

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

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Editorial

Mensch

One of the most beautiful Yiddish words is "Mensch," or in Hebrew "Ben Adam." It means a person, but in some cases it also expresses an ideal.

There is a Yiddish proverb which speaks about the Mensch and in essence it means this ideal personality. "A mensch is umetum a mensch" — a real mensch is a mensch under all circumstances.

Ours is a society where everything is in a state of flux. The morals and standards are under constant challenge. The new morality extends to every aspect of human behavior. There are no certainties, no more verities, no more time-tested truths, no permanent values.

As a result, we find ourselves in a state of terrible spiritual chaos and confusion.

But, we Jews have a tradition. It is a tradition that is 4,000 years old. We have been confronted with similar challenges and moral dilemmas for many centuries; and from our historic experience we have achieved profound insights and great wisdom that are embodied in the values taught by our Torah and our tradition.

These values are not disposable like yesterday's newspaper. They are values for which it is possible for a human being to live a meaningful life even in the 20th century.

These values and teachings of Jewish tradition have one goal — it's to try to make a mensch out of each one of us, because if you're a mensch, our tradition says that you can be relied upon under all circumstances. "You can be a man for all season."

If you're a student you can resist the pressure of others who want you to experiment with drugs or to use sex as a substitute for love.

If you are a mensch and have a profession, your concern for your client will supersede your concern for your own aggrandizement.

If you are a mensch and there is a crisis, you will be a person who can be counted on to help others as well as yourself.

Leo Rosten, in *The Joys of Yiddish*, wrote "to be a mensch has nothing to do with wealth, success or status."

Temple Israel will present its first Ben Adam or Mensch Award on Friday evening, February 19. The award will be given to a human being who is upright, honorable and decent. He or she may be someone of consequence, someone to admire and emulate, someone of noble character who has dignity and has a sense of what is right and responsible. The entire community is invited to join our Temple family.

The proverb says, "A real mensch is a mensch under all circumstances." I shall not forget my teacher, who used to say to me, "When will you become a mensch?"

It's a question that our tradition suggests we ask ourselves every day of our lives.

Rabbi Richard K. Rocklin

Across The Editors' Desks...

Dear Ann and Rita:

Please accept my thanks in particular for the coverage you've given me in becoming president of Charlotte Jewish Federation — and in general for the excellent work you're doing as editors of *The Charlotte Jewish News*.

Your winning the Public Relations Award of CJF is added testimony to the high standards you've set and achieved. The entire community is proud of your accomplishments and looks

forward to each issue.

Best wishes to you in all your efforts in 1982.

Kind personal regards,
 Richard A. Klein
 President,
 Charlotte Jewish
 Federation

The Editors welcome comments and letters expressing all points of view and reserve the right to edit.

L' Chaim

By L. Louis Albert, ACSW
 Director Federation
 Social Services

It was pretty cold here in Charlotte this past month, and like most of us I just turned up the heat in our apartment. We have electric heat that blows hot air, so that if it's not blowing it really doesn't feel too warm. The electric bill arrived just a few days ago and the one month charge was for a whopping \$103. Now to me that seems like a lot of money, although all of the neighbors are paying about the same. We're not extravagant with the heat either. During the daytime the temperature is set at 60 degrees, and is the same when we go to bed at

night. For about five hours in the early evening we raise it to 70 degrees. I've been wondering how elderly people living on a relatively fixed social security income cope with this problem of escalating costs.

Now about this same time I read that the telephone company is asking for a very large increase. For an elderly person the phone can be as much of a necessity as food and shelter, especially in the case of an emergency. There isn't any way to cut basic phone service unless you use a party line.

We haven't even begun to consider the fact that apartment rents are increased on a regular basis of at least once a year, or that food costs

have been edging upwards. Where do you begin to make the budget cuts when your income only covers the necessities?

Let's look at a typical situation for a moment. If a single older adult receives \$550 a month in social security retirement benefits and pays \$300 a month in rent, \$100 for electricity in the winter, \$12 for basic telephone service, and \$30 per week for food and other groceries, then that leaves only \$18 a month to pay for clothing, medical care, prescriptions, health insurance and transportation. Hardly an extravagant budget.

A person in such a situation might rely on their savings, yet even a \$10,000 nest egg goes mighty fast if you spend a week or two at the hospital. A person in such a situation might apply for government aid, such as food stamps or medicaid. Yet these programs have become more and more restrictive and someone with a \$550 income and more than \$1000 in the bank would not be eligible for any help most likely. A person might turn to his children for a little extra help, but that supposes that the children have extra money available. Or a person might move into one of the nice subsidized apartments for the elderly which are located around town. These apartments are so swamped with requests that the Housing Authority which runs them is no longer accepting applications and will not do so for at least the next year. A person might find himself in a pretty bad situation in spite of all his best efforts.

My purpose in describing this depressing scenario is not to make you feel badly or to ask for anything. Rather, it is to let you know that in the real world these things happen and people struggle to manage. It even happens in a Jewish Community such as Charlotte. Next time it's cold and you turn up the heat to stay warm, ask yourself how you might manage if the situations were reversed.



Thoughts From The Lubavitcher Rebbe

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

The fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat is the "Rosh Hashono" — New Year for Trees. It is celebrated by eating from the seven fruits distributed to Israel. We bring you a thought about the relation of tree to mankind.

"...for man is as the tree of the field..." Our sages have used this verse as a basis for their teaching that the service of man must relate to and be influenced by "the tree of the field."

Undoubtedly there are many points of instruction and guidance that we can derive from the vegetation that surrounds us; but why is the tree singled out as a source of inspiration for man?

The vegetative power which the creator instilled in the earth expresses the infinite nature of His being. Should the world continue to exist for millions of years the earth's infinite power of vegetation will ceaselessly cause grass to grow year after year and century after

century. The individual blade of grass does not, however, display within itself a characteristic of infinity.

Not so the tree. Each individual tree itself demonstrates a limitless cycle of infinite growth and propagation through its fruit which bear the seeds for the next generation of trees which will in turn bear seed carrying fruit, etc. An apple tree may grow large, sweet, delicious fruit, but this is not enough; the apple must also contain a seed which can be planted to yield another tree which in turn will produce fruits with seeds to grow further trees and so on.

The tree demonstrates an aspect of infinity, through its limitless reproduction of generations, providing us with a powerful analogy to derive inspiration for service of the Creator.

This teaches us that one should not only improve their own life but must also share their knowledge and wisdom with others to the extent that they in turn should bear fruit too.

The Jewish Calendar



Feb. 5 — 5:56 p.m.
 Feb. 12 — 6:03 p.m.
 Feb. 19 — 6:10 p.m.
 Feb. 26 — 6:16 p.m.
 Mar. 5 — 6:23 p.m.