

Temple Israel Book Club

Two Books, Two Meetings, and Two Special Events

I. RASHI'S DAUGHTERS, BOOK I: JOHEVED: A NOVEL OF LOVE AND TALMUD IN MEDIEVAL FRANCE BY MAGGIE ANTON, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18

**II. NUMEROUS BOOKS BY JUDITH VIORST
MONDAY, MARCH 12**

Both meetings will be held at Temple Israel at 7:30PM

In choosing its next two discussion selections, Temple Israel book club members had a unique situation - two noted authors will be speaking in Charlotte in the next few months: Maggie Anton at the Temple Israel Sisterhood

Shabbat on Saturday, January 21 and Judith Viorst at the Federation Women's Division Spring Lecture on Thursday, March 22. So the group did what any eager readers would do: They chose books written by these well-recognized authors for its next two meetings.

At its January 18 meeting,

members will discuss the first of Maggie Anton's books on *Rashi's Daughters - Joheved: A Novel of Love and Talmud in Medieval France*. Joheved, the eldest of Rashi's three daughters, has a secret wish, something that is strictly forbidden to Jewish women in 11th century France: she seeks to study the Talmud. For years she watched enviously as her father, the great scholar Rashi, teaches the Talmud to male students. History has told us that Rashi did teach Talmud to his daughters. Anton spent seven years gathering research about these remarkable but little-known women and it shows. As one critic noted, "This is historical fiction that brings our heritage as Jewish women closer to home ... an engaging read on many levels that will appeal to a variety of

audiences."

The prolific and entertaining author Judith Viorst wrote so many books relevant to women at various ages and stages in their lives that no one book was selected for the March 12 meeting. Readers can choose from such titles as *Grown Up Marriage*, *How Did I Get to be 40*, *Suddenly 60* and *Other Stories of Later Life*, *I'm Too Young to be 70*, *Imperfect Control*, *Necessary Losses*, *Murdering Mr. Monti - A Merry Little Tale of Sex and Violence*, many others, including a series of poems for both adults and children. We'll share our impressions of our selections at the March 12

meeting and will be well prepared to listen to and ask questions of Judith Viorst at the Women's Division Spring Lecture on March 22.

Anton's books are available at the public library and the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library. Most of Viorst's books are available at the public library, and copies of both authors' books are available at book stores or on-line. Both the January 18 and March 12 meetings are open to all members of the community, including "drop-ins" and those who haven't read the book. For additional information contact Linda Levy at 704-366-6362/levyollie@aol.com.✡

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"Singing Rabbi" Style Shabbaton at the Charlotte Torah Center

About a month ago, a number of Jews in Charlotte had their first exposure to a unique kind of Friday night and Shabbat morning service. The Charlotte Torah Center hosted a Carlebach service. What is that, you ask? It all began with Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994). Born in Berlin, he came to America when he was fourteen and attended some of the most revered academies of Jewish learning. Even though he was descended from generations of Rabbis from pre-Holocaust Germany, he created a unique path for himself and became known as the "singing Rabbi." He started writing songs in the 1960s, lived in Greenwich Village, and eventually moved to San Francisco. He shared the stage with such legends as Bob Dylan and the Grateful Dead, but his concern was reaching Jewish youth who had strayed far from their Jewish roots. He established the "House of Love and Prayer" for those youths and travelled extensively to touch the lives of Jews whom no one else could (or wanted to).

I know a Jewish singer in Israel who was at an Ashram in India in the early 1970s estranged from his Jewish identity. One evening Reb Shlomo (the name he was affectionately known by) showed up and sang songs that penetrated his soul. His melodies are short with lyrics from Tanach (Bible) or the Siddur (Jewish prayer book) and as a result they have become popular in many synagogues throughout the world. As one writer explained, "He changed the expectations of the prayer experience from decorous and somber to uplifting and ecstatic as he captivated generations with elemental melodies and stories of miraculous human saintliness, modesty and unselfishness." Anyone who has davened at the Western Wall on Friday night will recognize the lively singing and dancing of the Carlebach minyan. Many people who have never gotten anything out of Jewish prayer attend that minyan and are inspired.

Can this type of service be brought to Charlotte? We thought so but who

would lead it? Could there be a better candidate than someone who leads the services at the Carlebach Shule on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and is a producer of a (soon to be) Broadway musical about the life of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach called "Soul Doctor"? (<http://shlomomusical.com/>). Our chazzan was Dr. Jeremy Chess, a retina surgeon residing in Manhattan. His friendly demeanor, deep voice, and conscious effort to include all present set the stage for a spiritually uplifting Friday evening.

Although there were many highlights, one particularly inspiring part was during the middle of davening when Dr. Chess began dancing and formed a chain following him. We danced throughout the building and even outside. For a moment I was lost in thought and was reminded of the days when our family lived in Jerusalem and prayed at the Western Wall. Although it wasn't the real McCoy (Western Wall), I was transported for a few moments from Providence Road in Charlotte to the Old City in Jerusalem.

After the service we all sat down to a festive meal and heard words of Torah from Dr. Chess and had a special child friendly session. On Shabbat morning, Dr. Chess led prayers once again and it was wonderful.

Shabbat Parshat Lech Lecha tells the story of Abraham leaving his father's home and traveling to an unknown destination; that Shabbat was the Torah Center's Carlebach Shabbaton. Those present remained in the same physical location, but for some, Shabbat allowed them to leave their regular workweek and go to a destination unknown to them before. It was inspiring and inviting, and a new prayer experience for many who participated. We look forward to the next one. ✡

