

Spring 2009

Sof Ma'arav as a Community

By Sandra Z. Armstrong

On March 28, 2009 Sof Ma'arav services were held in our home. This was a particularly important week in my life as it marked the 50th anniversary of my open-heart surgery (1959) at the age of 5 years old at Deborah Hospital in Browns Mills, New Jersey. I had a 50/50 chance of survival, being that open-heart surgery was new technology. On this Shabbat, I was able to give back to the Hawaiian Jewish family by offering our home for services. The preparations continued throughout the week for the Torah to arrive with our much-loved community. First, Mat and Gin Sgan walked in. They were kind enough to bring the Torah and Sof Ma'arav's portable ark. Directly upon their heels, entered a "brand new" family of four from New Jersey, the Nhaisi family, and Stan from Poughkeepsie, New York, who just happened to be looking for our synagogue and found us that morning! We had a beautiful Shachrit service led by our neighbor, Pam Kosansky; Ethan Kuniyoshi read the Haftarah (back from California for a special visit) and Naomi Olstein presented an insightful Drash. The outdoor Oneg festivities followed. Everyone brought a pareve or dairy dish and we enjoyed the backyard sunshine long after our usual 1:00PM clean up at the Unitarian Church.

Forty people attended, and we bonded as always because it is about community. About filling in the gaps. That is what we do for each other on a weekly basis. Our lay led community forces us to try a little harder to be a part of something bigger than just one of us as

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individuals. It is more than just extended family. Meeting weekly with a minyan of Jews is the same experience as watching Shabbat candles swirl and dance around the living room, long after they were due to go out. Every week we come together to recreate ourselves by the very act of being together and uniting in prayer. As each one of us is engaged in the process of creating a holy place, so we are transformed in the essence of that creation. It cannot be labeled, bought or sold; we become a community of one, Shema Israel Adonoy Elohanu Adonoy ehad. The congregation is one. And we think how good it feels to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, but underlying all our good feelings is this Shema, our physical weekly unity that sustains our souls. We laugh, we cry, we mourn, we laugh again; we try once more to be better than the week before, this is what we take away from our Shabbat morning experience. Some of us read Hebrew well, others do not, it is the essence of who we are that counts.

We know that a welcoming spirit is essential to our house of worship as we emulate our biblical

Reflections from Mumbai

By Shaaroni Wong

For the past two days I, along with many others across the world, have been attached to my computer, constantly hitting the “refresh” button on six different websites in an effort to get information on the situation in Mumbai. From 2005 to 2006 I lived in Colaba, blocks away from the Taj hotel and the Chabad House (often referred to as the Jewish Center by the news). As a Chinese Jew, I am used to drawing second glances in Jewish communities around the world, but when I visited Chabad House in Mumbai, Rivki and Rabbi Gavi Holzberg welcomed me, no questions asked. They were amazing hosts, welcoming people not only into their homes, but into their lives and hearts. When my non-Jewish friend was ill, Rivki made soup for her, when my Muslim roommate came with me for dinner, Rivki and Rabbi Gavi welcomed her as well. I spent time at their house almost every day, learning from Rivki, helping them set up for holidays and Sabbaths, listening to Rabbi Gavi speak about the Torah on the Sabbath. Indeed while I was so far away from Hawai'i and my family, I found family in them. Today I sit in shock not only at their tragic deaths, but the tragic deaths of all the victims in Mumbai. While I was living there I was struck by the warmth of the people there and by the joy they had for life. My heart breaks for everyone who lost family and friends in the attacks, my heart breaks for the loss of so many lives, good lives like those of my friends.

I wonder what kind of world we live in where a Rabbi and his wife who dedicate themselves to welcoming strangers and helping others are targeted because they were Jews. I would love to say that this kind of hatred is gone, but the events

of the past two days would make a liar of me. The people who passed deserve better than this small piece of writing. They deserve poetry and song to celebrate their life even as they leave ours, but I today I find myself lacking in both poetry and song, even lacking in eloquence as my mind is heavy with disbelief and the question, “why?” “Why”? Why did these people, these specific people die? Why were others led to destroy so much? Some people on the news say that these people were soulless, they were monsters, not people. Perhaps. Or perhaps by saying that we are removing ourselves from this situation. The fact is that those who did this were people. People, like us, are capable of this kind of hatred, this kind of destruction. It's a frightening thought to have, but it also empowers us. The Lubavitcher Rebbe said that if people are positive, things will turn out good in the end. A friend told me this morning, as I was despairing and losing hope while waiting for news, that even if today is bad, we have the choice to make things right. Of course we cannot fix this, we cannot return life to those who died, give family back to those who lost, or take the terror away from those survivors who now must live with their pain. But we can use our sadness to do something good in memory of those who passed and in honor of those who live. This isn't about religion, allegiance or politics, it's about being in the family of humanity. Rabbi Gavi and Rivki lived every day of their lives as active members of this

Sof Drosches: An Invitation to Struggle

Fran Margulies

Moses ends the Torah cycle each year by saying, "Choose life!" Our member Elizabeth Whisnant droshed the words by explaining "He is really asking us to choose a process of struggle," in other words to NOT give up, to engage, to return again and again.

Let me offer you some of Sof's ongoing struggles with Torah texts. Before Purim this year, Alan posed the question, Can remembering lead to revenge? He said yes indeed, it can, and it has. But then Alan chose a different remembering. He followed a Hasidic commentary that focused on an antecedent cause to the Amalek ambush, a little remembered detail that our Hebrew ancestors had apparently placed the slower and feeble members "aharecha" BEHIND and separate from the rest. And therefore those feeble ones became vulnerable to Amalek's attack.

With that unexpected shift in focus, Alan concluded, "the Torah tells us to remember Amalek so that we never forget to bring our brothers and sisters who need special attention into our midst."

In another Sof struggle with the text, Alex Golub used some creative anthropology to drosh Vayeitze. He suggested that another bad guy, Laban, might have had a reasonable cause to worry. IF the social order of the time were matrilineal, and IF Laban's sister was Jacob's mother, then Jacob's line and Laban's own

daughters could legitimately be considered a threat to him.

Alex followed that line of thought to freshly explain Rachel's taking and hiding of the terafim, the household gods. Maybe she was simply, literally, and boldly claiming her own inheritance.

So many creative ways that Sofers respond to the invitation to struggle with the text! Here are a few more.

Marlene Booth used the memory of her son Raphi's Bar Mitzvah to drosh Korach and show us the difference between community shattering and community building. George Hudes droshed Ma'asei by using his mother's maiden name "Nichenhauser", "not at home", to meditate on journeys, family, and home. Jay Silverstein offered Moses as a splendid example of upper level management, mediating successfully between the omnipotent jealous God and a rebellious and jealous people. Kate Lingley, Dina Yoshimi, and Kay Lorraine droshed the tabernacle-building chapters by exploring work, what it is, its frustrations, and what can make it worthwhile and holy. There have been so many drosches, and all of them interesting.

Let's keep it going! Openings in April and May. Watch for the email schedule or see Sally Morgan or me at services

Sof Passover Cookbook Special

The When You Live In Hawaii You Get Very Creative During Passover Cookbook

Buy two for \$10 each and get one free!

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Sof Book Club

By Carolann Biederman

The Sof Book Group is pleased to present its updated reading schedule for the 2009. We welcome you to attend one or all the meetings. The group meets on Sundays, from 1 to 3 p.m. at rotating locations. Flyers with details are available at Shabbat services a few weeks before each meeting. For more information or to RSVP to Carolann Biederman at 254-8812 or cabcb@lava.net.

4/19/09

The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit (A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World) by Lucette Lagnado

337 pages, 1 copy @Hawaii Public Library (HPL)

Wall Street Journal investigative reporter Lucette Lagnado's personal account of her family's flight from Egypt after the fall of King Farouk is a stunning memoir. Lagnado gets to the heart of the modern exodus in a way only those who lived it can. This moving tale of exile unfolds against the backdrop of Cairo, Paris and New York. A vivid, heartbreaking, and powerful story of family, faith, tradition, and the American dream.

5/14/09

A Woman in Jerusalem by A.B. Yehoshua

256 pages, many copies @HPL

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.) While the novel is always aware of the sorrows of modern Israel, it soars on wry, wise wings far above the battered landscape. "At a time when pedestrians were routinely exploding in the streets," Yehoshua writes, "troubled consciences turned up in the oddest places."

7/12/09 Away by Amy Bloom

256 pages, many copies @HPL

Bloom's heroine is young Lillian Leyb whose family is destroyed in a Russian pogrom. She comes to America alone, determined to make her way in a new land. When word comes that her daughter, Sophie, might still be alive, Lillian embarks on an odyssey that takes her from the world of the Yiddish theater on New York's Lower East Side, to Seattle's Jazz District, and up to Alaska, along the fabled Telegraph Trail toward Siberia. This work of fiction blends skillful storytelling with memorable characters to create a classic quest narrative. A psychotherapist by profession, Amy Bloom brings humor and wit, elegant and irreverent language, and unflinching understanding of passion and the human heart to this novel that explores the power of maternal love,

8/23/09 My Life by Golda Meir

396 pages, six copies @HPL

When Golda Meir wrote her autobiography My Life she told her British publisher "I will not write about my private life. I will not settle political or other scores with anyone. I will not take advantage of the high office I have just left, or of anything I learned there." While the book remained well within those guidelines, it still became an international best seller in 1975. The book is both frank and very revealing of her personality and

Book Club (continued)

goals. Meir's practical idealism can be seen in efforts as diverse as the beautification of kibbutzim and her strong advocacy of unemployment benefits. The work that "most concerned and interested me," she writes, was "the translation of socialist principles into the down-to-earth terminology of everyday life." Although the political events narrated are well known, they are recounted with drama and spirit.

10/11/09 A Pigeon and A Boy by Meir Shalev
320 pages, many copies @HPL

Sally's Book Corner

By Sally Morgan

The Library at Temple Emanu El is ready for you to come, browse, study or borrow a book. Deborah and I are there on Mondays and Thursdays from 9AM-Noon. The library can be opened upon request. We are starting a Library Committee, and hope to recruit and train volunteers so that the Library may be opened on Wednesday afternoons and Sunday mornings.

We have received some special reference books, so come and browse through them.

REF 305.89 YIV

Hundert, Gershon David.,ed. In chief. The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. This has been recently published by Yale University in conjunction with YIVO, and comes in two volumes totaling 2,448 triple columns pages. They are the culmination of research by 450 scholars from 16 countries on three continents who have contributed articles on more than 1,800 subjects. Entries begin with Shimon Abeles, a boy of 17th century Prague whose father was accused of murdering him to keep him from converting, and end with Zalman Zybercweig, a 20th century Yiddish theater historian.

REF 223.20A

Alter, Robert. The Book of Psalms; a translation with Commentary. This timeless poetry is beautifully translated by Alter. He captures the ancient and elusive text of the Psalms in a vigorous English that restores the eloquence and power of the original. In addition Alter's learned and insightful commentary, set directly beneath the text, informs and explains as one reads each Psalm.

REF 439.10 WEI, v.1 &2

Weireich, Max.The History of the Yiddish Language.

This is a classic of Yiddish scholarship and is the only comprehensive study of the Yiddish language from its origin to the present. It is now published in full in English for the first time. This is a complete translation of the entire text originally written in Yiddish.

"Nice Jewish girl" from Boston who would like to spend the summer in HI. She is 20 years old, in graduate school and is looking for a room to either rent \$\$ or work off in house cleaning and/baby-sitting (preferably in town). I don't know her personally but have connected with her through Craig's List when we were looking for a house swap in Boston. I told her I would put the word out for her.
 If anyone is interested they could call me and I could put them in touch. Hinda: 737-9050 (h) 832-5227 (w)

Bissl Und Bissl

By Sally Morgan

>From the Philadelphia Exponent: Rabbi Steven Wernick, religious leader of Adath Israel in Merion Station, PA, has been chosen as the next professional leader of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Wernick is slated to replace the organization's longtime executive vice president, Rabbi Jerome Epstein. Wernick's selection marks the latest in a series of key leadership changes in the Conservative movement. In 2007, scholar Arnold Eisen replaced Rabbi Ismar Schorsch as head of the Jewish Theological Seminary, while last year, Rabbi Julie Schonfeld became the first woman picked to lead the Rabbinical Assembly.

>From The Jerusalem Post: An Egyptian cleric called for a boycott against Starbucks throughout the Arab world claiming that the woman in the international chain's logo is Queen Esther. He stated "Have any of you ever wondered who this woman with a crown on her head is?...The girl in the Starbucks logo is Queen Esther." The designer of the Starbucks logo, Doug Fast, says that the woman depicted is based on a Greek mythological siren-half woman/half fish- and has nothing to do with Queen Esther.

>From The New York Times. For decades, the origin of the Dead Sea Scrolls has been intensely debated. The prevailing theory is that these ancient documents were written over three centuries before 100 C.E. by a Jewish sect known as the Essenes. An alternative theory, passionately proffered by Norman Golb a University of Chicago professor, is that the scrolls' authors were not Essenes, and that the scrolls themselves were kept in various libraries in Jerusalem until they were hidden in caves around Qumran for safekeeping during the Roman war of 67-73 CE. Professor, Golb, has stood behind his theory despite significant criticism. His son, Raphael Haim Golb has been one of his greatest allies. But prosecutors said on March 5th that Raphael Golb took defending his father's theory too far. Mr. Golb is accused of using stolen identities of various people, including a New York University professor who disagreed with his father, to elevate his father's theory and besmirch its critics. Mr. Golb was arrested on March 5 and charged in Manhattan Criminal Court with identity theft, criminal impersonation and aggravated harassment.

>From The New York Times: The Torah with weathered brown parchment with its frayed edges and inked Hebrew letters seemed beautiful but unremarkable. But, when Rabbi Yitzchok Reisman, who restores Torahs, saw this Torah, he quickly realized that the Torah was unique. The materials and calligraphic style identified it as Spanish, which meant that it was written before 1492. In addition, the strong swirls on the top of certain letters matched the style favored in kabbalah. These kabbalistic flourishes, the rabbi added, make it not only old, but also "the only Spanish Torah known done in that way."

>From NPR: All Things Considered on March 9, 2009 interviewed a group of ten Ohio women who were about to become Bat Mitzvot. What is remarkable is that nine of the women were in their 90's, and one who is 89, may well set some sort of records for maturity when they are called to the Torah on March 22 in Cleveland.

Yiddish proverb for the quarter: Vu Toireh, dort iz chochmeh - where there is knowledge of the Scriptures, there is wisdom.

Sof Community from page 1

matriarch, Rebecca. It was Rebecca's kindness and generosity that crowned her a matriarch. She offered water to Abraham's servant, Eliezer, and his camels while guaranteeing them a place to rest for the night. This kindness and generosity to a stranger, took place in a minute, a turn of her hand, an effortless breath from her lips, and it changed humanity and the Jewish people forever. How could one simple act of kindness hold so much significance for all time? Our basic acceptance of others, a handshake, kind word, offer of welcoming impacts generations. Rebecca

embodies a core value of the Torah, which became known as gemilut hasadim, acts of loving-kindness. Beginning with our matriarchs and patriarchs, G-d enforces the act of loving-kindness and welcoming. That we exist within communities to pursue these good deeds is a natural habitat for Jews.

We begin with G-d's initial act of loving kindness – of giving us life – that continues throughout our development of meaningful human relationships, allowing us to reach out to others and establish religious communities like Sof Ma'arav.

From the Welcoming Committee

By Sandy Armstrong

Our services are often crossroads for people all over the world. Honolulu attracts an international Jewish community who we welcome on a weekly basis. It is always a pleasure to meet new friends and reconnect with others who have visited before. This includes our wonderful family of our own synagogue members. We look forward to their visits each year and they become very much apart of "who we are at Sof Ma'arav". Here is a beautiful note from Ahuva Soifer, mother of Avi Soifer and of course Marlene, too!

Dear Friends,

Please accept my thanks for including me so graciously, in the lovely, and meaningful services of Sof Ma'arav. To have been offered an aliyah is such an honor, and to be allowed to sit in a study session, is such a treat.

Your welcome is warm, and much appreciated, and I delight in the active participation of my children, and of "old friends".

May you long continue in your happy combinations of worship, learning and comradeship!

Ahuva Soifer

At Sof Ma'arav, we have many opportunities to connect and support our Jewish extended family on Oahu. Our friends at Aloha Chapel sent us this thank you note for our contribution towards their new Torah.

Dear Congregation Sof Ma'arav,

Thank you so very much for your generous donation of \$1,000.00 to our Torah Project. Because of people like you, this world is a better place.

Shalom,

Harriet Weissman, Torah Project Director,

And for something completely different.....

Read about the latest exciting research on whales, by member Adam Pack

<http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2009/02/13/humpback-whale-attraction.html>

Congregation Sof Ma'arav

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Havdalah: Trudy Wong
Webmistress: Louise Good
Welcome: Sandy Armstrong
Adult Ed. Dina Yoshimi

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.sofmaarav.org

Save the Dates...

June 20, 2009 - Bat Mitzvah of Rachel Kosansky

July 4, 2009 - Bar Mitzvah of Simon Wechsler. Services will be at the Ala Moana, beginning at 9:30AM.



Bat Mitzvah Lauren Feldberg with President Don Armstrong

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