

One Voice . . . Segulah By Cynthia Chapman

Recently a friend and I were talking about some differences between Judaism and its daughter religion Christianity. My friend commented that he often thinks the Christian view of heaven offers loved ones a more optimistic view of the afterlife than does Judaism.

True, in *Yigdal*, we assert a belief in resurrection. But Jews, in general, spend far more time discussing and thinking about the present life than the afterlife. A book I've been reading hints that Jews took on the idea of the soul from Greek culture. Looking back over history, many cultures have focused to a very great degree on the afterlife, the Egyptians, for example. I find Judaism's more limited focus on the World to Come refreshing. Who knows if there is a heaven or hell? None of us have first-hand knowledge of such places.

But what we do know is that grief for loved ones does not end when the grave is closed. Judaism offers rituals to help console the mourners. The meal of condolence, sitting shiva, the eleven months of reciting kaddish, the annual *yahrzeit*—all these confirm what the human heart knows, that grief has no end as long as loving memories live on. When I looked to Judaism for comfort after my mother's death a year and a half ago, I found it. Rending my garment showed tangibly the tearing apart of the fabric of my heart and life that I felt from losing her. Knowing that everyday someone else was feeling some of what I was feeling, that minyans exist both to praise God and to offer community when one needs it most was something that seemed like a spiritual glue when my world seemed to be falling apart. Nothing I

know of in Christianity can compare.

When my father died, at age 16 I knew of no rituals to comfort me. There were flowers and cards for a few days and then just emptiness. Where heaven or hell were, if they exist, seemed much less important to me at the time than confronting the struggle of getting through daily grief. It seems to me that Judaism is wise in the ways of the human heart. I appreciate the rhythmic intonation of the Kaddish on days when I'm feeling grief and on days when I'm not. That constancy, at least to me, is a comfort greater than a vision of pearly gates and judgement. A *yahrzeit* never stops. We always have a day when we can pause to remember the gift of another's person's presence in our own life, year after year, even after everyone else forgets the magnitude of our personal loss.

PREDICTIONS FOR 1997

By Kenneth Stein

Sometimes in dealing with the Middle East it is far easier and less painful to foretell the future than to predict the past. That's right, to foretell the future is easier than predicting the past.

The reasons are simple: everyone has a different spin on the past. Everyone. Each brings her/his own evidence, strong and often immovable personal feelings to the argument of what happened, why, how, etc. Ideology becomes tangled with reality. Hindsight is not 20/20 in retelling Middle Eastern history. Rarely are audiences satisfied with a historian's rendition of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Whoever tells the tale of the past obtains a throbbing headache from some professional audience-sitter for leaving something but or not putting the emphasis in the right place.

In retelling the past, it seems like the expert is accountable to everyone, including the almighty. On the other hand, how many times do we ask for forgiveness or receive punishment for the sins we are about to commit?

For example, if in retelling the past, I left remarking that Benjamin Netanyahu was no Menachem Begin, that Bill Clinton was no Jimmy Carter, or that Yassir Arafat was no Anwar Sadat, someone would have held my feet to the fire. On the other hand, when one predicts the future, it is never tightly entwined with ego nor emotion. In foretelling the future, the worst that can happen is that an expert or analyst is called crazy. In foretelling the future, who is going to hold you accountable for what you say in five or twenty years? In all the speaking I have done over the years, the only

warning I ever receive from convention planners or speaker's bureau personnel, is don't be too left or too right about the past.

No one ever cautions me not to be audaciously speculative about the future. What if I had predicted the following in May, 1977? Within twenty years, the Israeli government would have signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, that the cold war in the Middle East would end, that the influence of Arab oil money would fade, that Israel would willingly recognize and negotiate with the PLO and turn portions of West Bank and Gaza territory over to Yassir Arafat's control, and that the President in the White House would be the best friend that Israel would have since Harry Truman.

What if I would have said in May, 1977 that in May, 1996 there again will be Israeli parliamentary elections. Yitzhak Rabin was the Prime Minister, but in the months prior to the election Shimon Peres would replace him as the Labor Party candidate. A former Southern governor would again be in the White House. The Americans would root for a Peres/Labor victory. Again in astonishing fashion, the Likud would win. Building and expanding Israeli settlements in the territories would add an uncomfortable burden to the US-Israeli relationship.

For making such peculiar predictions, would the credibility police at Emory have stripped me of a hard-earned and costly University of Michigan doctorate? No. Would I be made chairperson of the Department of "Misplaced Reality" or been awarded an endowed chair in certified non-

sense? No.

So, since there are no penalties for predicting the future, here are my estimates for 1997.

1) There will be an agreement on Hebron. Netanyahu will honor a public obligation to the Oslo agreements and will try simultaneously to hasten conclusion of the final status talks with the Palestinians in order to avoid additional territorial concessions.

2) American Jews, regardless of their personal feelings about Netanyahu will come to understand and even appreciate that his definition of statesmanship is as he recently said, "It is not how much passing support you can win by subordinating your own (Israeli) interests to the other (Palestinian) side. The test is to protect your own interests by setting policy that defines the limits and demands and the parameters of the game."

3) Israelis will continue to seek separation of their lives from the Palestinians, but will not be able to reach a political consensus about the degree of further territorial withdrawals from the West Bank.

4) Israelis will continue to build a consensus that if a Palestinian state is to be created in the future, its sovereign ability to make decisions will have to be restricted or curtailed in specific spheres such as treaty making, fielding an army, drilling water wells, and returning expatriated Palestinians.

5) Yassir Arafat and the Arab world, especially led by Egypt, will try in every manner possible to avert the concretizing of such an Israeli consensus and seek American and European support for their view.

6) Israeli trepidation and casualties will come from military actions in the Lebanese south and from militant Palestinian activity.

7) Presidents Arafat, Assad, Quaddafi and King Hussein will become older faster than they anticipated, opening conjecture and speculation about the policies and attitudes of their successors.

8) U.S. Vice-President Al Gore's aspirations for the presidency in 2000 will act as a subtle break on possible White House pressures against Israeli procrastination in present and future Arab-Israeli negotiations.

9) Syria and Israeli will continue to spar diplomatically and snarl militarily at one another, but neither will be interested in a major confrontation.

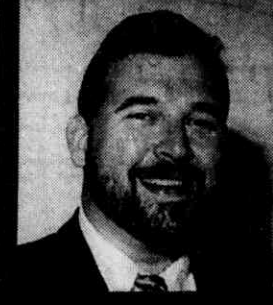
10) Arab-Israel negotiations will continue to be defined as "prolonging the inevitable indefinitely."

In Atlanta, Dr. Kenneth W. Stein is Professor of Near Eastern History and Political Science at Emory University. ☆

Point of View

Each issue of the CJN features an article written by one of three rabbis active in the Charlotte Community.

This Month:
Rabbi James M. Bennett
of Temple Beth El



Tzedakah, or "Righteousness: is one of the most important mitzvot of our tradition. There are many forms of *Tzedakah*. Maimonides, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also known as the *RaMBaM*, taught that there are eight levels of *Tzedakah*, ranging from the direct gift of money from one person to another, through more and more indirect, anonymous forms of giving. Each successive level of *Tzedakah* better preserves the dignity of the recipient and the anonymity of giver and recipient. The highest form of *Tzedakah* is to provide another with the opportunity to better himself or herself.

Jewish tradition also differentiates *Tzedakah*, which is primarily various forms of charitable giving and action, from the various act of *Gemilut Chasadim* or "Deeds of Lovingkindness" we are commanded as Jews to perform. These include such deeds as visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, reaching out to the stranger, widow or orphan, providing shelter for the homeless, offering food to the hungry, and sharing our companionship with the lonely. The famous Jewish mystic and teacher, Rabbi Isaac Luria, the *Ari*, taught a wonderful lesson about the role of such deeds in perfecting the world. In his conception, God created the universe by placing diving light in vessels. These vessels were increasingly distanced from God, who withdrew from creation in order to allow it to take place. In the process, some of the vessels were shattered, and the divine sparks scattered throughout creation. Our task is to gather these sparks, to uplift them, thus finding ourselves closer to God, the source of divine light. Gathering the sparks is achieved in many ways, including *Tzedakah* and *Gemilut Chasadim*.

The vision of gathering these sparks is wonderful imagery to help inspire us all to perform such deeds. Our Jewish tradition compels us to do so, not only for our fellow Jews, but for all people in need. The various Social Action programs of the synagogues and other organizations in the Charlotte Jewish Community provide a means for us to do so. One wonderful new example of such a program here at Shalom Park is the Room-in-the-Inn program we began last month. The simple concept is for synagogues, churches and other institutions to open our doors to a few homeless people to sleep, get a warm meal and good company on a regular basis, weekly, monthly, or otherwise. During the cold months, we can help to alleviate the great need facing the growing homeless population of our area.

I am proud that Shalom Park has united to begin participation in this critical program serving those whose need is greater than ours. Putting aside the differing agendas of our individual needs or institutions, we have come together as a Jewish community to do the important work of *Tzedakah* and *Gemilut Chasadim*. We are raising the sparks.

We are taught in our tradition that "In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we, personally, went forth from slavery in Egypt" (*Mishnah Pesachim 10:4*). From this we learn that we must learn empathy, to pay attention to the needs of those who are afflicted by every form of oppression. Those who are homeless, hungry, alone and in poverty experience oppression each and every day. The cold winter months are especially challenging and our participation in the Room-in-the-Inn program helps us to fulfill the Jewish obligation to alleviate suffering.

To all those who have already volunteered to participate, we thank you for the gift of your time and energy as volunteers in the Room-in-the-Inn program. All those who are interested in joining the project can contact the JCC, Temple Israel, or Temple Beth El for more information.

In *Pirke Avot 3:19-20*, Rabbi Tarfon said, "The day is short, the task is great, the workers are lazy, the reward is great and the Master is insistent. You are not required to complete the task, but neither are you free to neglect it." ☆

The Charlotte Jewish News

5007 Providence Road - Charlotte, NC 28226
(704) 366-5007 Fax (704) 365-4507

A Publication of the
Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte

Marvin Goldberg-Executive Director
Cynthia Chapman-Editor

Advertising Coordinator:
Rita Mond, 366-6632

CJN Executive Board
Co-Chairs - Bob Abel - Bob Davis
Members: Rosalind Taranto - Evelyn Berger -
-Suzanne Cannon -
Ann Langman - Linda Levy - Dr. Selwyn Spangenthal

The CJN does not assume responsibility for the quality or kasruth of any product or service advertised. Publishing of a paid political advertisement does not constitute an endorsement of any candidate, political party or position by this newspaper, the Federation or any employees.

Published monthly except July
Copy deadline is the 5th of the month preceding month of issue

THE YEAR 2000 IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING AND WE ARE PLANNING AHEAD FOR IT

The Charlotte Jewish Federation is conducting a study to help serve our community better.

HELP US HELP YOU!

In March, we will be calling 400 randomly selected Jewish homes. If we call you, please stay on the telephone. Your answers to our questions will help us perpetuate a strong, vibrant Jewish community into the next century.

WE ARE COUNTING ON YOU TO COUNT YOURSELF IN

Telephone numbers will be selected randomly. All calls will be anonymous. Interviewers will not know, and will not ask for, your name or address.

There will be NO SOLICITATION OF FUNDS.

JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER CHARLOTTE • 704-366-5007