



Temple Beth El



Learning Hineh Matov: Choosing Judaism and the Internet

By Susan Wilhite

Until recently America Online's virtual "Jewish Community" ran a dialogue for and between people who have or will soon choose Judaism. It disintegrated after a number of months. But here's how it went.

The Community's Message Boards have several public files for those choosing Judaism or have done so. The "Jewish Community", in a little office on Market Street in San Francisco, decided to set up a private dialogue for regular contributors to the boards. I was among the first twenty or so to be invited.

We were from all parts of the country; the majority were in non-traditionally Jewish cities or towns. We represented a variety of occupations. We had a female police officer in Houston, a female violinist in Colorado, a doctoral student in Northern California, a legal aide in Michigan, and a young mother married to an Israeli in a Georgia college town.

We sought various levels of observance of Judaism. A couple of us were going Orthodox, but most were Conservative and a few Reform. There is a common feeling among AOL's larger online Jewish Community that studying to choose Reform is wasted effort — why bother if you're not going to go 'all the way'?

This is where much friction originated. Religious elitism is not only rampant among born Jews.

We started the group with everyone writing about their attraction to Judaism.

The substance of our discussions had a support group flavor. It worked like a private bulletin board — whenever members read an e-mail message from a group member, they could post a relevant comment or choose to wait to first see what others said. A member might post a question or describe a situation for the group. Sometimes the questions referred to the practice of Judaism or sometimes it amounted to an informal poll. Sometimes we discussed problems with the question phrased as, 'if you were in my shoes', very often concerning religious family conflicts, especially with in-laws and children.

And of course we exchanged our bet din and mikveh fears and experiences (often providing careful descriptions for the queezy) and congratulated those with new Jewish names. We shared book recommendations, film & television representations of Judaism, and interpretations of ritual and Torah, flexing our new cultural muscles.

The group dismantled for two key reasons. A major reason was technical.

Group members came and went, some saying they couldn't keep up with the e-mail the discussions generated. When any member's departure was announced by a

Jewish Community supervisor we were to delete that screen name from the mailing list, or add, as was the case. This became a daunting chore.

The other reason for the group's demise was the perhaps inevitable discord between members, particularly between the more fundamental and the more liberal. Of people learning dispassionate, even kindly, religious discussion, some found it hard to hear or say 'lighten up', or 'you call that good enough?' It's possible that communication was further strained because of the array of education levels, reasons for seeking Judaism, personal meaning of Judaism, and even generation levels. All of these may have been overridden by a competent, actively involved facilitator. As it was, we often wondered if our supervisor and rabbi were monitoring the discussions.

We were, essentially, a sixth grade class with a part-time, volunteer advisor and no teacher.

In the end I felt it was a valuable experience. In locations with sparse Jewish communities, people wishing to choose Judaism found a virtual minyan of support.

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Mazel Tov . . .

. . . to Warren and Mary Lynne Sepkowitz on the birth of a son, Amos Irving Sepkowitz, on September 28.

. . . to Kevin and Cheryl Slane on the birth of a son, Benjamin, on September 30.

. . . to Mark and Linda Rothman on the birth of a granddaughter, Casey Marie Selph, on September 30.

. . . to Larry and Tracy Brown

on the birth of a daughter, Katherine Isabelle, on September 26.

. . . to Dr. Richard and Donna Gilbert on the birth of a son, Jacob Henry Gilbert, on October 1.

. . . to Saul Edlein who was selected as an outstanding Leader in Industry by the Graphic Arts Technical Foundation. ☆

We can secure the future by planting the seeds today

By Arthur Kramer



Emperor Hadrian, on his way to war, rode past a garden where he observed a very old man planting a fig tree. He halted his horse and asked: "Why in your old age do you labor so zealously? Do you expect to eat the fruit of the tree you are planting?" The old man replied: "If it be the will of God, I shall eat of it; if not, my children will enjoy it."

This story from the Talmud illustrates the hope of our endowment campaign: "We can secure the future by planting the seeds today." Everyone is conscious of time. Some bemoan its speedy passage and others lament its waste. Judaism sanctifies it by celebrating the holidays in their due season. As individuals we often wonder what we can do to make the best use of our time, so that when no more time is left, we will have done what was possible in our lifetimes.

Year after year you are solicited to increase your dues pledge to Temple Beth El. This year you have responded in record numbers and we are able to offer quality programming to you. However, it is a fact that in order to serve you in the best way possible — by continuing to provide adult education programs, life cycle events, youth religious education and activities, holiday celebrations and more, Temple Beth El needs funds beyond

which dues can provide.

Imagine your Temple being able to continue to meet our changing needs without constantly increasing dues. That is the purpose of the Endowment Fund. A fully funded Endowment can assure exceptional educational opportunities for our children and maintain the quality of our programs and facilities in perpetuity.

In the next few months everyone will be contacted to explore ways of supporting Temple Beth El. Whether its an outright gift of cash during your lifetime or a testamentary bequest in your will there are creative ways for everyone to help fund the endowment. A fully funded Endowment Fund will be the connecting thread with the future successes of your Temple and the continuing history of the Jewish people. Now is the time to think about what you can do to help guarantee the survival of Temple Beth El and its multiplicity of activities that will preserve Judaism to the end of time. ☆

The Passport to Jewish Learning

Do you have yours?

Our Condolences

The Board of Directors of Temple Beth El and the entire congregation extend their deepest sympathies to the families of

Myron Gateman, uncle of Fred Dumas

Jean DiMaio, mother of Vera Mendel

Lorraine Dorfman, aunt of Judy Sidell

Leonard D. Goodman, husband of Evelyn Goodman, father of Carol Siegel

Elsie Rosenthal, sister of Mildred Lyons

Herman Achs, grandfather of Tammy Seigel

Mary Ann Levinson, mother of Hal Levinson

Beverly Rosenhein, aunt of Ellen Martin

May their memories be for a blessing. ☆

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