

In My Opinion . . .

By Amy Krakovitz Montoni

I'd like to share with you a story I received from Rabbi Kalman Packouz of *Aish HaTorah*.

A high school science teacher wanted to demonstrate a concept to his students. He took a large-mouth jar and placed several large rocks in it. He then asked the class, "Is it full?" Unanimously, the class replied, "Yes!"

The teacher then took a bucket of gravel and poured it into the jar. The small rocks settled into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asked the class, "Is it full?" This time some students held back, but most replied, "Yes!"

The teacher then produced a large can of sand and proceeded to pour it into the jar. The sand filled up the spaces between the gravel.

For the third time, the teacher asked, "Is it full?" By now most of the students were wary of answering, but again, many replied, "Yes!"

Then the teacher brought out a pitcher of water and poured it into the jar. The water saturated the sand. At this point the teacher asked the class, "What is the point of this demonstration?"

One bright young student raised his hand and responded, "No matter how full one's schedule is in life, he can always squeeze in more things!"

"No," replied the teacher. "The point is that unless you first place the big rocks into the jar, you are never going to get them in. The big rocks are the important things

in your life — your family, your friends, your personal growth. If you fill your life with small things — as demonstrated by the gravel, the sand and the water — you will never have the time for the important things."

At this time of our Jewish New Year, perhaps we should all be thinking: "What are the 'Big Rocks' in my life? Spending time with my children, my parents or my spouse? Taking the seminar or class to get the information and perspective I need to succeed? Making the time to set goals, plan or evaluate my progress?" When you are hassled because there is no time, remember the story about the Big Rocks and the Jar. ✪



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 Yossi Groner
Lubavitch of North Carolina

Is Judaism Restrictive or Free Spirited?

To the Jewish person seeking a better understanding of our faith, there appears to be a sort of contradictory and sometimes complex dilemma. Is Judaism an expression of freedom or is it restrictive by the many laws incorporated within it?

To many people, Judaism has come to be synonymous with words like emancipation, freedom and liberty. The very roots of Jewish history began with the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. Yet with all the freedom, Judaism comes with a full set of 613 laws as defined in the Torah. Three hundred sixty five "don'ts" and two hundred forty eight "do's."

A puzzling statement found in the Talmud says "No person is free, unless he is occupied with Torah." If freedom means free to choose any lifestyle, is it not contradictory to say that it could be achieved only through Torah?

What is more puzzling is that the Torah comes with a list of laws that are restrictive and demanding. Take for instance the kosher dietary laws. One is required to keep kosher under all circumstances, even if it is inconvenient (except in life threatening situations).

When you are home it is not that difficult to keep kosher, especially with the availability of kosher food in our city. It is quite different when you are on the road or away from home. Say you are famished. The convenient way to satisfy your hunger would be to enter a local restaurant and order anything you want. However if you keep kosher, it isn't that simple. You would need to enter an establishment that carries kosher food and look for the trademark symbols that identify the food as kosher. Experienced kosher travelers know only too well how much preparation one must make in order to meet their needs away from home. (Today it is much easier with the Internet — look up kashruth.com). Now where is freedom in keeping kosher?

In our society, freedom is seen as the most important human right. In fact, it is considered to be the cornerstone of Western civilization.

Jews have always been on the forefront of the battle for freedom. We have helped shape legislation to guarantee freedom of the spoken and written word. We certainly don't like dictators who tell us how to live.

It is quite obvious, that due to centuries of persecution of our people by ruling majority religions, we have made it our life's goal to ensure freedom and liberty for all. This translates to freedom to be who we are or whoever we want to be.

This leads us to ponder the question of personal freedoms. How can one be Torah observant, which means adhering to all its laws and restrictions and at the same time be truly free?

In truth, the Talmudic definition of freedom, means free from one's own habits and wants. Freedom is the ability to rise over our limited inclination and to tap in to the endless inner energy stored in our soul, to use it in a constructive and purposeful manner. Freedom means to be a master and not a slave to our temptations.

Living with restrictions does not mean a denial of freedom. On the contrary, the restrictions allow the person to soar upwards towards a higher and loftier plane where he is not enslaved to his limited physical being.

We constantly discipline ourselves in order to achieve a greater goal. It may be a weight reduction diet or an exercise regimen. The greater the goal the more restrictive or disciplined the regimen.

Knowing that the restrictions in what we eat will cause us to live a longer and healthier life allows us to see through the restrictions and limitations. When we persevere, we not only succeed in reaching our goal; we eventually change our attitude to food and develop a healthy approach towards a better life.

Similarly, the Torah teaches us how to live a spiritual and divine life. The Torah tells us that we were entrusted with a mission by God at Mt. Sinai. The mission, which is the sacred privilege of each and every Jew, is to sanctify the physical world and to transform the mundane to the sublime. The Torah guides us through life and helps us fulfill our mission.

(Continued on page 10)

New Study on Genetic Links in Bipolar Disease Seeks Ashkenazi Jews

The Johns Hopkins Psychiatric Genetic-Epidemiology Research program is seeking the help of Ashkenazi Jewish families who are coping with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder for participation in a study on genetic linkages and susceptibility genes associated with these diseases.

Prior research has indicated that the susceptibility to these disorders is associated with genetic factors. Recent advances in molecular biology and statistical genetics now make it possible to identify and describe the specific genes that cause such complex disease as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. This knowledge will be used by researchers to help develop new treatments for these diseases.

Linkage Studies

Using genetic analysis, scientists can track small parts of each chromosome through a family and determine whether the occurrence of a specific disease or trait is associated with the presence or absence of some chromosomal marker.

Using the results obtained from many families, scientists get clues as to which segment of a chromo-

some is most likely to contain a gene involved in a disease like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Thus, a particular area of a chromosome is "linked" to schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

Linkages on several chromosomes have been reported for both disorders. Specific genes have not been identified for either disorder. One of the limiting factors in this work is the availability of appropriate families for participation in this research.

Why study the Ashkenazi Jewish community?

The fact that the Ashkenazi Jewish community evolved from a limited number of ancestors and that they tend to marry individuals from the same ethnic background provides a unique opportunity to contribute to our understanding of the genes involved in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Scientists do not think there is a higher frequency of schizophrenia among the Ashkenazim. Some studies suggest there may be a higher frequency of bipolar disorder among this population. Identification of susceptibility genes in the Jewish Community will hopefully lead to the development of new medica-

tions for this disease.

Eligibility for study

Ashkenazi Jewish families with TWO OR MORE SIBLINGS diagnosed with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder who have AT LEAST ONE LIVING PARENT; or Ashkenazi Jewish families with BOTH PARENTS LIVING AND AN OFFSPRING diagnosed with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

Participants will initially provide information about the medical and psychiatric history of family members. This confidential interview is generally completed by telephone.

Participants will be interviewed in person about their medical and psychiatric histories. They will be asked to sign consents for relevant medical records. A small blood sample will be taken.

Participants do not have to travel. An honorarium of \$25 to \$50 is available for study participants. Confidentiality is assured!

Families may be referred by a clinician or may contact Johns Hopkins directly. To learn more about the study, please call Dr. Ann E. Pulver or Gail Ullrich, MSW, toll free at 1-888-289-4095. ✪

Shana Tova — Happy New Year — Gut Yontiff!

from the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte

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