

Shalom

Magazine of the Jewish Federation of the Bluegrass



TRAVEL, DIASPORA, WORLD

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The Jewish Federation OF THE BLUEGRASS

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LETTER FROM THE

EDITOR

CARLY CONATSER

Editor-in-Chief

I remember being in high school and thinking whenever I attended services, celebrated a holiday, or participated in a Jewish communal event that Jews all over the world were doing the same thing as I was. I felt a sense of awe, connection, and belonging. It gave me both a sense of peace and purpose. What came later was learning about the diverse Jewish experience within the overall context of being Jewish. In my own life, I have been part of conservative, reform, reconstructionist/renewal, and orthodox communities and each one has shaped and gifted me with the opportunity to grow personally and to widen my perspective on the larger Jewish experience.

All of these experiences have helped me to author my own. In my short two years of being a part of the Bluegrass Jewish community, I've grown back into having a stronger Jewish identity. I have returned to work for a Jewish organization. I have been introduced to Mussar and created a Jewish chair yoga class guided by my Mussar learning at Temple Adath Israel. I've found friends and community and we've authored our own Seder reflecting the values and diversity of our practice, and soon I will be going to the mikveh for the first time to help me acknowledge my transition into motherhood.

In this issue, you will encounter stories and images from our diaspora experience. You'll hear ideas that echo your own feelings and you'll probably learn a little bit more about different ways of Jewish observance both locally and internationally. It is my hope that this issue helps turn and shift your Jewish kaleidoscope so you can see the richness and beauty of all that has been and all that will be to come into your own, and our collective, Jewish lineage.

B'SHALOM,

Carly

A FIFTH QUESTION:

Or... Why I Like It Here



BY
**RABBI DAVID
WIRTSCHAFTER,**
rabbi of Temple Adath Israel

The Passover song *Ha Lachma Anya* (*The Bread of Affliction*) proclaims “this year we are slaves, next year we’ll be free. Now we are here. Next year in Israel.” As if this weren’t sufficiently aspirational, the Haggadah concludes on an even more specific note: “Next year in Jerusalem.” How would we respond if the “Wicked Child” were to burst forth from “time out” and ask the fifth question, a problem strikingly similar to the one they presented before: “What do those words mean to you? We aren’t slaves here, and we most likely aren’t planning to spend all future seders in Jerusalem. The truth is, you have no intention of moving there next year, do you?”

I’m not going to dwell on how the state of Israel makes this diaspora rabbi’s dreams of living there so difficult. Yes, I do have those dreams sometimes! The fact that Reform rabbis aren’t fully recognized, that our institutions are not equally funded or that we are insulted regularly by public servants in the press are not sufficient arguments. First, nowhere is perfect. Israel is not alone in being an imperfect place. Secondly, they say nothing about *here*. What’s keeping me here? Why do I like being Jewish here?

I love the challenge of representing the concerns of progressive Jews to the rest of America, and I love how the best of what America has to offer can make us better Jews. It’s an honor and a privilege to pastor and preach to people who come to our

congregations seeking a sense of purpose, belonging and affirmation. It’s an honor and a privilege to teach Torah to children who soon will be the next generation of American Jewish leaders, to contribute to their critical thinking, to help them build a library of Jewish memories and a lens through which to interpret the challenges they will face. It’s an honor and a privilege to go to Frankfort and Washington D.C., to say our community is concerned about social justice, the environment, education, health care, poverty, racism and violence. It’s an honor and a privilege to spend one’s adult life wrestling with the questions of how Judaism should inform democratic values and how democratic values should inform Judaism.

This place is home because, from what I see and hear, the vast majority of us feel needed, wanted and useful here. At least I do. Being Jewish is one of the greatest resources we bring to the table of American identity. Israel will forever be the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, but America is my home. I’m proud of what my family has achieved, from founding a congregation in Tennessee in the later half of the 19th century to founding a Jewish summer camp in Lexington in the later half of the 20th century. According to family history, my father was the first Jewish department chair at the University of Kentucky’s medical school. Half a century later, his son might have a legitimate claim to be the first Lexington-born rabbi to

serve a Lexington congregation. When you consider my father’s mother, Reitza Dine Wirtschafter, who moved here to be with us in the 1960s and 1970s, and my children, who came here when I moved back in 2015, we’ve had four generations of Lexingtonians. As “diaspora Jews” have said for centuries, “this is our home now.”

Loyalty to Israel does not require disparaging the diaspora. Love of country does not demand

“ ”

*To understand the world
I must love my home.*

abandoning our dreams of the Promised Land. Israel cannot only be a *haven* for Jews being driven to it. Israel needs Jews who are drawn to it. Despite all its conflicts and challenges, the achievements and attributes of Israel remain a tremendous draw. To the question of the “Wicked Child” I reply, “I really do want to gather as a family for a seder in Jerusalem someday, and it is also my desire to host many more of them right here.”

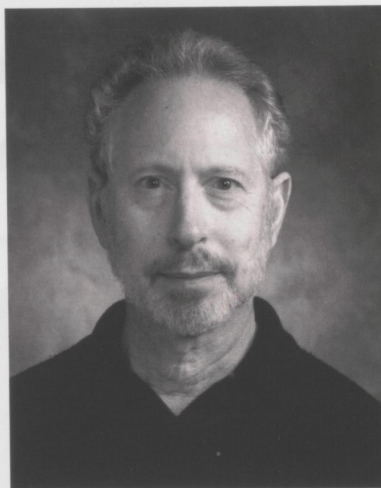
As Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, an avowed Zionist and courageous American, stated: “To understand the world I must love my home.” Our identity as diaspora Jews, our experience with what it is to be a religious minority in an imperfect and diverse democracy, is precisely the kind of knowledge our troubled world needs now. There is important work to be done here. The world is counting on us to do it well. ■

What Diaspora?

BY HAROLD SHERMAN

When I was born in Lexington, KY, there was already an established Jewish community. There was a synagogue for Conservative and Orthodox Jews and a temple for Reform Jews. There were established Jewish-owned retail businesses as well as people practicing law—my father, for example—and other professions. It is not my purpose to give a history lesson, but I have read that there was a Jewish presence in Lexington as far back as the early 1800s. Even though the Jewish community was relatively small at the time of my birth, I didn't grow up feeling particularly diasporic. Lexington was the only home I knew until I left for college. I only spent a year at Washington University in St. Louis, a school that many East Coast Jews attended, and then I came back to Lexington to go to the University of Kentucky, but that's another story. Later, I went on the road as a musician, ended up in New York City, and finally returned to Lexington in 1983 after an eleven-year absence. Although we would say "Next Year in Jerusalem" at Passover Seders, it didn't resonate with me in the sense of "returning home." Lexington has been home most of my life.

I won't say I read extensively about Jewish history, but I did get a general take-away from books and articles I did read: From the Roman Empire's dispersal of Jews to the migration to what was known as Palestine during the late 1800s up to Israel's independence, the Diaspora was a universal reality for the world Jewish community. Although I never had a sense of it, my grandparents and great aunts and uncles had to make sometimes daring escapes from Russia and Eastern Europe. My paternal grandparents escaped from Imperial Russia, while my maternal grandparents and siblings fled from the Bolsheviks. My great-uncle Wolf had to run ahead of the German Army to get to the Soviet side of Poland during the 1939 Blitzkrieg. Later, during Germany's 1941 invasion of Soviet-held territory and the Soviet Union itself, he had to run again—this time making a desperate journey most of the way across the Soviet Union by train to Vladivostok, where he stowed away on a freighter headed for San Francisco. These relatives definitely had a first-hand experience with the Diaspora. My mother didn't escape in the same way, but she was able to get to the United States from Poland in 1938. At the very least, this was a close call.



My wife Marianne and I took our only European trip to date in 2005, to Venice, Italy. It was in February, and northern Italy can get very cold. At one point, the gondolas were tied up, covered with snow. That was OK. We were there for the culture. We visited art museums, caught a performance of a chamber orchestra in what used to be a church performing Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons." We took a train through Tuscany just to spend an afternoon in Florence. We went on tours of historic landmarks. We saw the museum and tower in Piazza San Marco and the Museo Ebraico. Museo Ebraico is the site of the first European Jewish ghetto. Is it irony, karma, full circle, or some other phrase that applies to the Roman exile of Jews to the partial Italian acceptance of them centuries later? On the tour, we learned that Jews were welcome in Venice, as long as they could be isolated. It wasn't really about religion. A favorite expression of mine is, "follow the money." The local powers-that-be, or "powers-that-were," didn't want the Jewish community to get too much economic power. That seemed to be the narrative anywhere Jews went in Europe.

I write this in the wake of our country's embassy move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. As a holy city to three religions, Jerusalem is much more than just the capital of a country. There is ongoing conflict, and I don't have any solutions. The expression, "home is where the heart is" can be regarded as a corny cliché, but, historically, Jews' hearts have been in Jerusalem throughout the Diaspora. At the risk of sounding overly abstract, I would propose that each of us recognize an internal Jerusalem, a personal home within ourselves, for our own peace of mind and sense of home. I'm working on it. ■

A PHOTO ESSAY

Visiting the

BY JUDY & BOB BAUMANN

We love to travel to new places, to meet local people and learn about their communities, their culture, their food, and their families. Last year, we visited 10 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and 4 in Central Asia. Before World War II, many of the countries had large and vibrant Jewish communities. As we traveled, we visited many synagogues – some are still used by their small remaining community of Jews; other communities have no Jews. Each visit gave us a greater appreciation for Jewish life in another part of the world.

Dubrovnik | CROATIA

The Sephardic Synagogue is the oldest Sephardic synagogue in the world and the second oldest synagogue in Europe still in use today – though mostly on the High Holidays. It was built in the 14th century on the 3rd floor of a narrow building in the Jewish quarter. The Baroque style interior was completed in 1652 and has been preserved.



Novi Said | SERBIA

In January 1942, 3,000 Jews, Armenians, and gypsies were killed in Novi Said. Today, no Jews remain, and the beautiful synagogue is a concert hall. The building also houses a few artifacts from the former Jewish community.

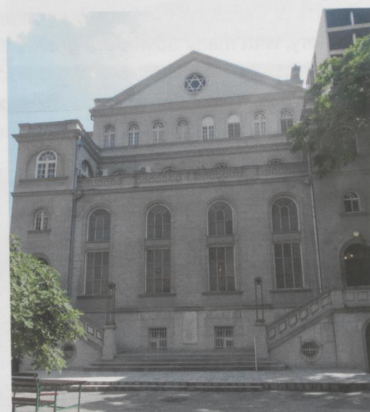
Diaspora



Belgrade | SERBIA

Sukkat Shalom is an active synagogue near the center of Belgrade. The synagogue was opened in 1926 by Ashkenazim, although today most of its congregants are Sefardim. Rather than destroy it, the Nazis used it as a brothel. The caretaker with whom we communicated told us there are about 1,300 Jews remaining in Belgrade, compared with 12,000 who were there before the Nazis invaded.

One of the artifacts on display is an Elijah's chair where the sandek sits during a baby boy's circumcision. (From Jewish encyclopedia: At every circumcision Elijah, "the angel of the covenant," as he is called in Malachi (iii. 1), is supposed to be seated at the right hand of the sandek, upon a chair richly carved and ornamented with embroideries ("kisse shel Eliyahu").



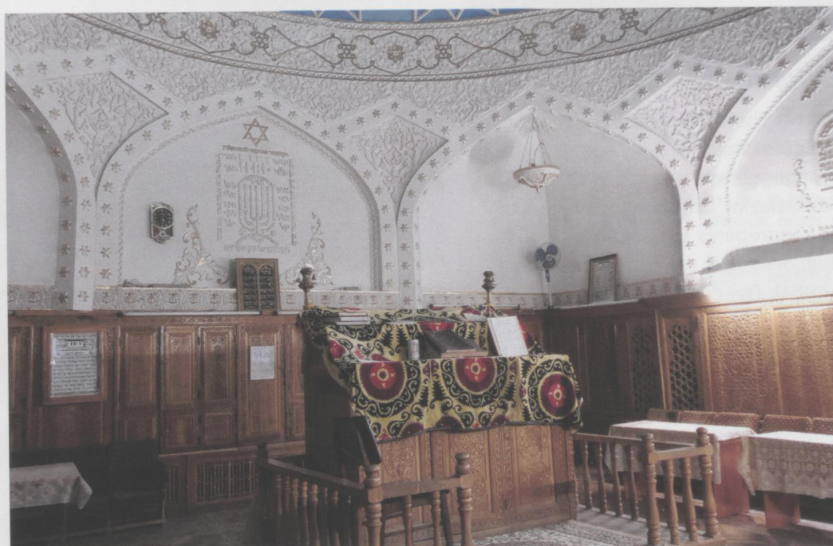
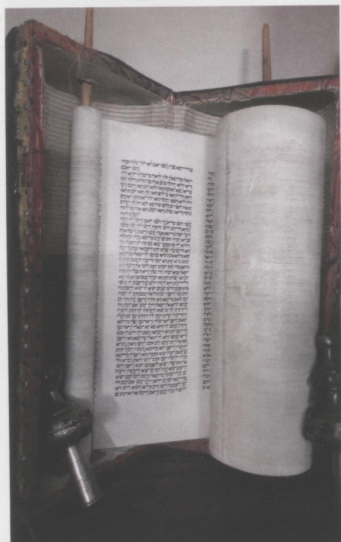
Bukhara | UZBEKISTAN

The Bukhara Synagogue, dating from the 16th century is one of the oldest synagogues in Central Asia and houses a Torah that is 1,000 years old. The synagogue is a protected UNESCO site. Abram Iskhakov, president of the Bukhara Jewish community, told us about the synagogue, answered questions from our group and posed for photos. There are about 100-150 Jews left in Bukhara and 20-25 attend Shabbat services. The community's Hebrew school is open to children of all denominations. In the main sanctuary and in the small study room, congregants sit on chairs or padded benches with a long table in front of them for their books.



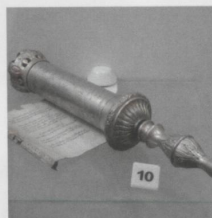
Samarkand | UZBEKISTAN

On a narrow street in the old part of the city, we visited the Sephardic synagogue and met its spiritual leader, Rabbi Isaac Jacobson. The synagogue was built from 1885-1891 and was renovated in 1988. At its height, there were 35,000 Jews in Samarkand; now there are 250 and about 15 attend Shabbat services. A small study room across from the main sanctuary is used by Samarkand's small Ashkenazi community. The two communities come together for holiday services. On the outskirts of the city is the huge Samarkand Sephardic Jewish cemetery, with many Soviet-era graves that are above ground and have an engraved picture of the deceased. Jewish life in Bukhara and Samarkand is largely supported by the large community of Bukharan Jews in the States, primarily in NYC.



Sarajevo | BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

The Jewish Museum, part of the Sarajevo Museum complex, is housed in the oldest synagogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina, built in 1581. The building was damaged several times by fires, then during World War II, and again during the Bosnian War. It was most recently restored in 2003 to resemble the 19th century synagogue. Only 500 Jews are left in Sarajevo and most are elderly. Today, services are held in the Ashkenazi Synagogue across the river from the old town. In another building of the museum complex is a Megillat Esther and a mannequin wearing a dress of a Jewish woman from Sarajevo.



Budapest | HUNGARY

The Orthodox Kazinczy Street Synagogue's Art Nouveau building was built in 1910. The Reform movement had begun in Hungary in 1810 and wanted to integrate Jews into contemporary Budapest Hungarian society. The Orthodox weren't interested; they wanted to keep their traditions and were not interested in being socially integrated.



On Visiting Berlin

BY MARTHA ANNE TOLL

"The past I've emerged from is ... pitted by gaps left by silences stretched across generations. By losses of language and voice. By human displacements. By immeasurable dimensions of lives compressed and deflated. And by dismembering narratives of who 'we' are to each other in this land."

Lauret Savoy, *Trace*

The summer before last, I spent six days in Berlin with my daughters. It was a family trip, but my husband declined to join. Germany is too difficult for him. And so the three of us rented a fifth floor walk-up in the bustling Mitte neighborhood. Our landlords were Italian. I don't know how long they'd made their home in Berlin, but they appeared settled; they owned a shop two blocks from our flat.

I awoke in the middle of the first night to thunderous, low flying planes overhead. I had to shake myself awake to convince myself that they weren't coming to get us.

Morning, however, delivered sunshine and charm. Catty-corner from the flat was a café that sold delicate, flaky pastries and luxuriant coffee. It was frequented by locals who arrived on bicycles—toddlers and school-aged children in tow—and by European tourists in search of espresso.

Today's Berlin is an international hub with a polyglot population that prides itself on tolerance and inclusiveness. With the knowledge that it was not always so, the city is awash in museums and monuments struggling to tell the troubled history of its lost citizens.

In various parts of the city, brass plates embedded in the sidewalk mark where Jewish families lived. For these tens of thousands, Berlin was home. Until it wasn't. You could walk by the sidewalk plates and not notice them, or you could pause to consider those ordinary Berliners living humdrum lives—frying potatoes and tucking in their children, planting flowers in the window boxes and doing the ironing, reading the paper in the living room easy chair. The plates provide two dates: date of deportation and date

of murder. Other such markers are affixed to the sides of buildings like misplaced home addresses. The Nazis were excellent record keepers.

And yet. The plaques recall only an infinitesimal fraction of the lost. If we attempt to honor our history, the scale of the crime is too enormous to absorb. Why the trajectory from ordinary, civilized life to murder on an incomprehensible scale? How? What was here just a few short decades ago? These horrifying mysteries drag alongside me.

We spent a day at the Berlin wall, scrawled with art accreted over decades; symbolism of an oppression fresh in memory. "Let's build a wall," the authorities said, erecting a concrete barrier that rendered home part of a contrived 'east' or a coveted 'west.' The wall separated families and lovers, and isolated a regime whose most productive output was an intricate web of at-home spymasters—neighbor against neighbor, children betraying parents. On one side of the wall lay freedom (and rampant capitalism), on the other, rows of tall, blocky buildings, unencumbered by trees, and therefore by shade. Today those apartment blocks house thousands, many of whom have fled their places of birth. They are immigrants and they live far from home.

We discovered a photography exhibit behind the wall that displayed annotated portraits of Syrians. Boys with stumps for legs dished for the camera. Girls recounted how they went about searching for food for their baby brothers. *We are repeating our mistakes, ignoring our obligations. We are not acting.* The subtext for each picture was a family's specific decline into hell. The children—missing limbs or eyes—spoke in the

EDITOR'S NOTE

When I first became editor-in-chief, I reached out to my Washington D.C. writing group for creative writing submissions. I'm grateful that Martha volunteered the essay above. I have to say that this is something that I love about community and how we are able to support each other and make connections from where we have been and where we are going.

- C.C.



language of hope to describe their ambitions to return to school; to find their parents; to have an opportunity to live, once again, in normalcy. Anything, to find home.

We visited the Topography of Terror at the site of the Nazi Secret State Police Office, the leadership of the SS, and the Reich Security Main Office. There, a series of outdoor panels enumerates how the German government carried out its populist agenda.

In thrall to relentless propaganda about Aryan supremacy (make Germany Aryan again) laced with racist lies, an entire nation not only stood by, but largely assisted as their Jewish, and homosexual, and communist, and Roma neighbors were stripped of their rights; denied the ability to own and run businesses (indeed, to earn a living); robbed of their property; and finally, murdered. Even though these unlucky Germans—many of whom served their country in World War I—had never questioned their German identity, for them, home meant death.

We cycled to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a plaza filled with oblong stones of uneven lengths. Not for the first time, I wondered how to teach new generations about the scale and scope of the crime. Berlin may have been the epicenter, but the disease spread over Europe and North Africa. André Schwarz-Bart described Drancy, France as “one of many drains inserted into Europe’s passive flanks...for the herd being led to the slaughter.” And farther east: “A few freight trains, a few engineers, a few chemists vanquished that ancient scapegoat, the Jew of Poland. [From *The Last of the Just*, by André Schwarz-Bart, translated from the French by Stephen Becker.]

Methods of slaughter varied according to where home happened to be: machine guns poised over mass graves in Lithuania, a ghetto under siege in Warsaw, humans burnt alive in locked buildings, death by shotgun

and Zyklon B and forced marches and starvation across Europe. National boundaries proved inadequate to prevent the transformation of home to killing field.

In silence, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has a moving severity. The day we visited, children were gleefully playing hide and seek amidst the stones. Young people picnicked on top of them.

At what point and at what distance from the events, is the appropriate time to play on such a memorial? *My daughters are part of the last generation to know Holocaust survivors. We are losing our stories. When will all those people’s homes be forgotten?*

Perhaps that time has already come and gone.

We spent our last afternoon in the former West Berlin. We stopped at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (*Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche*), heavily damaged by allied bombing during World War II. The remains of the original structure is now called ‘Hall of Remembrance.’ The church, consecrated in 1895, was once an imposing neo-Gothic structure. Wikipedia notes that it was built by the Kaiser in opposition to the organized labor and socialist movements, as a return to ‘traditional’ religious values. Joseph Goebbels criticized the Gedächtniskirche neighborhood for having too many low lives and immigrants—“too cosmopolitan—a meeting place for different kinds of people, for ‘harlots’ and ‘so-called men’ and for people speaking ‘all the languages of the world.’”

On December 19, 2016, Anis Amri, a man of Tunisian origin, crashed a truck through a Christmas market beside this church, killing twelve people and injuring dozens. He was shot by police in Milan a few days later.

After visiting the Kaiser Wilhelm Church we headed to our apartment in the late afternoon heat. On the way to the train station, we passed huge department stores, many of them the upscale chains now found in



any city in advanced industrial countries. There was no sense that people lived in this West Berlin neighborhood, or in fact that they ever had. There was, instead, a sense of consumerism unleashed, the streets empty only because the stores were closed for the day.

Outside the Wittenbergplatz U-Bahn stop was a large sign, a reminder of the previous destinations for Germans assembled here: Auschwitz, Stutthof, Maidanek, Treblinka, Theresienstadt, Buchenwald, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, Trostenez, Flossenbürg.

Inside, the station looked as it had in the 1930s. I tried to imagine it filled with people, clutching suitcases that they would never need, leaving their homes—forever—uprooted by a once democratically elected regime that used words and laws to ensure to dispatch them to their deaths.

One half of my family is German. My grandmother was born to German immigrants in New York, and my grandfather emigrated to this country from Germany at age sixteen. His brother-in-law, brother-in-law's second wife (the first wife—his sister—died in childbirth), and niece, were murdered at Auschwitz. I knew this growing up, but it was not framed this way. My grandmother referred to these facts as “that Nazi business.” My parents discussed the Holocaust, but never as a personal, family matter, even though those murdered relatives were my mother's uncle and aunt and cousin.

My mother's home was indisputably in America. For her mother, my grandmother, the same. For my grandfather, less so. He died when I was four, so my memories of him are hazy. He is reported to have had a heavy German accent, and to have never quite acclimated to certain seminal American realities—driving a car, for example—and being married to the fiercely independent woman who was my grandmother.

After an intense six days, in which we understood we had not scratched Berlin's surface, my daughters continued their travels, and I returned to Washington, DC. I rode home from the Baltimore airport with a Pakistani cabbie.

Initially, I didn't know he was Pakistani, but somehow the conversation turned in that direction. Adamant on the importance of being multi-lingual, he reminisced fondly about his boyhood. His family spoke Punjabi at home; he spoke Urdu at school. He and his brothers enjoyed switching to Punjabi in the schoolyard to impress their mates. He learned Arabic by studying the Qur'an and was insisting his two young daughters—now thoroughly American—do so as well. Hindi and Urdu speakers understand each other, he said, but can't read each other's languages. Urdu, he noted, is read right to left in Arabic characters. His English was nuanced and



flawless.

His name was Asif and he left me with this morsel of wisdom, uttered in wistful reverence: Urdu is the language of poetry. Nothing surpasses it for the way it captures poetry's music.

In the first three months of the Trump administration, arrests of immigrants were up 38%. That works out to a rate of more than 400 people per day. The New York Times reported that many of these arrests were carried out in people's homes. ■

An earlier version of this piece appeared in Cargo Literary <https://cargoliterary.com/article/home-elsewhere-visiting-berlin/> "When Home Elsewhere" is published here with their kind permission.

Martha Anne Toll's nonfiction has appeared in the NPR, The Millions, Heck, [PANK], The Nervous Breakdown, Tin House blog, Bloom, Narrative, and the Washington Independent Review of Books; her fiction in Slush Pile Magazine, Vol.1 Brooklyn, Yale's Letters Journal, Poetica E Magazine, Referential Magazine, Inkapture Magazine, and Wild. Her novel in process, represented by the Einstein Literary Agency, was shortlisted for the 2016 Mary Rinehart Roberts fiction prize. She directs a social-justice foundation focused on preventing and ending homelessness and abolishing the death penalty. Please visit her at marthaannetoll.com and tweet to her at @marthaannetoll.



A TRAIN RIDE AND A FOLKSONG

BY SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN

In the course of my work as a demographer working from Brown University, I was fortunate to undertake research and give lectures in countries all over the world. In many instances, I was accompanied by my wife, Alice, who also participated in the research activities. Several of those trips took us to the Soviet Union and some of the surrounding countries, including Lithuania.

During our visit to Vilnius, Lithuania in 1991, I made contacts with a number of officials in the Lithuanian Jewish community and also with statisticians at the National University. As a result of those discussions, I was invited to return to Lithuania to undertake a population survey of the Jewish community. I had had extensive experience in survey work in general, and on Jewish populations in particular, so I saw this request as a wonderful opportunity to return to Lithuania to help the local Jewish community assess its population. Since my mother had lived in Lithuania before emigrating to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, I hoped that I would also be able to explore some family connections while undertaking the research. Over the next two years, I raised the necessary funds and developed a research plan in consultation with the Lithuanian Jewish officials. Faculty at the University cooperated to help with the field work. We planned to return to Lithuania once the survey was almost completed, and did so in 1994.

Before going to Vilnius, we visited Riga, Latvia for a few days. The visit was very enjoyable and informative. We arranged to travel to Vilnius from Riga by train. A travel agency made the necessary arrangements and we arrived at the Riga train station 1½ hours before our train was due to leave. Our train and its track (No. 2) were

posted on a large board; we followed the information to find the track. To our surprise, the train posted at that track was not ours, and was scheduled to leave after our train. There were no signs anywhere, the information booth was closed, and the general ticket agent told us there was no such train. When Alice showed him our tickets, he still couldn't tell us the proper platform, but directed us to the international ticket seller.

The international agent "supposed" that our train was to leave from platform 2, track 1. We went back to the platform but only the earlier train was posted and there was no indication of the train to Vilnius. Furthermore, no one on the platform spoke English or German; all they replied to our questions was "Vlov." Finally, about 15 minutes before the scheduled departure, we heard someone speaking English. We rushed over to them. They were a young couple in the Peace Corps posted in Latvia. We enlisted their help and they checked around to confirm that we were in the right place. They even helped carry our two heavy suitcases up the steep flight of stairs to the track.

Sure enough, the train - of the Soviet variety - arrived and left right on schedule. We settled into our compartment- the only ones in that compartment, although we saw that others were filling the remainder of the railroad car. They included a Russian couple who were living in Riga. She spoke a little English, and we learned that her husband was an artist and they were going to Hungary for an art exhibit.

The attendant in our train car was a jolly looking, grandmotherly lady with short white hair and a mouth full of gold caps. When we tried to speak with her and asked if she spoke English or German, she replied "German." So we began a conversation, but it became clear almost



immediately that her German was really Yiddish. When I switched to that language a great smile appeared, and she sat down with us for a shmooz, for as long as her duties allowed. Fruma was 46 years old, and both she and her husband worked on the train. They had one son, who was an invalid. Fruma was Latvian, orphaned at the age of 8, and raised by her Zaide, who was too poor to send her to school. She began working for the railroad when she turned 19. Her husband was from Russia. Fruma wanted very much to immigrate to Israel, but her husband refused.

During the course of the train ride, Fruma introduced us to a young man, Dmitri, in the next compartment who spoke a little English. She indicated that his parents had also been Jewish, but that his i.d. papers indicated that he was Lithuanian. This change of ethnicity was important for someone who wanted to advance in any kind of civil service position. The young man lived in Shauliai, Lithuania but was attending the police academy in Vilnius. He told us he wanted to be a policeman because he loved guns. There was no indication at all that he knew anything about Judaism. Dmitri tried to convince us to stay in his apartment while we were in Vilnius; he could probably have used the extra income. He and his friend spent most of the train ride drinking beer. When Fruma joined us from time to time, the conversation was truly polyglot – Russian, Latvian, Yiddish, Lithuanian, and German!

As we pulled into the Vilnius railroad station, Fruma mobilized two young men to carry our luggage off the train. We waited in the crowded corridor to debark, when we heard our new friend begin to sing, "Tumbala, tumbala, tumbalaika ..." We joined in this farewell song with tears in our eyes. ■



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Who are the *Bnei Anusim*

BY LEE COBIN

Brazil's population is over 200,000,000 inhabitants, of which roughly 120,000 are Jewish. There are many examples of great achievements attained by this small segment of the population. Regarding television personalities, on Saturday afternoon millions are glued to their televisions watching Luciano Huck's two-hour entertaining and socially conscious weekly program. Many others, from scientists to authors could be cited, but I prefer to celebrate what would have been Jacob do Bandalim's (Jacob, the Mandolin Player) hundredth birthday this year. His Jewish roots were unbeknownst to me for decades, about which I will explain later. I have been a fan of his music for decades: Noites Cariocas (Rio Nights) and Doce de Coco (Coconut Candy) are among my favorite Choro pieces and merit listening to the many recordings available online.

Not counted among the 120,000 Jewish population is a relatively inconspicuous and growing segment, many of which hail from the Northeastern interior, far removed from large developed metropolitan centers near to and on the coast, such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Salvador, and Recife. This fascinating group of people referred to as Anusim are descendants of the Jewish population in Portugal who fled to Brazil escaping the unforgiving Inquisition. I will focus on the Anusim and, of course, excluding the 120,000 Jews who immigrated from Morocco, Turkey, Poland, Russia, Romania, Greece, etc. and have become part of the melting pot of races which characterizes Brazil. Each has their own unique stories to be told. I will acknowledge that historically there exists a number of Jews converted to Catholicism who helped colonize Brazil, and whose names are well known to Brazilians, but not mentioned in mainstream history books as having Jewish roots. It also merits noting that the first synagogue of the Americas was built in Recife at the time Holland conquered a swath of Northeastern territory and controlled it from 1630 – 1654. Following the return of Portuguese rule, Jewish life in the open ceased and a small group of refugees sailed into New Amsterdam to what is now New York, possibly America's first Jewish immigrants.

As Portugal began colonizing Brazil in the 15th century, it has been estimated that one in three Portuguese immigrating to Brazil was Jewish. Let me

clarify that the Jews fleeing Portugal had already been forcibly converted to Catholicism and were known as "Cristãos Novos," or New Christians. This term was used in both Spain and Portugal to identify the newly converted, mainly Jews and to a lesser extent, Moors. It is of interest to note that in the novel, "Don Quijote de La Mancha," Don Quijote identified himself as a New Christian, while his counterpart, Sancho Panza, proudly declared himself an Old Christian, a true believer. Miguel Cervantes, the author, might have been a crypto-Jew.

Why would this growing segment of the Jewish population be found in the poor and underdeveloped backwoods of the Northeast? In the 1500s, sugarcane production throughout tropical Americas was established to supply European's insatiable demand for this scarce and sought-after commodity. A narrow strip of tropical and humid land along the Northeast coast became the center of the Brazilian sugarcane industry. Traveling inland and away from the fertile tropical coastal region, the landscape transforms into a biome called the Sertão, characterized by a hot and dry climate, suffering periodic droughts. Among the inhabitants of these forbidding backlands, there are a growing number of returnees to Judaism rediscovering their intergenerational religious traditions fragmented over three hundred years of religious intolerance by the cruel and unforgiving hand of the Inquisition. These New Christians have been pejoratively referred to as "marranos," those who didn't eat pork, but are identified now as the Bnei Anusim, or the children of the coerced or forced ones.

The Bnei Anusim, or simply the Anusim, miraculously endured the periodic imprisonment, torture and constant fear of three hundred years of the Inquisition, which in Portugal ended in 1821, a year before Brazil's independence. Almost two hundred years have passed and these resilient crypto-Jews have only recently begun to rediscover their ancestral religion openly, a daunting task. For almost 500 years they had no Jewish institutions, prayer books, or bibles to refer to, just oral tradition passed down from generation to generation. Survival and preservation of the ancient customs was due in part to endogamy, families intermarrying, cousins with cousins, a mechanism to preserve their identity and their beliefs. To achieve this, they have had to live double lives, outwardly as Catholics,

being baptized, celebrating the holidays, going to Mass, and so on. In their homes, Jewish traditions, such as the lighting of the Sabbath candles at the appearance of the first star on Friday evening, were preserved. However, after centuries of oppression, only vestiges of Judaism remained in customs handed down and which varied from family to family.

Many customs from the "old faith" handed down and integrated into daily life are practiced by not only the Anusim, but the local population that has no Jewish identification. Accordingly, the genealogy of many Nordestinos (Northeasterners) contains Jewish blood as explained in the documentary, "A Estrela Oculta do Sertão," (The Hidden Star of the Sertão). A few examples of these customs are discussed, such as crosses adorning burial sites that are covered with stones to remember the deceased. Locals speak about burial practices that include burying the dead in simple wooden caskets or placing them directly into the ground, bathed and dressed in a shroud. In one scene, an elderly devout Catholic lady is sweeping the floor and sending out the dirt through the backdoor in her humble home. She defends this custom of always using the back as opposed to the front door, for no particular reason other than it has always been done this way. She does not realize that it would be improper to sweep the dirt out the front door according to an ancient Jewish custom as it would pass under the Mezuzah. Examples of other Jewish customs practiced by some and not others include circumcision and the slaughtering of chickens in the Jewish tradition. Many of the customs are explained by the locals as being traditions they learned from their ancestors and are clueless to why they carry them out.

In the mid 1990s, I made a trip to Recife to study Maracatu music, an African-based genre that used Portuguese colonial-era rope-tuned drums to hide their religious customs and beliefs through their drumming and chanting to their deities. The Portuguese thought that the slaves were partying and horsing around when in fact this guise made it possible for them to pass on their religious belief system during the harsh times of the Inquisition, akin to the crypto-Jews practicing in secrecy. It was during this trip that I visited the first synagogue of the Americas. Sinagoga Kahal Zur Israel is today a museum and located in the historical center of Recife on the street carrying two names: On the top part of the street sign is written Rua do Bom Jesus (Street of Good Jesus) and underneath, Rua dos Judeus (Street of the Jews). As part of this visit, I viewed a short video about past and present Jewish heritage in Brazil. It was obvious to me that seated around me were many local people and, unsurprisingly as explained later by the docent, they come in droves from surrounding smaller towns to

seek out answers about their possible Jewish roots. I still get the chills recalling the docent's explanation.

My knowledge about the Anusim was sparked about seven years ago when I saw an article highlighted in a monthly Brazilian history magazine in a street kiosk in Rio de Janeiro. This article led to a lecture at the National Library in Rio featuring the historian, Paulo Valadares, who recommended following up with the 2005 documentary "Estrela Oculta do Sertão." As referenced earlier, it not only shows the Jewish historical influence in the Sertão, but also documents one man's quest to return to the religion of his forefathers. Luciano Oliveira is interviewed and shown visiting his immediate relatives seeking information about his family roots and traditions. He travels to São Paulo to figure out his next steps as he prefers to be accepted as an orthodox Jew. The issue of conversion versus return is meticulously examined and eventually taken up by the religious authorities in Israel. This has led to Israel softening their tough stance in legitimizing the Anusim. During Luciano's trip to São Paulo he is introduced to Anita Novinsky, professor emeritus at the University of São Paulo who has dedicated her life to the study of the Inquisition in Brazil, prior to, during, and after. Her scholarly knowledge is encyclopedic and her books are testament to it. A momentous scene takes place at the professor's home with research colleagues seated at a large table studying the Anusim question, when in walks Luciano, a real live breathing Anusim, who shares some of his family history and pertinent knowledge of the Inquisition.

I have only glossed over the Anusim question attempting to introduce an English-speaking audience through your magazine to an emerging group of Jews in Brazil, and I thank you for the opportunity. I occasionally follow Rabbi Moré Ventura on YouTube who interacts and assists Anusim in exploring their emerging Judaism. How many of us take for granted Jewish traditions? I, for one, am guilty as charged, but understand that these newly returned religious refugees, after a half a millennium of intolerance forced upon them, hunger for that which many of us water down. I belong to a few Anusim groups on Facebook and it is interesting to note that they reject Evangelical Christian posts as oftentimes the Anusim are victims of attempted proselytism. The Marrano question is not unique to Brazil. How many Spanish-speaking New Christians have had similar experiences to those in Brazil?

A few afterthoughts: One of the most all time popular tunes in Brazil is "Asa Branca" by Luiz Gonzaga. One Brazilian colleague told me years ago that the melodies were non-Western and probably influenced by the Moors. Since we know that the Northeast of

Brazil is full of Jewish lineage, it is safe to say that this melodic musical influence found in Forró music is of Jewish origin. Additionally, my friend and guitar teacher for many years, Duílio Cosenza, played with the crème of the crème when he lived in Brazil and this included playing in Jacob do Bandolim's Choro Music group. He used to tell me that Jacob was Jewish, and I could never figure it out as Bittencourt is a not a Jewish surname.

Thanks to the internet, I discovered that it was his mother's last name Pick, a Polish Jewish immigrant. Sadly, Jacob's mother, Raquel Pick, belonged to a group of female destitute Polish Jews who were taken to Brazil as prostitutes. Jacob was raised by his mother in the Bohemian section of Rio called Lapa, and kept indoors a lot to keep him out of trouble. He used his free time to develop his musical skills at home. ■

Lee Cobin is a retired elementary teacher from Los Angeles and married to a Brazilian woman. He currently divides his time between Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles. He volunteers teaching children the recorder as well as Brazilian percussion in both Rio and Los Angeles. He is also an eternal student of Brazilian percussion instruments, guitar, and clarinet, as well as many Brazilian musical styles. He can be reached at barevoi@hotmail.com.

The Jewish Community Center in Krakow

BY SUSAN COBIN

Six years ago my husband Randall, my son Marshall, and I travelled in the Czech Republic, Austria, and Poland; we spent several days in Krakow, an imperial city and Poland's second largest city, which many consider to be the cultural capital of the country. We visited the main square of Old Town, one of the largest medieval town squares in Europe, located in the center of the city and dating back to the 13th century. We toured Wawel Castle and two fabulous art museums: one was MOCAR Contemporary Art Museum and the other a museum that exhibited Polish artists. We visited the administrative building of Oskar Schindler's factory Emalia, and I still recall the chills I felt standing beside his desk. One early evening, on foot, we wound around streets in the Kazimierz neighborhood hoping to find a vegetarian restaurant that had been highly recommended to us. Kazimierz is a district where Jews have lived off and on for centuries. Currently this district is a vibrant area with many Jewish-themed restaurants, cafes, and shops, and we were eager to find this vegetarian restaurant in a culinary climate that worships its carrion.

What we did happen upon that evening in Krakow was the Jewish Community Center. The patio was filled with people, Jewish and non-Jewish volunteers alike, and lively music poured from the building. The inside was teeming with people, too. The JCC was having an open house, and the volunteers sitting at tables were signing up new members. I learned that many people were just finding out that their families were Jewish and coming to the JCC to become educated. I became

an overseas member, so anytime I am in Krakow on Shabbat, I can go to the JCC for a complimentary dinner. I also learned that in 2002 Prince Charles was in Krakow and visited with several elderly Holocaust survivors. He was tremendously moved by their stories and wanted to help when he learned of the lack of senior services that they needed. They spoke of building a senior center, but after much discussion and learning about the Jewish community resurfacing in Krakow, the idea of a Jewish Community Center for all generations was conceived. Prince Charles was one of the major benefactors of the construction of the facility. The JCC can be found in the center of Kazimierz near the Tempel Synagogue, which was built between 1860-62. The JCC opened its doors in 2008. Apart from providing educational, social, religious, and daycare services to the community, the JCC hosts exhibitions and is open to the thousands of visitors to Krakow. Kazimierz, which was once the vibrant Jewish Quarter of Krakow, is again a growing Jewish community.

We never found that recommended restaurant. In fact, we spent a long time looking for a place to eat, and when we finally did sit down at a table in a subterranean eatery, I was about to spread what I thought was delicious butter on a hearty piece of dark rye bread and thankfully was stopped by Randall before I would have consumed boar lard! ■

If you'd like more information about the JCC or becoming a member, please visit: <http://www.jcckrakow.org/en/community/membershipv>

An Introduction to Karaism

BY SHLOMIT

Two Jews, Three Opinions. Jews have a reputation for being contentious and Karaites might be even more argumentative than the rest. Still, a Karaite in the twenty-first-century United States and a Karaite in medieval Byzantium could agree on at least one thing: it is the fundamental duty of every Jew to study Tanach so that he or she can discover an accurate way of bringing its principles into daily life through the performance of *mitsvot*. The name of our sect comes from the word *qara'* (אָרָא), "to read aloud;" we sometimes call ourselves *bney miqra'* (בְּנֵי מִקְרָא) or "children of scripture." Karaites' identity is grounded in a distinctive relationship to the Tanach. Most Jews follow one law in two forms, believing that the covenant at Sinai obligated the Israelites to observe both the written and the oral Torah. Karaites consider the oral Torah a human invention and the Tanach the sole source of *halachic* authority¹. We must interpret the Tanach, but we cannot create additional obligations (Dvariym 4:2).

Karaite exegetical traditions favor the plain, *peshat* meaning of the text—not necessarily the literal one.² Imagine reading Dvariym 11:18–20: "Bind [my words] as a sign on your hand and let them serve as *totafot* on your forehead... and inscribe them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates." Interpreting this passage literally raises numerous questions. Which words are meant—perhaps the whole Torah? How do you write something on a gate and get it to stick? What are *totafot*, anyway?³ For rabbanites, the Talmud answers all these questions. Most Karaites consider this passage too abstruse to be literal, interpreting it as a figuratively worded injunction to be continually aware of Torah.

This does not mean that a Karaite is forbidden from laying *tefillin* or putting *mezuzot* on her doorframes, simply that she is not obligated to do so. With almost every

mitsvah, the practice one Karaite decides to follow can differ dramatically from that of another. We acknowledge the wisdom of exceptional religious scholars; Karaite *hachamim* have written works of exegesis throughout the history of our sect.⁴ Yet a Karaite *hacham* cannot rule on a contested point of *halachah* in the same way that a Rabbanite *poseq* does.⁵ If historical Karaites performed some *mitsvah* in a particular manner, modern Karaites assume that interpretation must not have been a bad way of doing things—but also not necessarily a correct way, and by no means the only good way.

The Karaite Journey. Karaism first emerged under that name in ninth-century Iraq. While Jews have questioned the validity of the oral Torah since the days of the pre-Talmudic Boethusians and Sadducees, Samaritans and Karaites are the only such sects that still exist. The Abbasid Caliphate granted Karaites religious autonomy. By the eleventh century, Karaism had spread throughout the Muslim world. Damascus, Cairo, Cordoba, and Jerusalem all boasted large Karaite populations. During this era, as many as a third of the world's Jews may have adhered to Karaism. Disputes between rabbanites and Karaites prompted polemical literature on both sides; Maimonides and Sa'adiah Gaon labeled them heretics.⁶ The first major Karaite exegetical works stem from this same period with the writings of such *hachamim* as Yefet ben Ali and Ya'aqov al-Qirkisani.⁷

The sect continued to travel outward to Syria, Lithuania, southern Poland, and the Crimean peninsula, yet Egypt emerged as the clear center of Karaite life during the early modern era. In Cairo, Karaites enjoyed their own neighborhood—the *harat al-yahud al-qara'in*, centered around Ben Ezra Synagogue and adjacent to the rabbanite quarter.⁸ The vast majority of modern Karaites trace their heritage to Egypt; in 1948, about 5,000 of

¹ *Halachah*: "the way of walking;" that is, the practical application or living-out of biblical *mitsvot*.

² *Peshat*: the simplest or most direct explanation of a biblical passage, contrasted with the increasingly symbolic approaches of *remez*, *drash*, or *sod*.

³ *Totafot*: the uncertain meaning and etymology of this word (תּוֹתָפוֹת or תּוֹתָפוֹת) have been debated since at least the time of R. Akiva in the first century C.E. (see Sanhedrin 4b). The most common explanation that connects *totafot* to the practice of laying *tefillin* is that it contains Coptic and Phrygian terms meaning "two," which combine to evoke the four compartments of head-*tefillin*.

⁴ *Hacham*: a person whose depth of religious learning is respected by his or her community, but who has not necessarily received *smichah* (rabbinical ordination).

⁵ *Poseq*: a rabbanite scholar who rules on contested issues of *halachah* and whose decisions are adopted by his community.

⁶ Mosheh ben Maymon or "Maimonides" (1135–1204), a Spanish-born rabbanite philosopher and exegete whose works include the *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Hamitsvot*, and *Moreh Nechuvim*; Sa'adiah ben Yosef Gaon (ca. 882–942), a prominent exegete and translator who lived in Babylonia and Palestine.

⁷ Yefet ben Ali Halevi or "the maskiy ha-golah" (fl. late 10th century), an Iraqi-born Karaite *hacham* who wrote biblical commentaries and works on *halachah*; Ya'aqov ben Efrayim al-Qirkisani (fl. early 10th century), a Circassian *hacham* whose *halachic* writings include *Kitāb al-Anwār w-al-Marāqib* and *al-Riyad wal-Hada'iq*.

⁸ *Harat al-yahud al-qara'in*: "quarter of the Karaite Jews" (Arabic).

Egypt's 80,000 Jews were Karaite. That shared heritage sentenced us to a shared exile, one we call "our second exodus." When Egypt became a British protectorate in the 1880s, the colonial government stripped citizenship from almost all members of the Jewish community—one that had existed in Egypt since at least the fifth century B.C.E. This left many Karaites in a precarious position as the rise of Arab nationalism threatened the place of Jews throughout Egyptian society. Of the numerous pogroms against Cairo's Jews between 1942 and 1952, the bloodiest began with a bombing that devastated the Karaite quarter. Mass expulsions began a few years afterward: a third of Egypt's Jews were ordered to leave within two days with only one suitcase of possessions per household. The final crisis came in 1967, when all Jewish men over age sixteen were sent to internment camps. By the early 1970s, international pressure forced the Egyptian government to release those prisoners and allow the remainder of the Jewish community to flee.

Living as a Karaite. What do Karaites actually do with a lot of Jews, a lot of opinions, and nobody with the authority to decide between them? Disregarding *mitsvot d'rabbanan* eliminates whole swaths of observance familiar to mainstream Jews.⁹ As long as we are not boiling actual kids in their actual mothers' milk, Karaites mix milk and meat freely. Yet the typical Karaite interpretation of a commandment can also be more stringent or eliminate customary exceptions. Al-Qirkisani argued that women and men are equally obligated to wear *tsitsiyot* almost a thousand years before liberal rabbanites began to approach the same position.

If you are familiar with rabbanite *siduriy*, Karaite prayers may strike you as alien. In fact, Karaites cannot recite the usual blessings for hand-washing and candle-lighting, since both include the phrase "*asher qidshanu*" in reference to *mitsvot d'rabbanan*.¹⁰ The most important Karaite prayers are *birkat hamazon* and those surrounding the recitation of the Shema twice a day (Dvariym 8:10, 11:19).¹¹ Since these occasions of prayer are biblically instituted, our liturgy for them

consists almost entirely of biblical *pesuqim*.¹² Karaites nonetheless have a rich tradition of liturgical poetry. When reading *parashiyot* and *haftarot* every week in a cycle similar to that used by Sephardim, Karaites often accompany the biblical excerpts with a *piyut parashah*.¹³ The thirteenth-century Byzantine *hacham* 'Aharon ha-Rofeh wrote a complete yearly cycle of songs that correspond to *parashah* readings and which are still recited weekly in many Karaite congregations. Karaites practice prostration during prayer, a custom mentioned many times during the Tanach (e.g., Tehilim 99:9). Synagogue seating is usually sex-segregated (but without a *mehitsah*) to reduce the possibility of accidentally seeing up the clothing of the opposite sex while kneeling.¹⁴ The rug-covered prayer space within a Karaite home has an area outside where worshippers can leave their shoes—aspects that often make mainstream Jews feel more as if they are visiting a mosque than a synagogue.

Our new year does not begin with *Yom Teru'ah* but in the spring, with the month of 'Aviv.¹⁵ (We do not use *Niysan* or other Assyrian names for months.) The Karaite calendar is observational; it cannot be a new month before you have seen the new moon. This practice often adds extra days to a month if the next new moon is difficult to sight. Regardless of how far askew we may have gotten, every spring we synchronize to the agricultural cycle again so that the *regaliym* will fall during the appropriate harvest seasons.¹⁶ Once wild barley in Israel is headed, the news goes out to Karaites worldwide: our new year has begun, and with it the preparation for *Pesah* and *Hag Hamatsot*.¹⁷ Even in the diaspora, we celebrate only one day of holidays. Since Karaites were accustomed to relying on local lunar observations for centuries, there is no need to correct by adding a second day. Our one *seder* focuses on telling the story of the exodus as it is described in the Tanach. Many Karaites look at the biblical term for vinegar (*hamets yayin*) and conclude that the chamets we are supposed to avoid on *Hag Hamatsot* includes all

⁹ *Mitsvah d'rabbanan*: a *mitsvah* "from the rabbis," that is, a halachic requirement that is rabbinically rather than only biblically mandated.

¹⁰ *Asher qidshanu bmitsvotav vtsivanu*: "who hallows us with *mitsvot* and commands us to [do a certain *mitsvah*]." Since Karaites do not consider any *mitsvot* from outside the Tanach to carry divine authority, we cannot bless Hashem for commanding us to perform them.

¹¹ *Birkat hamazon*: blessing after having eaten.

¹² *Pasuq*: a verse from the Tanach.

¹³ *Parashah*: a section of the Torah read in sequence during a particular week of the liturgical year; *haftarah*: a reading from the *Nevi'im* or prophetic works read along with a *parashah*; *piyut parashah*: a Karaite liturgical poem sung to accompany a particular *parashah*.

¹⁴ *Mehitsah*: the partition that separates men and women in a rabbanite prayer space.

¹⁵ *Yom Teru'ah*: "day of shouting," the biblical name for the holiday that rabbanites refer to as *Rosh Hashanah* (see Bmidbar 29:1); 'Aviv: the first month of the ecclesiastical year, known to rabbanites as *Niysan*, named for and marked by an agricultural season during which barley is barely headed out.

¹⁶ *Shalosh regaliym*: the pilgrimage festivals of *Pesah*, *Shavu'ot*, and *Sukot*, which fall during harvests.

¹⁷ *Pesah*: the holiday of Passover; *Hag Hamatsot*: the week following *Pesah*, after the *seder* but during which *hamets* is still forbidden.

fermented foods—pickles, cheese, and, yes, wine! It is a custom to eat lamb for Pesah rather than avoiding it. The homemade matsah we eat during the seder is bland, but throughout *Hag Hamatsot* we flavor it with coriander. Karaites do celebrate Purim, but not rabbinically instituted holidays like Chanukah or Tu Bishvat.

Karaites Today. Despite opposition from the Chief Rabbinate, the Israeli government eventually decided that Karaites fleeing Egypt could make aliyah like other Jews. Karaites' religious status in Israel remains less certain. Most Ashkenazim do not consider Karaites to be Jews at all unless they convert; Sephardim, who have more often lived alongside Karaites, are comparatively accepting. The Israeli Karaite community has won recent victories of recognition and accommodation, such as being allowed to *shecht* their own meat.¹⁸ Almost all of the world's Karaites—approximately 35,000 of them—now make their home in Be'er Sheva, Ashdod, Ramla, and the surrounding region.

Some historical centers of Karaism, while dwindling, still boast small communities. There are about 1,200 Karaites in Ukrainian Crimea, with smaller groups in Turkey, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. The minority of Egyptian Karaites who did not make aliyah fled to places such as France, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, and the United States. Estimates of the number of Karaites in the U.S. range between 2,500 and 4,000. The only synagogue in the U.S. that follows Karaite *minhag* is B'nai Israel in Daly City, California.¹⁹ The Bay Area has about 250 Karaite families. Orah Saddiqim, a small group in Albany, New York, meets in members' homes.

As for the rest of American Karaites, we live scattered. Many affiliate with rabbanite synagogues in order to connect with the wider Jewish community, but then go home to say different prayers, celebrating our own *mo'edim* on different days.²⁰ Mainstream Jews have often extended only a conditional acceptance to Karaites, hoping we will assimilate to rabbanite ways. In 1984, the Committee and on Jewish Law and Standards voted to accept Karaites into Conservative communities. R. David H. Lincoln argued, "It has been the lesson of history that sects who leave their natural surroundings or are separated from the main body of followers, usually assimilate...Here in the United States, Karaites mostly wish to identify with the rabbanite community; should we abandon them, they would probably disappear and more Jews would be lost to us." We are well aware that, with such a tiny and tenuous foothold among American Jews, we could be swallowed up by the rabbanite majority within a generation or two. Karaites, so much more critical of tradition than most

Jews, now cling with increasing desperation to our own customs. Peninsula Sinai, a USCJ-affiliated synagogue, recently gave American Karaites one reason to hope: while B'nai Israel is being renovated to encompass a new Karaite cultural center, the rabbanite congregation welcomed the Karaite one into their own building. One can only hope that more American Jews will be willing to acknowledge Karaites as their Jewish neighbors without also demanding their assimilation.

Should any readers wish to learn more about the Karaite perspective, they ought to contact Karaite Jews of America (California-based, but with a nationwide advocacy). Also recommended is Shawn Joe Lichaa's blog *A Blue Thread*, written by an American-born Egyptian Karaite whose goal is to encourage dialogue with mainstream Jews while still upholding the distinctiveness of Karaite thought. ■

¹⁸ *Shhitah*: the slaughter of livestock in accordance with the requirements of *kashrut*. Traditional Karaite *shhitah* differs from the rabbanite practice, including stricter stances regarding the parts of the throat that should be cut and the slaughter of pregnant animals (see *Vayiqra* 22:28).

¹⁹ *Minhag*: the group of traditions followed by a certain philosophically or geographically distinct group of Jews, whether it is Karaites, Galitzianers, Western Sephardim, Yemeni Jews, etc.

²⁰ *Mo'ed*: a biblically appointed time or holiday. Like other Mizrahim, Karaites appreciate when our neighbors wish us not always gut yomtov but sometimes *mo'adim* *Isimhah* ("a joyful holiday").

An Egyptian Karaite Recipe

Wedan Haman. Making this Purim treat will allow you to experience a beloved Karaite tradition in your own kitchen. The Arabic name means "Haman's ears." No recipes seem to be available in English—you read it first in Shalom!

Step 1: Whisk together two eggs, 1/3 c. water, 2 T. orange blossom water, 1 T. oil, and 2 t. vinegar.

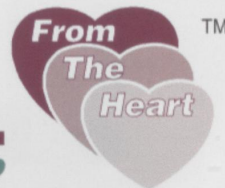
Step 2: Beat in 1 T. baking powder, 1/2 t. salt, and enough flour to make a stiff noodle-type dough.

Step 3: Knead until fully smooth and wrap in plastic while you are not working it.

Step 4: Using one egg-sized ball of dough at a time, roll as thin as possible and cut into 3" x 5" rectangles. Pleat one of the long edges of the rectangle and pinch the end tight to keep it pleated.

Step 5: Fry the "ears" in hot oil until they puff up (about twenty seconds each, flipping once). Blot and toss in powdered sugar.

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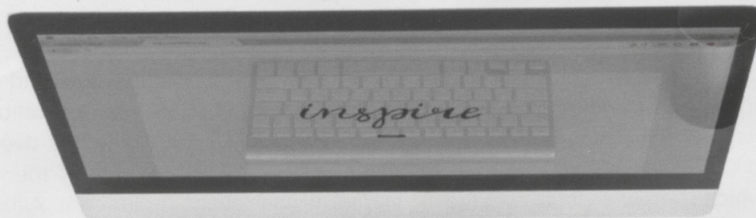


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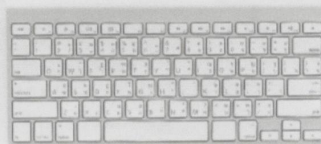
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United We Stand

BY SHOSHI LITVIN

In the Shema prayer, G-d tells the Jewish people, "V'shinantam l'vanecha v'dibarta bam..."- And you shall teach them to your children and you shall speak of them..." (Deuteronomy 6:7) This verse is the very reason that over the past 3,330 years, Jewish tradition has been preserved across the globe. I have had the incredible privilege to study and teach in many Jewish communities around the world, and I found so many beautiful unique cultures, and yet, at the heart of it, we're all one people, united at our core.

Growing up in the Chabad Lubavitch community in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, I went to an all-girls Jewish school. We studied in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English, and many of my classmates spoke Hebrew or Yiddish at home. My classes were structured so that we started off the day learning Torah. After the morning prayers, we learned Chumash (Bible), Hebrew language, lessons from the Torah Portion and Kabbalah. The school served a hot kosher lunch, after which everyone would sing the Grace After Meals together. The afternoon was reserved for secular studies, like math, science and world history. Our PE teacher often played Jewish music during class and school was closed for all Jewish holidays.

The main street in Crown Heights consists of kosher eateries and grocery stores, clothing shops filled with modest wardrobe options, and synagogues. Most of my friends were Jewish girls my age, whose family lives were similar to mine: mothers who covered their hair with wigs, fathers with black hats and white shirts, and all of us walking to each other's' houses to play on long Shabbos afternoons. The joy of living Jewish is palpable in the streets of Crown Heights. Whenever there is a celebration for the completion of a new Torah scroll, the music fills the streets and people pour out of

their homes to join the parade. On Simchat Torah, the main street is always closed off to cars so the myriads of families walking to and from synagogue can walk safely. On Sukkot, you can walk down any street and hear families singing together as they enjoy a holiday meal, leaving their Sukkah doors open for friends and strangers alike to stop in and make a L'chaim.

Chabad is a Hebrew acronym for the words Chochmah (wisdom), Binah (understanding) and Da'as (knowledge). This Chasidic philosophy originated in White Russia nearly 300 years ago with Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, a student of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the first Chasidic master. Following the Holocaust, The Lubavitcher Rebbe led Chabad to reach out to Jews across the world and educate and involve them in their faith through Chabad's educational arm, Merkos Leuni Chinuch. Chabad now has over 10,000 leaders across the globe, and is one of the largest and most vibrant organizations in Judaism. Although we lived in the Chabad community in Crown Heights, my father was sent by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, to help lead the Jewish community in Great Neck, NY.

The Jewish community in Great Neck is made up mostly of Persian Jews. Jews first moved to Persia (Iran, today) back in Biblical times. The first Jewish diaspora began when the Babylonians conquered Israel and sent the Jews into captivity there. The Jews mostly lived in their own communities and they thrived and flourished there, building houses of study and preserving their traditions. When the Temple was rebuilt and Jews were allowed to return to the Land of Israel, many stayed behind in ancient Persia and Jewish communities continued to exist there, despite near-constant persecution, until the

20th century, when it became increasingly dangerous for Jews to live there. Persian Jewish communities have since grown in the US, with the largest being in Great Neck, NY and Los Angeles, CA. Persian Jews, follow the rulings and customs of Sefardic Rabbi Yosef Karo, but have many customs and traditions unique to their community.

Generally my father would commute there alone during the work week, but every year for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, my whole family would pack up and go with him. There, I experienced a whole different set of Jewish customs and traditions. The tunes used during prayer were the ancient Mediterranean tunes their ancestors sang in Iran and women there covered their hair for synagogue with beautiful, elaborate hats. Each meal over the holiday consisted of rice and chicken seasoned with saffron. Most of my friends there were second-generation Americans, and yet they spoke Farsi fluently with their parents and each other. There are a few kosher restaurants in Great Neck, most of them dimly lit with heavy tapestries hanging on the wall, and the menus are made up of rice, kebabs, and Persian soups.

After graduating from high school, I attended a teaching seminary in Tzfat, Israel. I spent a year living in the mountains, in a picturesque city that seems frozen in time. While the main street is bustling with tourists and American students, if you take a walk down into the old city, you'll find stones and structures that have been there for centuries. Stroll through the streets and you'll see women wearing long head scarves and flowing skirts carrying infants in baby wraps who seem to have stepped right out of the Bible. Men in long white shirts with light colored linen pants clutching the hands of their young boys with long flowing sidelocks are a vision from generations past.

Following the exile from Israel, the Jews who settled in the Iberian Peninsula became known as Sephardic Jews. In 1492, the Spanish Inquisition expelled the Jews from Spain and they spread across North Africa and Europe. Some found refuge in Amsterdam and later made their way to America, becoming the first Jews to settle in New Orleans. Today, their Sephardic customs, like chamim (similar to cholent), are mixed with a dash of creole and thanks to the efforts of Chabad, there are certified kosher restaurants in New Orleans where you can get French dishes such as flan and beignets. I lived in New Orleans shortly after leaving Tzfat. During the year I spent teaching there, I was lucky enough to have kosher gumbo and jambalaya as well.

My visit to Bogotá, Colombia for a friend's wedding opened my eyes to a very different reality of

living as a Jew. The distinction between the wealthy and the poor is so vast that the wealthy people need constant protection from burglary and kidnapping. In addition to being wealthy, the Jews in Bogotá also have to deal with anti-semitism and many of them have round-the-clock security. Rabbi Rosenfeld of Casa del Jabad and his security guards know the names and faces of every Jew in the community and only familiar faces are allowed free access to the building. The wedding guests toured in large groups and traveled on bullet-proof buses as we rode llamas and shopped in flea markets, taking in the tourist attractions.

After we got married, my husband and I went to work at a Chabad center in Melbourne, Australia. In Australia, the Jewish community dates back to the British, but the majority of the Jewish community, like my grandfather, fled there before, during or immediately following the Holocaust. The community there is a reflection of the chaos in Europe; Jews from Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, and Czechoslovakia live side by side. A Jewish, European-style bakery called Glick's opened after the war and is now found in most major cities. In the schools, Jewish children whose parents stem from a dozen countries all learn together. The summer camp we ran there was attended by religious and non-religious children and our Chabad center was open to all Jews. I have also been lucky enough to run various Chabad programs across the United States, from a day camp in Daytona Beach, Florida to a Friendship Circle serving special-needs children in the Five Towns, New York, and a summer camp in Los Angeles, California. In all those places, I felt blessed to live in a country with such varied people, and where we could safely and happily walk the streets singing, "I'm a Jew, and I'm proud."

I carry all of these experiences with me now, as a Rebbetzin in Lexington. It is one of my guiding messages in life that Jews come from all different backgrounds and traditions and we need to be open and accepting of the many different Jewish customs that exist. At the same time, I am now homeschooling and I teach my children the songs, and customs of all the communities I was so fortunate to be a part of, and I try to instill in them the Rebbe's message of love, that underneath it all, we are all Jews and each and every one of us carries an actual spark of G-dliness which unites us all as brothers and sisters. ■

Shoshi Litvin is the Co-Director of Chabad of the Bluegrass, the Program Coordinator at the Jewish Student Center, and an advisor for Friendship Circle in Kentucky. She also teaches at the Louisville Jewish Day School and is the proud mother of 4 children.

So Good to Come Home

BY RIVKA EPSTEIN



When I moved with my family to Israel from Atlanta, Georgia in August 1977, I felt a blend of two totally different experiences and emotions. On one hand, I had never been to Israel before, so there was the actual excitement and challenge of moving to a new continent and culture. Together with that were the routine logistics of packing, choosing a city where to live, finding schools for the kids, and job hunting.

What was most surprising was that I felt like I was reuniting with something so familiar, as if I were finally meeting a beloved grandparent

whom I had grown up hearing about and seeing in pictures, but was only reconnecting in real time right now as an adult. How could it be that living in Israel was so familiar when, in reality, I had never been here before physically? On the soul level, at my core, I felt at home in a way I had never felt before.

I went to the Western Wall and had this profound feeling that I had been here before. I looked around me and saw people of all stripes touching, kissing, and embracing the Wall. I saw the little notes of the prayers and dreams that people placed in the crevices and cracks between the stones. There was something so very human about this Wall, a two thousand year old survivor of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Rabbi Abraham Kook, the first Chief Rabbi here, said these poetic words about this Wall: "There are people with hearts of stone, and there are stones with hearts of people."

Yes, these stones have witnessed and absorbed so much of Jewish history ---expulsion, foreign domination, and now the Return. And like a loving mother, they wait patiently for their children to come Home.

I continued to live life on a dual tract. There was the ordinariness of day to day life; work, shopping, homework, bedtimes, but also the dimension of the wonder and awe. I felt part of a privileged generation that has been given the possibility of returning to our Jewish Homeland. I had a totally new feeling here that I never had in America. I felt normal here. The holidays that were celebrated around me were my holidays. I remember that the first holiday to occur after we moved to Israel was Rosh Hashanah. I was like a child in Disneyland. Almost every store had honey and apples, pictures of shofars and signs of New Year greetings, Shanah Tovah Umetukah, Have a very sweet year. I heard it on the streets. Vendors said it, salespeople said it, and neighbors said it.

Living a Jewish life was not just in your private home or at the synagogue, the way it was when I was growing up in America. Here it was a national experience, outside and inside.

It is still this way today. On Fridays, everyone calls out "Shabbat Shalom," have a nice Sabbath. The cab driver says it, as well as the checkout lady at the store, the barber, and the bus driver. The process of getting ready for Shabbat is normal here. Jerusalem and other cities begin winding down Friday afternoons. Stores start to close. Owners start to go home. Flower stands are everywhere and people buy bouquets to bring

home for Shabbat. Delicious challahs are available everywhere. People have time to reconnect with family and friends.

There is a vitality and creativity to Jewish life here and a healthy optimism, visible in the spiritual and physical realms. This youthful spirit is actually contagious and it enters into your inner self. There is so much building and reconstruction and renewal here. There are so many synagogues and so many prayer services. There are many hi-tech centers here, rivaling Silicon Valley. You see huge office buildings in technological parks with signs of Microsoft and MobilEye. Per capita, Israelis file for the most patents in the world, after the United States. Also there are many Torah centers of Jewish learning, both for men and for women. Learning about Judaism and your Jewish roots is an "in" thing to do here.

There is always the mix of the old and the new here, ancient history and recent history melding into the present tense. There is a deep awareness that the Holocaust has a different ending here. I remember that I used to take my young children to see movies at the Israel Museum in the late 70's. That particular afternoon, the museum showed the movie The Sound of Music. There is a part when Captain Von Trapp pulls down a Nazi flag from his estate in Salzburg, Austria. Suddenly I heard a commotion and clamoring and clapping from the audience. What was happening? Then I understood. That act of ripping down the flag did not go unnoticed. The entire audience had burst out in a flurry of spontaneous applause. Everyone was applauding and identifying with what the captain did. In Israel, you do not take for granted such gestures. Survival makes you ever vigilant.

Since we moved here, several of our relatives have also moved to Israel. My husband's mother, his sister, and my parents all moved here. It is a place of family reunification on many levels. And most of all, a blessed reunification with your deepest self.

We are thankful to G-d that our children have grown up in Israel, have married fine Israelis and that all of our grandchildren are Sabras, born in Israel. Our family members continue to thank us for taking that big step to move here. They, too, feel they are in the right place. And they are happy we did the Aliyah leap for them 41 years ago. My husband and I have become the transitional chain in our family line, the ancestors who have replanted the family in our Ancestral Jewish Homeland.

Maybe you want to add coming to Israel to your bucket list?

Adventures In Gustatory Judaism

BY ALICE GOLDSTEIN

The Bible is full of references to food – think of the joys of manna. Abraham feeding his guests a repast featuring goat; Joseph dining regally with his brothers; and Ezekiel providing a recipe for bread. Our own memories are full of comfort foods, special treats, family recipes. Much of our nostalgia for food is associated with Jewish holidays, Jewish life cycle events, or Shabbat. We think of these foods as defining us as Jews, and, in fact, often define ourselves as Jews because we eat certain foods.

Don't Jews everywhere identify themselves through the foods we eat? Well, yes, but the foods vary greatly by geography. Think of how different the diet of Jews in the Middle East or North Africa is from the diet of those of us whose ancestors came from Eastern Europe. Haroseth made with figs, dates, and oranges is nothing like the charoset made with apples and walnuts, but both remind us of the mortar our ancestors had to make in Egypt. Even within larger regions, huge variations exist, as I came to realize when I – a German Jew – married a man with Lithuanian roots. We were both Ashkenazi Jews, but a divide existed between Western and Eastern Europe. With the huge Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe around the turn of the 20th century, East European food traditions overwhelmingly came to define Jewish food in America.

My first realization of differences came when I was served bagels and lox on a Sunday morning. I was certainly familiar with lox, but what were bagels? I'd never heard of them, even though I had lived in the U.S. for 14 years. Food barriers aren't always hard to overcome. It was easy to develop a taste for bagels – especially the "everything" kind!

Holidays posed other hurdles. On Rosh Hashanah, I was accustomed to a compote of apples and plums; my husband Sidney ate tzimmes made with carrots, sweet potatoes, and prunes. Our compromise? We serve both. I knew nothing of gefilte fish. My family ate carp poached in a wine and parsley sauce. Even our challah recipes differed: my mother's dough included potatoes, but no eggs; the more usual challah dough in the U.S. prides itself on its use of eggs.

Pesach was relatively easy. We both were used to charoset made with apples and walnuts. Chicken

soup, of course, had to have small matzo balls (though my mother added finely chopped parsley to hers). Sponge cake was a staple. The major difference for us was the addition of my family's tradition of serving matzo dumplings along with the brisket.

A crisis came at Chanukah. I didn't know about latkes! My family had made jelly doughnuts (sufganiyot in Israel) as the traditional fried food. But potato pancakes? I turned to my mother-in-law for instruction and soon turned them out in heaps.

In Eastern Europe, food preparation for Shabbat often meant preparing cholent – a slow cooked dish of vegetables, legumes, and meat. The German version was a delicious kugel made with beef fat, onions, flour, water, and salt, baked and baked again, the last time with stewed pears or prunes on top. A true artery clogger! I haven't made it in years.

After 65 years of marriage, our food traditions have pretty well blended. And we're just as likely to serve Asian food as any variation on "Jewish" food. But our recipes are passed from one generation to another, forming links to our past. They remind us that there are many paths, even through our stomachs, to be mindful of the myriad ways of life that help to define us as Jews.



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