

Winter 2008

## IMUN experience – Summer 2007

By Alis Rasmussen

The USCJ website describes IMUN as “a seminar retreat designed to strengthen lay religious leadership in United Synagogue congregations.” The 2007 IMUN was held this past July at Camp Ramah New York, located, I was told, in “not-quite-the-Berkshires.” Three teachers (one rabbi and two cantors) taught sixteen participants from the USA and Canada.

Our days started at 7 am with Shacharit and ended at about 9 pm. During those 14-hour days we took classes in trope (both basic and advanced), nusach (the melodic motives used in prayer), text study and liturgy, and had discussions of how to lead services, give a Dvar Torah, handle gabbaim duties, and lead a shiva minyan. And more besides, including four guest speakers.

## Upshernish of Amiel Akiva

The weather, rainy and cloudy over the weekend, turned sunny just in time to brighten the Upshernish of Amiel Akiva Hopkins, son of Elizabeth Whisnant and Kevin Hopkins. Some 15 Sof Ma'arav members, other friends, and neighbors attended the traditional hair cutting event on Sunday, November 18th at Elizabeth and Kevin's home in Kaneohe.

The ceremony in celebration of Amiel's third birthday trains Jewish boys to observe the mitzvah of peyot, the sidelocks of observant Jews, and

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It was so intense that I actually dreamed in nusach some nights.

The food was mediocre, everyone was together almost all the time (crazy-making for an introvert), and due, I suppose, to insurance issues, it was so difficult to get into the water for a swim because of the complicated logistical system the water safety people had set up that I was only able to get in two ten-minute swims despite the heat.

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marks the beginning of their conscious Jewish education. Symbolically, we consider the child like a tree whose fruit is not harvested for the first three years. While the child absorbs the nutrients of his Jewish home life and community, he flourishes until he reaches a point where he can give back the richness that has nurtured him. The haircutting is like a harvest.

Amiel's hair fell in long ringlets around his head as he sat in a place of honor atop a table, flanked by his parents and sisters, Nesya (5) and Selilah (1).

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## Thank You

To Congregation Sof Ma'arav,

We would like to thank everyone at Sof Ma'arav for both the wonderful and warm welcome that you have bestowed upon us since we wandered into the Shabbat morning service on October 27th. On that Shabbat and since, we have felt nothing but sincere friendship and a sense of welcome that has been overwhelming.

In addition, we were very happy to have so many of you attend Amiel's upshernish in November. This was an extremely joyous occasion for us with Kevin's parents in attendance from Idaho. However, without the support of the Sof Ma'arav community, it certainly would not have been the event that it was.

In particular, we would like to thank Sandy and Don Armstrong. While Sandy assisted us with getting the word out about Amiel's upshernish, Don

brought his musical talents and keyboarding partner, Frank, to surprise and delight us with Jewish music to which we all danced and sang. This musical dimension was something that we could not have imagined and are truly grateful for your wonderful contribution to this simcha.

Finally, we would like to thank each of you who contributed tzedakah in honor of Amiel's upshernish. We collected nearly \$50 that we contributed to the Hawaii Foodbank. This contribution offers us the great opportunity to explain to Amiel the meaning of tzedakah, honor, humility, and the importance of giving and receiving so much.

It is indeed special to be able to attend a synagogue that has welcomed us so readily and has shared in the life cycle moments of our children.

Elizabeth, Kevin, Nesya, Amiel, and Selilah

## Bissl Und Bissl

By Sally Morgan

### Prize Winners and Award Winners:

1. Primo Levis' 1975 book, "The Periodic Table" was named the best science book ever written by the Royal Institution of Great Britain.
2. Philip Roth was awarded the first PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction. This \$40,000 prize, given every two years, honors a distinguished living American author of fiction whose body of work in English possesses qualities of excellence, ambition and scale of achievement over a sustained career which paces him or her in the highest rank of American literature.
3. Paul Simon was awarded the first Gershwin Prize given by the Library of Congress. This award recognizes the profound and positive effect of popular music on the world's culture.
4. Billy Crystal was awarded the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. This prize was created by the Kennedy Center to honor the brilliant minds that elbow American culture to see if it is still alive—and make us laugh about it.
5. In May, Beth Sholom Congregation Synagogue in Elkins Park, a suburb of Philadelphia, was added to the National Historic Monuments. The award means that the synagogue, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and completed in 1959, is not just of cultural importance to the Jewish community, but to the entire American landscape.
6. Dalia Sofer was given \$50,000 as one of ten winners of the annual Whiting Writers' Awards for emerging authors. Her first novel, "The Septembers of Shiraz " was published this year.

## Sally's Book Corner

By Sally Morgan

**From New York Times 100 Notable Books of the Year (Dec. 2, 2007):**

Bearing the Body by Ehud Havazelet. In this daring first novel, a man travels to California after his brother is killed in what may have been a drug transaction.

Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman. Aciman's novel of love, desire, time and memory describes a passionate affair between two young men in Italy.

Exit Ghost by Philip Roth. In his latest novel Roth brings back Nathan Zuckerman, a protagonist whom we have known since his potent youth and who now must face his inevitable decline.

The Ministry of Special Cases by Nathan Englander. A Jewish family is caught up in Argentina's "Dirty War".

The Septembers of Shiraz by Dalia Sofer. In this powerful first novel, the father of a prosperous Jewish family in Tehran is arrested shortly after the Iranian revolution.

The Yiddish Policemen's Union by Michael Chabon. Cops, thugs, schemers, rabbis, chess fanatics and obsessives of every stripe populate this screwball, hard-boiled murder mystery set in an imaginary Jewish settlement in Alaska.

Foreskin's Lament: a Memoir by Shalom Auslander. With scathing humor and bitter irony, Auslander wrestles with his Jewish Orthodox roots.

**From The Washington Post Holiday Guide (December 2, 2007):**

My Holocaust by Tova Reich. Serious, hilarious and utterly scathing. There's something here to offend everyone. Reich is the master of fury's return.

Past Perfect by Susan Isaacs. Isaac's trademarks are in full force here: a funny, smart and smart-alecky heroine, a good supporting cast, and with to burn.

Shakespeare's Kitchen: Stories by Lore Segal. The power lies in Segal's dazzling ability to merge the mundane details of life with the arc of human emotions.

Away by Amy Bloom. This immigrant story reads like dry wood bursting into flame; desperate and impassioned, erotic and moving.

Imposture by Benjamin Markovits. The youngest medical student to have taken a degree at Edinburgh is abruptly hired as personal physician to Lord Byron. A rare novel of ideas that pulses with real blood.

The Yiddish Policemen's Union by Michael Chabon. (Listed above) A strange and breathtaking novel.

The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story by Diane Ackerman. A lovely story about the Holocaust might seem like a grotesque oxymoron. But here is a true story of how the Berlin Zoo and its keepers saved the lives of Jews.

## Bissl Und Bissl – Take Two

By Sally Morgan

**From Jerusalem Post, Oct. 1, 2007:** On September 9, 2007, Jen Taylor Friedman became the first woman known to have completed a Torah scroll. She was commissioned by the United Hebrew Congregation, a Reform synagogue in St. Louis, Missouri as part of its Torah Alive! Project. Friedman delivered the completed scroll on Oct. 1, just in time for Simhat Torah.

**From Yiddish proverbs:** Sheynkeyt fargeyt, khokhme bashteyt  
(Beauty fades, wisdom stays)

## Sof Book Club

By Carolann Biederman

The Sof Book Group is pleased to present its 2008 schedule and welcomes you to attend one or all the meetings. We meet on Sundays from 1 to 3 p.m. at members' homes. Flyers with details are available closer to each meeting. For more information or to RSVP to Carolann Biederman at 254-8812 or cabc@lava.net.

**1//27/08**

**The Periodic Table by Primo Levi**

**240 pages, 1 copy @HPL**

Part autobiography, part poetry, part history and science textbook, Levi fuses these together in a memoir filled with both comedy and drama. A chemist who grew up during WWII in Mussolini's Italy, Levi uses the periodic table of the elements as metaphors to create a cycle of linked, somewhat autobiographical tales, including stories of the Piedmontese Jewish community he came from, and of his response to the Holocaust. While the majority of the novel's chapters reflect important biographical events in Levi's intriguing existence, three of the book's chapters are fictional: Carbon, Lead and Mercury. Often deceptively simple, *The Periodic Table* is hardly an elementary read -- Levi's concepts, philosophies and frequent use of veiled symbolism, require and deserve lengthy deliberation to digest their hidden depths.

**3/9/08**

**Rashi's Daughters: Miriam by Maggie Anton**

**496 pages, no library copies**

Salomon ben Isaac (Rashi), the great Talmudic authority, teaches his daughters the intricacies of Mishnah and Gemara in an era when educating women in Jewish scholarship was unheard of. The engrossing historical series continues with the tale of Miriam, the middle daughter, who becomes a midwife. Anton brings the Talmud and eleventh-century France to vivid life, provides a context for Rashi's insights and poignantly captures the struggles and triumphs of strong Jewish women.

**4/27/08**

**Septembers of Shiraz by Dalia Sofer**

**340 pages, many copies @HPL**

Sofer's family escaped from Iran in 1982 when she was 10, an experience that may explain the intense detail of this unnerving debut novel. Set in 1981, a wealthy gem trader is accosted by Revolutionary Guards at his Tehran office and imprisoned for being Jewish in a country where Muslim fanaticism is growing daily. Being rich and having had ties to the Shah's regime magnify his peril. Sofer's dramatization of just-post-revolutionary Iran captures its small tensions and larger brutalities, which play vividly upon a family that cannot, even if it wishes to, conform.

**6/22/08**

**The Yiddish Policemen's Union: A Novel by Michael Chabon**

**414 pages, many copies @HPL**

Chabon has created a world in which there is no Israel. Rather, after Israel's defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli

war, the U.S. created a temporary homeland for displaced European Jews in Sitka, Alaska. Yiddish, not Hebrew, is the primary language. Chabon's writing, like Yiddish itself, is rich and thick with meaning, funny and thoughtful. The book follows a murder investigation in a town filled with greed and corruption, and the path Detective Landsman, the protagonist, must walk is filled with hurdles and hidden minefields.

**8/10/08**

**Rembrandt's Jews by Steven Nadler**  
**250 pages nonfiction, 1 copy @HPL**

Nadler has made the intriguing world of seventeenth-century Amsterdam his specialty, first in his acclaimed *Spinoza: A Life* (1999), and now in this enlightening inquiry into the depiction of Jews in Dutch art. Using Rembrandt's profoundly human portraits of his Jewish neighbors and depictions of Old Testament stories as his base, Nadler elucidates both the inner dynamics of Jewish Amsterdam and its interactions with the city at large.

**9/28/08**

**Joy Comes in the Morning by Jonathan Rosen**  
**389 pages, 3 copies @HPL**

Deborah Green is a woman of passionate contradictions: a rabbi who craves faith and goodness while wrestling with her own doubts and desires. Her life changes when she visits the hospital room of an ailing Holocaust survivor who is recovering from a debilitating stroke and a suicide attempt and meets his skeptical son. Served with the merest teaspoon of schmaltz, Rosen's touching novel of Jewish manners thoughtfully addresses the question of whether piety can teach us faith.

**11/9/08**

**The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story by Diane Ackerman**  
**368 pages, many copies @HPL**

This nonfiction account of Jan Zabinski, the director of the Warsaw Zoo, and his wife, Antonina, who, with courage and coolheaded ingenuity, sheltered 300 Jews as well as Polish resisters in their villa and in various parts of the zoo.

**12/28/08**

**A Woman in Jerusalem by A.B. Yehoshua**  
**256 pages, no library copies**

A.B. Yehoshua is one of the most interesting and creative minds at work in literature today. The storyline is deceptively simple--a victim of a terrorist bombing in Jerusalem goes unmissed and unidentified for a week before a tabloid reveals her employer and levels an accusation of corporate indifference to her death. The humiliated employer decides to make amends, using his personnel director to "do the right thing" for the deceased employee. (The novel's original title, translated from the Hebrew, is *The Mission of the Human Resource Manager*.)

*Upshernish* from page 1

With the rocking tunes of Don Armstrong and his keyboard player Frank, the ceremony began to the rousing beat of “Siman Tov u’ Mazal Tov” after which Kevin spoke about the event’s significance to Amiel and his family.

Kevin explained that the hair cutting was a glorification of the mitzvah (Lev. 19:27) not to round off the “corners” of the head. It is also the second of Amiel’s three “coming of age” ceremonies, all of which involve the removal of “orlah” (barriers) to leading a full Jewish life. The first was his “brit milah” at 8 days old (Gen. 17:9–14), the second his Upshernish at 3 years old (Lev. 19:23–24, 27), and the third will be (B”H) his bar mitzvah at 13 years old (Deut. 10:16). Finally, the Upshernish is an opportunity to demonstrate pride in who we are as Jews and to signify Amiel’s transition to new responsibilities.

As symbols of these new responsibilities, Amiel received a kippah, a tzitzit katan, which he donned after reciting the blessing, and his very own Kiddush cup. This last gift prompted a big grin, as he had long envied Nesya’s cup at the Shabbat table.



Nesya, who has been an important guide in Amiel’s spiritual growth, demonstrated her ruach by singing a few blessings, amazed to have both a microphone and an audience. At some point during the speech and singing, Amiel squirmed down from the table and ran off to play in the palm branches. When he was called back for his big moment, like any good three-year old, he ran off giggling in the opposite direction and had to be bodily carried back to the table. To sweeten his passage, Elizabeth gave him a chocolate chip cookie. Amiel said the mzonot bracha and dutifully munched while a succession of relatives, including one set of grandparents from Idaho, and friends began clipping his curls.

When all but the peyot had been snipped, the band played and the participants joined in a circle dance, with Amiel dancing in the center. Then, everyone was invited inside to schmooze and nosh. It was truly a joyous occasion



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What made it possible to get through the week without collapsing was, I think, the sense that we were all in it together and, of course, that we had all chosen to be there. I was so impressed by this wonderful and generous group of people. One of the great elements of the week lay in our sharing local customs and melodies, and in enjoying the diversity of practice present: from the woman who attended what she described as a “hippy-dippy shul” to a man whose synagogue had just in the last few years figured out how to accommodate women at greater levels of participation without going against their understanding of halakha; from people who were members of huge Texas synagogues to the fellow from a 25-member-strong synagogue whose members had been told it was too isolated and small for a rabbi.

It also helped that we each had different strengths. For instance, I took the advanced trope classes but the basic liturgy classes, while others who knew the service backwards and forwards had never read Torah as adults. A New Jersey dentist with a lovely tenor taught us a beautiful melody for “Az Yashir.” A Texas engineer enlivened low-energy afternoons with appalling puns, aided and abetted by the rabbi (or maybe it was the other way around).

We were all encouraged to take turns leading the weekday services (naturally we davened three times a day). The week culminated as we led Shabbat morning services, sharing out the various parts of the service and the Torah and Haftarah readings. It sounds terribly hokey but is nonetheless true: when everyone is short of sleep and has been studying intensely together for a number of days, the ‘yasher koach’s are accompanied by hugs and tears.

At the end of the week, one of my fabulous room-mates mentioned how, in such an atmosphere, it was possible to try new things knowing that you would be fully supported through your (inevitable) mistakes. No one was ever embarrassed. Everyone felt embraced in their efforts to learn. I think that, more than anything, is the strength of *IMUN* as a program. It’s also a strength and philosophy we have here at Sof, and one I hope we continue to encourage and celebrate.

**Congregation Sof Ma'arav**

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*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

[www.sofmaarav.org](http://www.sofmaarav.org)

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## Children's Service Schedule

Children's services are being offered on the following dates beginning at 11 am in the Fred Harper Room (across from the Art Room) We will be conducting an interactive service geared toward children ages 6-11, however children of any age are welcome. Parents are invited, but are not required to stay in the Children's services.

Children's services will be held on the following dates:

January 19, 2008  
February 16, 2008  
March 22, 2008  
April 26, 2008  
May 24, 2008

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