim Shalom by no means indicates that the Minyan has accepted its liturgy verbatim. The book simply appeared one day in the chapel. Many members of the Minyan are quite dissatisfied with it, to say

nothing of its method of adoption. Its frequently inaccurate but politically correct translations (or non-translations) grate on the nerves. One is never sure which congregations use the "alternative" sections and which use the parts "some congregations add" or why.

Second, the existence of a particular prayer in Siddur Sim Shalom (or any siddur, for that matter) does not necessarily imply that we will include it in our service. To mention only one example, the short Talmudic passage beginning "Amar Rabbi Elazar," although included in the Sim Shalom just prior to Aleinu, was dropped from our services many years ago -- though no one remembers why -- though it contains some beautiful thoughts as well. Indeed, few Ba'alei T'filah include the word "Ba'olam" (in the concluding paragraph of the Amidah, as mentioned in the proposal) in their davening.

Third, it has never been our practice to change our service, and certainly not to change the liturgy, without a full study of the matter and approval by the Minyan. I don't see any reason why we should change that procedure.

As to the substance of the proposal, although Kaddish may not be as "core" to the prayer service as the Amidah, it is one of the greatest and most universal parts of the service. If we are to add the proposed phrase to all Kaddishes, we must consider

that people who do not come during the year often find themselves drawn to the synagogue for Yizkor and yahrzeits. Is this where a modification to the service should be made? Mourner's Kaddish includes a transliteration for those who feel unfamiliar with the prayer. Would we insert a new transliterated paragraph?

There are many places in the service, and throughout the texts, where the desire for universal peace is expressed. There is even a prayer, colorless and vapid though it may be, included in Sim Shalom for just that purpose, and the Sh'liach Tzibbur may and does on occasion include that. In addition to (or preferably instead of) that prayer, I would suggest some of the truly expressive and meaningful words of Isaiah or Amos regarding the hope for peace in the world.

Finally, there is an implication in the proposal that without making this change, we are exclusivist and unconcerned with peace for the entire world. The record of the Jews -- the first people to even propose universal peace as an ideal, who have contributed so much to the notion of peace, and who have suffered so much from the absence of peace -- needs no defense from me. We should not in any way be reluctant to or feel guilty about asking the Kodosh Baruch Hu to send a little peace our particular way.

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STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT: Microphone Debate

-- submitted by Carl Sunshine

The issue of using a microphone in the new chapel for Library Minyan services has been raised again, as you know if you read the last issue of the Minyan Monthly. At the Steering Committee meeting on March 13, the issue was discussed at some length. At present there seem to be strong sentiments on both sides. We plan to invite drashot, articles and letters to the Minyan Monthly, conduct a survey, and hold well-publicized discussion meetings on this subject over the next several months to further our understanding.

One major concern appears to be how quickly we should make a decision on the issue. Some feel we should try the new chapel acoustics before making a decision, thereby delaying any decision until after this year's High Holidays. Others feel the problems of no microphone are significant enough that we should try to make a decision prior to High Holidays.

At the last meeting, it was decided that we would continue to discuss the issue over the next three months, and make a group decision in June as to whether we should continue to discuss the issue longer, or make a decision on the question prior to the High Holidays.





TREASURER'S REPORT

-- by Dale Bodenstein

Join fellow members of the Library Minyan in honoring one of the founding members of the Minyan, Rabbi Joel Rembaum on his 10th year as spiritual leader of Temple Beth Am.

Our goal is to include in the "Keepsake Family Album," commemorating Temple Beth Am's 60th Anniversary and honoring Rabbi Rembaum, a full-page congratulatory message. We will express our thanks and offer our good wishes on behalf of the entire Library Minyan. Of course, we hope this is in addition to any personal messages or Family Tree pages you might already be placing in the Family Album.

We welcome any size donations towards Library Minyan mazel tovs to our own Rabbi Joel Rembaum. Please send your contributions by April 15th to:

Library Minyan
Dale Bodenstein, Treasurer
1121 South Spaulding Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90019

The Library Minyan gratefully acknowledges the following generous contributions:

Baruch Link for Torah Aliyah

Leon and Anne Kramer (parents of Marshall Kramer)

Jeff Marder, in honor of Norm and Rachel Green for Shabbat hospitality.

Mel Rosenthal, in honor of Cathy Engel Marder, who had recent surgery.

Mollie Aczel, in honor of the wedding of Elizabeth Anne Aczel and Stuart Bryan Wallock.

Beverly, Andy and Joshua Liggett and RoseMarie and Herman Goodman, in honor of Allen and Judy Weinstock and family and Esther and Eddie Friedman and family.

TORAH GABBAI ('IM) NEEDED

The position of Torah Gabbai is unoccupied. The job consists of orchestrating the Torah service at least once a month, and lining up others to do it whenever possible. Good Hebrew reading skills are required, and Torah reading skills are recommended though not essential. Call Arnie Wuhrman for more information, (310) 657-5533.

SHABBAT CHILDCARE PROGRAM

-- By Michelle K. Wolf

With all the other changes taking place at shul, you might not have noticed that our Shabbat childcare program has been greatly enhanced, under the direction of Sherri Kadovitz, a professional Jewish educator recently hired to direct children's programs on Shabbat.

There are now coordinated programs for all our kids, ages 1-12, taking place in the School Building. Little ones, ages 1-5, can enjoy Tot Shabbat from 11-Noon, with songs, simple prayers and stories, not to mention fruit-loop necklaces and other fun activities.



The older children are all invited to participate in Jr. Congregation services, with separate services on the way for first-third graders and fourth-sixth graders.

Sherri has twenty years of experience working with children and wants to create a "positive Shabbat environment for children and their families."

She is also the Museum Director of "My Jewish Discovery Place," a hands-on Jewish museum at the Westside Jewish Community Center, for children ages 3-7. Please join me in welcoming her to Temple Beth Am and the Library Minyan!

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A Bar Mitzvah Observed

--by Sharon L. William

Many of you have met my son, Jason, and most of you are aware we recently celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at his father's synagogue in Orange County. But few are familiar with the story behind this event, which was far from a foregone conclusion.

Many people assume that I went into the field of learning disabilities after my son's diagnosis as learning disabled, but this is not true. At the time I chose this career, Jason was only three years old. There was no sign of learning problems, indeed he seemed advanced in many ways.

When he turned five, preschool testing showed Jason wasn't yet ready for kindergarten. I allowed him to wait a year, enrolling him in a "Preppy-K" program at his preschool. Despite what seemed like a good program, he showed little interest in learning his letters and numbers, and still barely knew how to write his name when he entered kindergarten at age six.

I can easily understand how LD students develop a bad attitude toward learning when I recall my son's first school experiences. About a week after school started, he got into the car one day with a sad look on his face. When I asked him what was wrong he said, "The teacher says I work too slow!"

Apparently he heard such negative messages frequently, and the kindergarten teacher began sending home packets of worksheets with instructions to "finish at home."

This all happened at about the time I moved to Los Angeles, though I was still working in the East San Gabriel Valley. The next year I got a job in Santa Monica, and Jason began attending school there. By the middle of first grade, his teacher was concerned enough to refer him for special education testing.

The psychologist said he had a higher than average IQ, along with many of the symptoms of "classic dyslexia", i.e. the left-right confusion and letter reversals people think of when one mentions dyslexia (though there are other forms). Jason showed strengths in

other areas, such as physical coordination and perceiving spatial relationships, also typical with learning disabled students. It amazes me that, despite attempts to educate the public, many learning disabled children grow up thinking they must be stupid, when in fact the exact opposite is true.

In spite of the extra help he was getting from the Resource Specialist at school, Jason had a very difficult time learning to read and write. He couldn't seem to memorize words by sight, and although an approach focusing on sound-letter relationships was very slow and tedious, it seemed to work better for him than other methods.

I had frequent run-ins with his teachers, however, who felt he should be required to do the same amount of homework and classwork as everyone else, even if it took him three times as long. I remember one teacher who never let him do art, because he hadn't finished his "important" work.

At about this time I began to become involved with the Library Minyan, and the Jewish community as a whole. As I became disillusioned with the public schools' handling of Jason's learning needs, I decided to try some of the Jewish Day Schools I was hearing so much about.

Imagine my surprise when I found that the situation for learning disabled students is even worse among Jewish schools than it is in public education! More than one principal, when I mentioned Jason's learning disability, told me they could not help me, that he was far better off in public school.

Dr. Ackerman, at Pressman academy, felt his needs were too severe to be addressed in the program, despite access to a part-time Resource Specialist. Several people told me it was unrealistic to expect Jason to read and write in Hebrew, since he was having such a

struggle in English.

That was when I began to wonder if planning for a Bar Mitzvah wasn't a total waste of time. Some people said, "Well, don't worry, he can always memorize his Torah portion." But somehow that doesn't represent Jewish literacy to me. I even called the Jewish Federation, trying to locate an after-school program for learning disabled students, but the only ones they knew of were in the Valley.

Finally, a parent of one of the other Jewish students in my LD class mentioned a program at University Synagogue. A wonderful teacher there by the name of Abby worked with Jason in a small group, teaching him the Hebrew alphabet and vowels. By the end of that year, Jason was able to sound out basic Hebrew words. He said to me, "Mom, reading Hebrew is easier than English! At least the letters always say the same thing."

Of course, there was much more study to be done before a Bar Mitzvah was in the works, but I can't begin to express how proud I was as I watched him at the bimah that day, reading from the Torah. He didn't want to "cheat" and memorize his portion, he wanted to be really reading it. Who was I to object?

According to tests completed last fall, Jason now reads about three years above his grade level. Did his study of Hebrew have anything to do with this remarkable turnaround? Probably it was a combination of factors. But I'm glad I didn't give up, as so many advised me to do. It seems to me there is much more that could be done for students like Jason, to ensure that all have access to a quality Jewish education.





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Editor's Column

--by Sharon L. Williams

This month's issue has many important issues to cover, from a response to last month's article on "Universal Peace" (p.1) to further information on the microphone debate (p. 2). We are open to and earnestly encourage responses on either of these topics, and others you feel need to be raised.

Please note our plans to place a congratulatory message in the Family Album, for our own Rabbi Rembaum (see Treasurer's Report, p. 3). If you have a donations for this purpose, they are needed immediately.

The office of Torah Gabbai is still open; please let us know of any other openings or changes to the Minyan Contact list.

On page 4 you will find some personal reflections on my son's Bar Mitzvah. I still have difficulty believing I am the mother of a Bar Mitzvah, especially for the reasons mentioned in the article. Many thanks to all who helped and shared our simcha at kiddush several weeks ago.

HAPPY PASSOVER!!!

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