

# In My Opinion...

By Amy Krakovitz Montoni

The American Heart Association has designated February as "heart healthy month." This seems very appropriate as I write this because it is still the beginning of January, and many people are making those first of the year commitments to getting in shape and changing their bad habits.

I personally favor those kinds of resolutions. Those who know me well know that I am a devoted runner. In addition to running, which I love, I also do a little weight lifting, which I don't like as much, even less stretching, which I don't like at all, and "watching what I

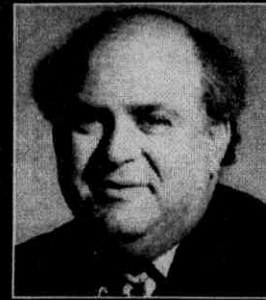
eat," which I hate.

The problem some people have isn't starting a fitness and health regime, it seems to be sticking with it. For that, I give you my unprofessional advice, a phrase I picked up in John Irving's novel, *The Hotel New Hampshire*. It came from the grandfather, Iowa Bob, who when he was training the main character, John, said, "You've got to get obsessed, and stay obsessed." Once you're obsessed, you'll find it difficult to stop your fitness program.

The other concern people seem to have is that they don't have the

time to fit a workout into their lives. For me, something else has to give. When I was a young woman, it was sleep. I would wake up sometimes as early as 4:30 AM to fit in a run. I just can't do that anymore. So what gets sacrificed is my housework, something I don't care to do anyway. So when you come into my house, you might find dishes in the sink, dust on the blinds, or spots on the bathroom mirrors. I don't care. I'm obsessed.

Obsession has its limits, too, though. Like a good Jewish bubbe, even the most strenuous of fitness schedules, even training for a marathon, calls for one day of rest every week. Now there's some spiritual fitness advice we all could use! ☆



## 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 Murray Ezring of Temple Israel

## Charlotte as a Model for Israeli Unity

My family and I spent part of the winter recess from school in Florida. On our way down to a family simcha, we visited Disney World. Disney World is a wonderful vacation spot. It is like entering a world of virtual reality. It is a place set aside from the rest of the world, separated by dreams and imagination in order to create a fantasy world into which we can escape.

Many people are amazed that Disney was able to envision such a place out of time and create his own place in the world. To those of us who are religious people it should not be a surprise. In fact religion, and particularly our Judaism looks at the world as it is and tries to create a new reality in which we can live. The Torah rabbinic teachings try to help us look at the world from a new perspective: Not what really is, but what could and should be. Our Judaism provides a lens to life which guarantees good and proper treatment of all human beings, special times and places in which we can celebrate life and our relationship to God and a future filled with joy and hope.

One of the constant hopes of our ancestral people has been a return to the land of Israel. While early Zionist leaders warned that we would know we have a Jewish state when there are Jewish criminals in the prisons and on the streets, we still, as a people, idealized the vision of what Israel would be.

This new year of 1999 has once again reawakened the tensions within the Jewish people. While Israel is seen as the homeland for all Jews, once again the politicalization of religion has made headlines in our modern homeland. Questions over Israeli Supreme Court decisions which open the doors to a more pluralistic religious expression within the religious councils of Israel; an attempt to reopen the conversion law. Discussions within the Knesset have made it clear that our idealization of one unified State of Israel accepting all forms of Judaism does not exist. We must understand that the State of Israel is undergoing its growing pains. As the nation matures, as its politicians and leaders understand the need for an open society that protects not only the rights of other religions, but all forms of Judaism, we will see a much more cohesive future in the modern State of Israel.

That is why what we do here is so important. That is why it is necessary for those of us who live in communities such as Charlotte with Jewish communal histories that date back much farther than the modern State of Israel, to provide a model for the modern State. As we continue in spite of the bumps in the road and the pains of maturation for the modern State, to show that we can accept each other and live together creating a stronger Jewish community because of our mutual respect and acceptance. It is important to understand and discuss our differences and problems both here and in Israel. It is just as important to understand that these problems are blips on the road of progress, and not issues that should distance us from our community or from our ancestral homeland. If we are upset with what we see happening, rather than turning our back it is our role to speak up, to take part, to ensure that our traditions are heard. It is no different than arguments within a family; within a home; for that is what Israel and the Jewish community is, our family and our home. Can we be upset? Yes. Can we turn our backs on Israel? No. Can we allow what is going on politically in Israel to destroy us as a community here? No. Rather, we have to set the example and show that in even a minority community like Charlotte, the strength of our Jewish community is our ability to accept each other, respect each other and to work together. That is the idealized reality that the Torah demands of us; that Jewish history demands of us; and that we ourselves must demand of us. We pray that the New Year will bring healing and unity within the Jewish world. ☆

## MAZON Awards Grants to Four North Carolina Hunger Organizations

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger has announced Fall 1998 grants totaling an unprecedented \$1,255,000, including \$31,000 awarded to four North Carolina nonprofit organizations and three recent emergency grants to regions in crisis. Since 1989, MAZON has granted \$240,000 in North Carolina. MAZON also recently granted \$30,000 in emergency relief to International Medical Corps, to fund therapeutic feeding and intervention programs designed to bring a sleeping-sickness epidemic under control in the Tambura region of southern Sudan, considered the country's breadbasket. The epidemic is sweeping through the region, already devastated by years of civil strife. Sleeping sickness - fatal to humans and cattle if left untreated - has reduced agricultural production and contributed to the famine threatening millions of Sudanese people.

MAZON also recently awarded two emergency grants totaling \$50,000 to support relief and rebuilding efforts in Central America, devastated by Hurricane Mitch last month.

The grants were made to The SHARE Foundation/Building a New El Salvador Today, headquartered in San Francisco, which received \$30,000; and Operation USA, based in Los Angeles, which received \$20,000. MAZON's funds will support efforts to feed and shelter tens of thousands of people left homeless by the storm, prevent the spread of disease, and help devastated communities rebuild. MAZON is also

seeking donations to facilitate additional emergency funding in Central America.

Daniel D. Levenson, Chair of the MAZON board of directors, stressed that MAZON's principal mandate remains confronting hunger in the United States. "Despite the fact that we have an extremely strong economy, hunger and poverty affect more children per capita in the U.S. than in any other industrialized country," he said. "However, our Jewish tradition teaches us to 'help the stranger,' meaning we must reach beyond our own borders when tragic situations compel us to do so." MAZON, Hebrew for "food," was established in 1986 and is now one of the largest privately supported organizations in the United States funding domestic hunger prevention and relief efforts. A small number of grants are made annually in Israel and in poor countries worldwide.

MAZON raises funds principally by asking American Jews to contribute 3% of the cost of life-cycle celebrations, such as weddings and bar/bat mitzvahs. Funds also are raised during annual Passover and High Holy Days appeals and from thousands of commemorative contributions.

In its 13-year history, MAZON has awarded grants totaling more than \$16 million to emergency feeding programs, food banks, anti-hunger advocacy groups, multi-service organizations and international relief and development projects.

For further information about MAZON, or to contribute to the

organization, contact: MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, 12401 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 303, Los Angeles, CA 90025; tel: (310) 442-0020. ☆

### MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

#### North Carolina Grants Fall 1998

(North Carolina grants = \$31,000)

#### Elizabeth City

*Albemarle Manna* . . . \$7,000  
In general support of this food bank which is the only source of emergency food in a sparsely populated, rural 15-county area.

#### Raleigh

*Food Bank of North Carolina* . . . \$10,000  
In general support of the distribution of more than seven million pounds of food annually to nearly 500 emergency feeding programs in eastern and central North Carolina.

#### North Carolina Hunger

*Network* . . . \$7,000  
In support of this grassroots organization's efforts to coordinate a statewide advocacy response to North Carolina's food and welfare policies. Activities include providing training to give low-income people the tools they need to advocate for themselves.

#### Winston-Salem

*Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina* . . . \$7,000  
In general support of the distribution of four million pounds of food annually to more than 300 charities in 18 counties.

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