

My Voice . . .

By Susan Kramer

I never realized what an education was in store for me when I took over the editorship of the *Charlotte Jewish News*. Now, I thought I was an educated Jew — after all, as a Jew by choice, I have done an enormous amount of reading and studying to catch up with my "born Jew" brethren. Ha! There is so much Jewish information out there about things that I didn't know I didn't know about — well, these last four months have been an humbling experience.

An enormous amount of information comes across my desk each month, and I read it all, looking for important stories, thought-provoking op-ed pieces and engaging feature articles that will interest my readers. I see a little bit of everything, from Mendy comic books ("the only kosher comic book published in the US") to books for review. (The most intriguing offering recently, *The Harlot By The Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible*, will be reviewed as soon as I clean the steam from my glasses.)

I get press releases from left and right-wing groups (everyone has an agenda!) as well as from the mainstream organizations that keep me posted on the (newest) crisis to confront the Jews — and it seems as if there is a new crisis weekly.

I receive heartwarming stories like the one about the (non-Jewish) teacher in the rural Georgia town who has created an award-winning Holocaust curriculum for her school, even though there were no Jews in the community, the mildly ridiculous (see "Mendy" above) and the downright funny, like the handout I got in my mailbox detailing how to be a good wife, circa a 1952 High School Economics textbook. (When "he" comes home, "have his dinner ready, touch up your makeup, wash the children's faces, minimize the noise of the washer, dryer, dishwasher and vacuum, have a cool drink ready for him and take off his shoes . . ." My only question is where can I get a wife like that?)

One of my favorite weekly submissions is the Shabbat

Shalom Fax, published by Aish HaTorah, an Orthodox outreach organization. Founded by Rabbi Noah Weinberg of Jerusalem, Aish claims it can teach you the Torah in an hour, Hebrew in five lessons and 3,300 years of Jewish history in three hours. Although I am somewhat skeptical of those claims, I do find the idea on which his organization is founded, that "every individual Jew is part of the overall destiny of the Jewish People," and the "importance of loving every Jew," to be very appealing. Each week, the Shabbat Shalom Fax, in addition to a D'var Torah on the weekly parsha, publishes interesting essays on current Jewish events. At their invitation to "pass it along," I am reproducing a recent essay here. It spoke to me — perhaps it will speak to you. (By the way, if you are interested in receiving the Shabbat Shalom Fax, you may contact Aish HaTorah at (305) 535-2474.)

And so, my Jewish education continues. I look forward to sharing it all with you, and even more importantly, learning from you as well. ☆

Susan Kramer

We must stop this family feud

Good morning! This week I received the following letter from Rabbi Yitz Greenman, Director of the Aish HaTorah New York Branch. It's a letter that represents the feelings of all of us involved with Aish and probably many Jews worldwide. It's a letter that needs to be read and passed on to others.

Last night I cried. Last night I went to the wedding of a close friend and cried. My tears were not of joy, but of sorrow and pain. Oh no, don't misunderstand, it was a beautiful wedding and they are a lovely couple.

Now you may wonder, why else would I cry at a wedding? Perhaps it's the incident at the Wall, where some of my Jewish brothers acted in a despicable way and undermined the very outreach work that I do? That's not it. Maybe it's the "Who Is A Jew" issue that has Jews of all stripes up in arms? No again. What about the "religious" Jews who are accused of laundering money for drug traffickers in NY? That's not it either. Well, then maybe it's the fact that more than 50% of my brothers and sisters are intermarrying? Sorry. What then could it be?

I sat next to a very nice gentle man at this wedding who was recently in Israel. When sharing the highlights of his trip with me he said, "You Jews are in trouble — and it isn't the Arabs, it's the fact that you're not at peace with your fellow Jews. You're at each other's throats!" When I heard that, I cried.

Yes, our dirty laundry is hanging on the line for all to see and we have no one to blame, but ourselves. All of the issues above bother me terribly, but hearing this point from a non-Jew was the straw that

broke the camel's back. It's gotten so out of hand that the non Jews are wagging their fingers at us. It's hard to be a light unto the nations when you're not shining. We're not and we should be ashamed.

You ask, "What can I do?" A lot. 1) Try to love all Jews, especially the ones you disagree with. Realize that you're either part of the solution or part of the problem. If you don't learn to recognize and appreciate the virtues in all Jews, you're part of the problem. Period. It's easier to feel closer to other Jews when you focus on the values that we have in common. There are so many. 2) Stop accusing. It takes two to tango and the blame lies on all sides. Try to understand where "they" are coming from. Ask yourself: "if I were born into a non observant/observant (or right of center/left of center) home, how would I feel about this issue?" It's not necessary to change your views, but it is necessary to respect the rights of other people to have their own views. 3) Study Torah. The Torah has been our guide for over 3,000 years. As the great philosopher, Rav Saadiah Gaon, said: "Our nation is a nation because of the Torah. If you're not fluent in Torah study, ask your rabbi to explain what the Torah says about these complex issues. If you don't have a rabbi, now is a great time to find one.

We've overcome so many obstacles over the millennium and accomplished so much, we can't let ourselves self-destruct now. We must stop this family feud.

Reprinted from The Shabbat Shalom Fax, published by Aish Ha Torah, Rabbi Kalman Packouz, editor. ☆

Committee seeks compromise on conversion issue

JERUSALEM — The committee named to find a compromise on Jewish conversion has begun its awesome task.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking at the opening of the committee's first meeting June 30, urged the sides to demonstrate tolerance and flexibility in trying to find a solution. The prime minister "gave us his hearty blessing," said Uri

Regev, director of the Israel Religious Action Center and the Reform movement's representative on the seven-member committee.

The Conservative representative is Rabbi Reuven Hammer, who is head of the Masorti rabbinic Court for conversions. The other five members, including the committee's chair, former Justice Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, are Orthodox. The committee was

created as part of a compromise negotiated between the Israeli government and Reform and Conservative movements to find a consensus on the conversion issue.

The conversion crisis erupted a year ago after religious political parties secured a commitment from a newly elected Netanyahu to seek legislation that would set into law the Orthodox establishment's sole authority over Jewish conversions conducted in Israel.

After the Knesset passed the first reading of the bill in April, Reform and Conservative Jews, both in Israel and the United States, went to work vigorously opposing the measure, saying that it would delegitimize the non-Orthodox movements. The agreement to establish the interdenominational committee came after more than two months of talks between coalition representatives and Reform and Conservative leaders, including last-minute marathon talks that involved Netanyahu himself.

As part of the compromise, the coalition agreed to suspend legislative work on the bill and the Conservative movements agreed to suspend litigation pending before Israel's High Court of Justice.

The committee was given until August 15 to develop recommendations. If the coalition, which includes the 23 Knesset members from the religious parties, adopts the recommendations, the Knesset would likely pass legislation in September.

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