

MINYAN MONTHLY

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Heshvan-Kislev 5756

CHAYYE SARAH AND THE DEATH OF RABIN

(From a Drash given 11/18/95)

-- Sharon L. Williams-Wenger

The tragic events in Israel have provided a stark and disturbing contrast to the theme of the Torah portions of recent weeks. We can all gain wisdom by examining the way Abraham treats the inhabitants of the land where he sojourned for most of his days, indeed the way he lived his entire life. This week, the parshah details his dealings with the Hittites when it came time to bury Sarah after her death.

Despite his distraction over the loss of his life's companion, Abraham is the soul of honor as he attempts to buy a piece of land where, as yet, he has none. He never lets on that he knows someday all this land will be his. He doesn't even haggle with the owner of the land he wants, rather he instantly weighs out the first price mentioned, in the common, immediately usable currency of the region.

Contrast this to what happened in last week's parshah, Vayera, in which Abraham bargains with God, the Ruler of the entire Universe, for the lives of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah! Abraham seems to have valued human life far more than any material goods, even more than land.

This same cave Abraham

bought from Ephron the Hittite in this week's parshah, revered by both peoples as the burial place of their common ancestor, was the site of a shameful massacre a few years ago at Purim. This act showed a complete lack of knowledge and respect for the principles and character of Abraham.

That anyone, even a Rabbi, should justify the killing of anyone else, or passing judgement on our duly elected leader (and as Steven mentioned last week, the equivalent of God's anointed) shows that they have little true understanding of God's word or his intent for Israel, as revealed in Torah. Perhaps they see themselves in the mold of David, warrior of God, who expanded and consolidated the ancient kingdom of Israel? But of David it cannot be said, as it was of Abraham, that he instructed his children after him in the ways of God. Hence the haftarah portion this week, in which David as an old man must put down the rebellion of Adonijah.

At the end of this week's parshah, Isaac and Ishmael are reconciled as they bury their father together in the cave at Machpelah. What a beautiful metaphor for what we would like to see happen in the Middle East today!

In future Torah portions, we see other examples of the exemplary behavior of the patriarchs toward the inhabitants of the land. Isaac made treaties with Abimelech,

indeed was willing to keep moving away until he found room for himself and his growing possessions and family. Jacob, who became the greatest of them all, thanks to his two wives and their concubines, was very aware of his precarious position among the inhabitants of Canaan.

In the unfortunate incident with Deena, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi took retribution of the inhabitants of Shechem, killing and despoiling them after deceitfully encouraging them to circumcize themselves. Jacob is irate, fearful that their hasty actions will "make me odious to the inhabitants of the land... and I, being few in number, they will gather themselves against me and smite me; and I shall be destroyed, and my house." He could have fallen back on God's promises of the land, but he apparently understood that these were partly dependent on his own and his descendents' actions.

Let's look a little further into the future, as the Israelites are beginning to take possession of the "promised land." Despite their entrance with a bang, all did not go so smoothly, with the Israelites moving in and displacing the Canaanites. We know from the book of Judges that for many years they had to "co-exist" with the previous inhabitants, only gradually gaining the strength to take over the more desirable land. The archeological record shows the Israelite "occupation" originally applied to what had formerly been unwanted land, the "hill country" composed of the arid central ridge of mountains, and which only became habitable due to two innovative farming techniques.

This hill country received plentiful rain in the winter, but became an arid desert in the dry months as the rain ran off and gathered in the fertile valleys.

The Israelites found a way to solve this problem, primarily by digging cisterns and lining them with limestone. This enabled them to catch and hold the seasonal rains for later use.

Concurrently, they built terraces along the lines of the hills, using the abundant stones to make walls, and packing the fertile dirt behind the walls, so it would no longer wash away. The land could then be cultivated year-round with the stored rainwater, hence was capable of supporting stable communities and townships, which it had been unable to do previously.

But it was many generations, as we can see from the stories in Judges and Samuel, before the Israelites were a dominant force in the land. Even though God had given them the right to settle there, it was as if he was saying to them, "Now you have to earn the actuality." The same holds true for today.

I sympathize with the fears of the settlers, fears for their families, that they will lose the land they've worked and slaved for, fears that the government they trusted, that encouraged them to settle in disputed territory has now turned against them. But I also fear the rhetoric which has encouraged the kind of extremism we saw unleashed against one of our elected leaders, a celebrated war hero, two weeks ago. This kind of behavior is frighteningly close to the events occurring during the final days of the Second Temple, when the Romans sat outside our walls and watched as we destroyed ourselves from within.

The West Bank settlers have a unique opportunity, if they could only look past their fears to see it. They have not been cut off, or forced to move, by the current peace treaty. They will remain connected, by roads and communication lines, to the rest of Israel, much like the tribes who settled beyond the Jordan in ancient days. But of them will be required the "nuts and bolts" of peace. They must learn to build ties to their Arab neighbors, and trust where none has existed before.

They need to remember that their neighbors have little reason to trust them, but even less to trust their Arab "allies", as all have seen in recent years. I believe the Palestinians are in favor of peace, not because they believe this is their chance to throw us into the sea, but because they see it as their first and perhaps last chance for freedom on their own land, land they also believe belongs to them through Ishmael, and Abraham's other sons.

So the settlers have a chance to prove and test their own faith in God, in his ability to protect and prosper them. They have a chance to give real peace a try, in a place where none would have believed it could ever exist. Both sides can say, "Oh, I could never trust them, they are my enemies!" As I tell my students when they complain of being placed in a group with someone they hate, "You don't have to marry them, you only have to work with them!" This usually brings sheepish grins and a little laughter, and soon students are focused on the common task, instead of each other.

Abraham seemed to understand the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries also since, despite his respect and esteem for his neighbors, he sent his servant to take a wife for Isaac from his own kindred.

As farmers, the Palestinians and Israeli settlers have much more in common than they both realize. Imagine if it were possible to "beat the swords into plowshares" and till the land together for the good of all. What if they could share ideas and resources for preserving water, fertilization, storage, pest control and a host of other common problems? What kind of example to the world would it present if, in spite of the historic, racial and religious tension, peace were to become reality in this ancient land?

This is the challenge facing the settlers today, even more than the rest of us, but it can be accomplished, by looking to and emulating the example of our father Abraham, in lovingkindness and truth, in selflessness, in hospitality, in pity for humanity and in his faith in God. Isaiah 51:1-2 says, "Look unto the rock whence you were hewn... look unto Abraham your father." Let us all pray that this phase of history will end as does today's parshah, with the brothers reconciled at the grave of their father.

MINYAN LIST UPDATES

Please communicate all changes and updates of the Minyan List to:

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Los Angeles, CA 90035
(213) 651-1633 - home
E-Mail: sigman @ metcom.com



Re-Register to Vote

-- by Norm Green

As Jews, we understand the power of traditions. This article, however, is devoted not to a Jewish tradition, but to a California tradition. Until about 20 years ago, many Californians followed a tradition of re-registering to vote in different parties' primaries depending on which would be more interesting or more important.

The coming 1996 primaries provide an excellent case in point. As of now, it appears that the only highly contested partisan primary in our region of the state will be the Republican presidential primary. Most of us live in Congressional, State Senate and Assembly districts represented by Democratic incumbents who will face no meaningful primary challenge for reelection, and they are not subject to immediate term limits. No state-wide offices will be up for election in 1996. President Clinton is unlikely to face a significant primary challenge in California.

On the other hand, the Republican primary promises to be the most important and controversial in a generation. First, the Republicans have a variety of candidates with varying characteristics, whether measured by personal character, by specific policies or by other criteria.

Second, it is distinctly possible that the Republican candidate may be elected. The Republican nomination battle will be very important for this country, and indeed the world, even if the ultimate nominee is not elected, for it will help to shape the future of the Republican party and to define the issues and approaches that will be considered in coming years.

At a recent "debate" between political liberal Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller and politically conservative Daniel Lapin, one of the few points of agreement was that Pat Buchanan can fairly be characterized as an antisemite. In a well-publicized article a few years ago, leading conservative William F. Buckley, Jr., concurred. Prominent neo-conservative Norman Podhoretz, in an article defending several "Christian right" personalities from similar charges, essentially conceded the issue with respect to Mr. Buchanan.

While his antisemitism is not the only thing I find objectionable about Mr. Buchanan, it is the reason I have sought this forum to discuss this issue. Our community will probably be divided in determining which candidates to support, but I believe that we all should look with alarm at the candidacy of Pat Buchanan.

Some people will dismiss the Buchanan candidacy as unlikely to succeed. However, he is being treated by many, including much of the mass media and many mainstream polls, as a sufficiently mainstream candidate to have a significant voice on many issues. The

situation of a candidate with clearly antisemitic views being treated as respectable is a very serious one indeed, even if one can be certain he himself will not be nominated for President.

Further, some people may consider some of stronger candidates as being almost as unpalatable. For example, at least two of the candidates favor legislation that would prohibit abortions even in some situations where Jewish law makes them mandatory. Clearly, this election will be an important one and present significant choices.

Almost every Jew in America, other than those who are required to be Democrats for professional reasons, should register and vote in the Republican presidential primary in 1996. I say this as one who has been a registered Democrat for over ten years and who once appeared on a Democratic primary ballot. No reader of this article should ever face the prospect of someday telling a child or grandchild that he or she skipped the important chance to vote in the 1996 Republican primary and help shape the future.

I am aware that some people are dogmatically attached to the Democratic party. Be assured that voting in a party's primary does not obligate one to vote for any of that party's candidates in the future, or to continue voting in that party's primaries. And it's free.

While I feel that such a political message as this one would be an inappropriate topic for a drash, I feel that the importance of the topic necessitates bringing it to your attention in this forum. I would be happy to discuss these or related issues with any of you.

The time has come to revive the California tradition of party switching to maximize the power of the vote.



NEW KIDDUSH PROGRAM FOR THE LIBRARY MINYAN

-- by Sheryl Eisenberg

Temple Beth Am is making it easier than ever to sponsor a kiddush for the Library Minyan. The goal is to have a kiddush every week after Services. Here's how you can help.

1) Look at your calendar and choose a date that has a special meaning for you, i.e. your birthday, anniversary, or engagement; your child's birthday; family or friends will be visiting from out of town; the anniversary of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah; we're reading your favorite parshah; commemorating a yahrzeit; celebrating a graduation, the publication of a paper, receiving an honor, a new job or promotion; you've just returned safely from a trip; you'd like to say "thank you" to someone special.

NOTE: Feel free to find friends to share in the sponsorship! Groups of people are encouraged to co-sponsor together - share the mitzvah!

2) Call Amy Rabin at the Temple office at (310) 652-7353 ext. 213 to reserve the date.

3) Decide what kind of a kiddush you'd like. Here are the current options for a "regular" Shabbat (150-200 people):

- A. BASIC KIDDUSH \$100
Entenmann's bakery goods
Wine + Grape Juice
Cups + Napkins + Linen
tablecloths
- B. BASIC KIDDUSH PLUS (\$100 for all of the above plus)
Fresh fruit platter: \$75
Chumus, babaganoush + pita
or crackers: \$75
Bagels & Cream Cheese: \$100
Soft Drinks: \$25
Bakery goods other than
Entenmann's (ask Amy for
prices)

OR, instead of the Basic Kiddush, choose one or more items from the above list and add \$50 for wine + grape juice + paper goods + linens + set-up/clean-up; for example, fruit (\$75) + bagels and cream cheese (+ \$100 = \$175 + \$50 = \$225).

- C. Catered Kiddush
\$7 per person & up,
depending on what you
want. Speak to Amy
for options.

4) Confirm your choice with Amy and send her a check (payable to Temple Beth Am). She will arrange for everything to be set up for you, and clean-up will also be done by the Temple. Your name will be listed as a kiddush sponsor in the Shabbat Bulletin.

If you have further questions or requests, speak to Amy directly. You may also talk to Sheryl Eisenberg or Judy Weinstock if you have suggestions to share.



Treasurer's Report

-- by Dale Bodenstein

Now that we are in our beautiful, permanent chapel I felt this to be a good time to bring new and old members up to date on the status of the Minyan treasury.

By way of information, the input to the Minyan treasury is through donation only-- contributions made in honor of an aliyah, to commemorate a simcha, in memory of a loved one. Periodically a call has been put out to the membership for monies for specific purposes. This shall be made clear as I list where Minyan treasure money is used.

1. Through the years, the Minyan has paid a portion of the money paid each month for baby sitters used during child care for Shabbat and Hagim. This averages to about \$300 per year.

2. Tributes the Minyan makes in honor of some of our members, generally when they are being honored by other charitable organizations. The amount varies from year to year.

3. Miscellaneous expenses such as stamps, thank you cards, etc. This past year we paid to have a Torah repaired.

4. Kiddushes--we paid to honor the child care staff with a special kiddush last year. One year the Library Minyan sponsored a big kiddush in the Crystal Room on Simhat Torah.

This brings us to the real nuts and bolts of the treasury.

As of this Fall the Library Minyan has:

\$1156 which has been donated to the Library Minyan Kiddush Fund and \$ 200 for general expenses \$1356 total

So, it looks like the Library Minyan could fill in with eleven Shabbat kiddushes. It would be nice to have a kiddush every week, which means members and groups of members should consider sponsoring a kiddush according to the suggestions made by Judy Weinstock and Sheryl Eisenberg. Perhaps we could think of it as the Library Minyan providing one kiddush a month with individuals providing for the rest.

In any case, we need some new monies flowing into the treasury. Periodically, we have asked members to help pay for babysitting. It has been a long time since this call has been made. Please consider making a donation to the treasury for this, for kiddushes, for tzedakah.

Send donations either to the Temple office, attention Minyan treasury, or to:

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

Checks can be payable to the Beth Am Library Minyan and are tax deductible.

Some recent thanks go to:

Dr. Alan and Sheila Spiwak, Edward and Tamar Andrews, Norm and Rachel Green, and Jonathan Friedman for their Simhat Torah pledges.

Neil and Sharon Williams-Wenger in honor of Yitzhak Yaron, for providing music at their wedding.

Debbie and Jerry Abeles in memory of Larry Harris' grandmother.

Mark and Vicki Rothman in honor of the birth of their son, Eitan Rami Rothman.

Norm and Rachel Green in honor of Itzhak Yaron.

Cathi Lippman & Jules Kamins, in honor of the birth of Eitan Rami Rothman, Michelle Wuhrman, and Adina Stern, and in memory of Max Stern's brother.

Rachel and Norm Green in honor of Abe Schlossberg's birthday.

Susan and Arthur Mishler, in memory of Pearl Horowitz, loving mother of Perry Horowitz.

Please submit articles for the Minyan Monthly, on disk (IBM or Mac) to:

Sandra Braun
6516 Whitworth Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90035
Home - (213) 934-3231
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Microphones for the Minyan?

-- by Henry Morgen

I have been planning to write something for the Minyan Monthly for a long time. This summer, as we deliberated over the microphone issue, I decided that if the vote went the way I hoped (and it did), I would share my opinion on using the microphone in our new worship space in an article. This had to wait until the new facility was built, however, because so many factors were dependent on the facility itself.

During the Yomim Nora'im I spent time sitting in various parts of the Dorff-Nelson chapel/hall over the course of the many services we held. I have come to the conclusion that there are times when we will need to use a microphone with speakers activated in the rear section. However, this will only be necessary when a congregation is in attendance large enough to require seating beyond the middle of the third partition. What follows is what I observed, how I arrived at my conclusion, and some suggestions or alternatives to consider.

The hall is truly beautiful. The committee and architects did a wonderful job of creating a space that is warm and prayerful. They were also very successful at wringing out every bit of acoustic advantage they could from the available structure. The biggest problem they had to deal with is the relatively low ceiling.

By creating the cutaway sections they were able to give the appearance that the ceiling is higher than it is; however, acoustically, the sound does not travel across this ceiling the way it would in a concert hall. This becomes especially noticeable when sitting in the back few rows of the expanded seating of the third section, and when the room is filled with people who are standing. Even a Ba'al T'filah with moderately good projection is virtually inaudible under these circumstances.

Contributing to the difficulty in hearing the leader is the murmuring of the masses and the Minyan's minhag of having the leader face the ark, not the congregation. The architects did the right thing by using sound-absorbing tiles above the seats outside the front section; but by the time you build up the occasional, though hushed, ambient sound of 250 people, this background noise matches or beats the sound level of the single leader near the front.

Another contributor to the problem is the folding walls which deaden the sound traveling back along the west wall. The remaining barrier is the sheer distance that the participant in the back experiences from the leader near the front. It is not easy to see him/her, and the narrowness of the space exaggerates the feeling of distance.

For the record, I do not feel we need a microphone during regular Shabbat services. In fact, I really do not want to use a microphone at all during any of our services. There are Orthodox

congregations that deal with the use of a microphone on Shabbat by leaving the electricity on all the time, and not being concerned that the voice is causing pulses of energy to travel through the sound system. The Conservative Movement has determined that the use of electricity per se is not a violation of Shabbat. The issue for me is beyond the arguments regarding Halacha. Joel Grossman made an excellent point in a Drash he gave on the subject when he stated that a microphone would destroy the feeling of intimacy that one gets from the unamplified human voice.

I had hoped that we would be able to maintain this feeling in our new environment and not be concerned with our burgeoning size by having to use artificial supplements. Alas, I don't believe this is reasonable any more. There are minor things that could still be done to avoid using a microphone in a limited way, but I don't think any of them will eliminate the need for amplification when we're at our largest (and possibly growing) assembled size.

One thing that could be done is to remove the folding walls completely when such a large set-up is required. Another possibility is to install acoustically reflective tile on the front (stained glass) wall. Another option that comes to mind is to require all people who don't want the microphone to sit in the back of the congregation if we open up past the second partition. This way they can best appreciate the environment they requested. Of course this is silly suggestion.

An option that would be unpleasant to me would be to split the Minyan over this issue. Avi Havivi's observations reported in the Tishrei Minyan Monthly point out that the Library Minyan is very big for the type of congregation it is. Beth Am is now able to support a

rich diversity of minyanim. This is very exciting to me! I think it speaks well of the whole community. On the other hand, I would really feel uncomfortable telling anyone who wanted to participate and be a member of the Library Minyan that they were not welcome to do so.

It is in the light of trying to be inclusive and to accomodate all those who wish to be members of our Minyan community that I concede a microphone is necessary whenever we hold services that include the vast majority of the community at the same time in our new and flexible facility. I believe the microphone could be routed only to speakers in the back of the congregation, however, thus enabling all members to participate fully, while preserving the intimacy we treasure in the front sections of the hall.

OPEN MEETING

Sunday, December 10, 1995, 7 PM

An important meeting will be held Sunday, Dec. 10, 7:00 p.m. at Temple Beth Am, open to all members of the Library Minyan, to discuss matters of interest, including possible restructuring of the organization of the Minyan. If anyone has something they would like to add to the Agenda, please call Alan Broidy at (310) 286-6601.

MINYAN COMMITTEES/CONTACTS

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Minyan Treasurer
Dale Bodenstein(213)937-7443
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Val Goldstein (310)837-5503
Gabai'im-Shabbat/Holiday Services
Torah Honors
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Susan Grinel (310)559-6780
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Abby Harris (310)556-7778
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Shiva Minyans
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DON'T FORGET WE'RE STILL COLLECTING
CANNED AND PACKAGED FOODS FOR
SOVA

Editor's Column

--by Sharon Williams-Wenger

I want to thank everyone who helped and contributed articles and feedback during my two year tenure as editor, especially my co-editors, Michelle Wolf and Diane Winocur. Thanks are also due to Norm Green and Ronny Cohen, who were most encouraging throughout, and also regular contributors.

As I look back over the issues we produced, I am proud to see that each issue dealt with matters of significance, providing written input and giving members a forum for the discussion and sharing of a variety of opinions. In a community of this size and type, such a forum is indeed an important vehicle, and I'd like to thank all those who took the time to write their opinions down and get them to me, in whatever form.

Several people called to thank me for the information received, and asked if there was anything they could do to support our efforts. Since the synagogue puts out and pays for the Minyan Monthly, perhaps a contribution in honor of the Minyan Monthly, or a particular issue or article, would be a good idea for those who feel they have received value in this way.

I'll be staying on as a contributing editor, so you haven't heard the last of me, but again I say thanks to all who've been supportive during my tenure as editor-in-chief, and yasher koachah to Sandra Braun, new editor-in-chief of the Minyan Monthly.