

In My Opinion...

By Amy Krakovitz Montoni

Last night when I went to sleep, there were two synagogues in Charlotte. This morning when I woke up, there were five congregations here!

Okay, so maybe it wasn't that dramatic, but in a rather short period of time, three new congregations have arisen in our midst. There is now an exciting diversity here, unimaginable just a few years ago.

Just a few months ago, Havurat Tikvah, a well-known mainstay organization in our community for at least 12 years, affiliated with the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. Last month, Chabad Lubavitch announced the official organization of their synagogue. And this month, Torah Partners of Charlotte, a modern Orthodox congregation, is announcing their formation. See page 8 for their formal announcement.

More proof that our Judaic resources have grown and expanded is apparent on page 27, where you can see a story and photos from the Annual Women's Seder. The women's role in the Passover story was largely ignored until just a few years ago, and now Charlotte has enough interested and enthusiastic participants to turn this into an annual event. Make plans to attend next year's seder.

Check out the special holiday section starting on page 20. I'd daresay that a lot of people don't even know what Lag B'Omer is; others (like me) think of it as "the picnic holiday." But these articles will explain the omer to you and give you stories of new Jewish heroes to tell.

Don't miss Phyllis Schultz's moving account of her family's story and the woman who is trying to make it all real again. Turn to

page 18 to read her story of Yaffa Eliach. And you'll be able to read a reprint of Phyllis's original story of her trip to Eishishok with her brother. It was amazingly good fortune that led Phyllis to that display in the Holocaust Museum that opened up her past for her. Like most of our ancestors who emigrated from eastern Europe, her father had been silent about his past. My grandparents, too, were almost secretive about where they came from and what their past lives were like. Phyllis was given a wonderful gift that she has appreciated these last few years.

When you're done with that, read everything else. My goal is to make most of this newspaper as local as possible. Even the national stories will have a local slant if possible (see the NRA story on page 5 with its mention of the upcoming Charlotte convention). Anytime you feel that you can contribute to the improvement of this newspaper, please feel free to let me know. ✪



Point of View

Each issue of the CJN features an article written by one of the rabbis active in the Charlotte Community.

This Month:

Rabbi Jim Bennett
of Temple Beth El

CONNECTIONS TO ISRAEL

"Dear Rabbi,

I know this will come as no surprise to you, but this country is so incredible. Even though I have learned about Israel, the Jewish State, since I was a little boy, I had no idea just how powerful it would be to actually be here. From the moment I arrived at Ben Gurion airport, every moment of every day has been filled with a sense of the greatness of this country and its people. Seeing the Western Wall filled me with an overwhelming feeling of connection to my people; I imagined my people standing in this very spot for so many years. My people, that is what I feel when I look around, even though some of these people are so different from me. Everywhere I look, there are Jewish people — driving the taxi-cab, serving me at the restaurants, business owners, shopkeepers, and workers in the streets. They are my people. I realize what it means to be part of a people. . . ."

I received this letter some years ago from a student of mine who was in Israel for the first time. As I re-read his words, I began to realize the power of the State of Israel in our lives as Jews today. As we celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israel Independence Day, this month, we rejoice with the people of Israel, giving thanks

for the freedom and independence that have reigned for 52 years.

Our tradition recognized centuries ago that there is often a discrepancy between our ideals and reality. The rabbis envisioned two Jerusalems — "Yerushalayim shel Ma'alah" or the "Heavenly Jerusalem" and "Yerushalayim shel Matah" or the "Earthly Jerusalem." While the Heavenly Jerusalem represents our ideals of a city of peace and tranquility, the Earthly Jerusalem symbolizes the realities of this world, with all of its flaws and imperfections.

Israel today can be seen through this same dual prism. As

Jews, we have a dream and a vision of what we would like Israel to be. We long for a country at peace, a Jewish state that will be a model of democracy to all the nations of her region, and a Jewish state in which will flourish

Judaism in all its pluralistic expressions.

The reality is very different. Israel faces many challenges; peace is still illusory, despite continued optimism for a settlement in the Syrian peace talks and the resolution of the Palestinian conflict. Jewish pluralism is a distant dream, as the orthodox establishment repeatedly rebuffs and rejects the efforts of non-orthodox Jewish movements to establish political and religious legitimacy. Economic and social pressures continue to challenge the reality and the dream alike.

Yet, the people and the land have a magnetic attraction for us. As American Jews, we must seek to renew and expand our connections to Israel, by caring about, supporting, visiting and advocating for Israel. Israel has faded from prominence in our local Charlotte Jewish consciousness, but it is our responsibility to renew our interest and our commitment. As Yom Ha'Atzmaut arrives this month, we might do well to seek a new understanding and connection to Israel.

When Theodor Herzl spoke his memorable and prophetic words, he was challenging all of us to care about our people and our land. "If you will it, it is no dream," he said "To live as a free people, in our own land, in the land of Israel and Jerusalem." ✪



Online Booksellers Label Notorious Anti-Semitic Forgery with Disclaimer

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — The war against hate on the Internet is heating up.

Two major online booksellers agreed this week to post disclaimers about a 19th-century forgery that claims there is an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

But an online civil liberties group is questioning the moves by Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com regarding "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," calling them an infringement on free speech. The moves come amid increasing controversy about how to deal with hate speech on the Internet.

Earlier this year, the Internet portal Yahoo! vowed to remove racist and anti-Semitic clubs that it is hosting online, and eBay banned the sale of hate material on its online auction site after pressure from groups, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The note on Amazon.com read: "Please note that Amazon.com does not endorse the views expressed in this book or those in the publisher's book description below."

"The book is considered a forgery," barnesandnoble.com spokesman, Gus Carlson was quoted as saying. "In a situation where there is concern over the legitimacy of the book, it is our job to make certain facts clear."

In addition to their own dis-

claimers, the two companies are posting a rebuttal to the book provided by the Anti-Defamation League: "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, circulated by the Czarist secret police at the turn of the 20th century, is plainly and simply a plagiarized forgery. The Protocols has been a major weapon in the arsenals of anti-Semites around the world, republished and circulated by individuals, hate groups and governments to convince the gullible as well as the bigoted that Jews have schemed and plotted to take over the world."

The ADL's negative reviews of dozens of other "objectionable" books are also included on Amazon.com.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADLeague, emphasized that his group just wants potential customers to know what the book really is.

"We are not in the business of banning books, no matter how reprehensible or indefensible they are," he said.

But Deborah Pierce, an attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said the move "raises some flags." She worries what would happen with situations that are not as clear-cut, referring to a hypothetical case involving a how-to abortion book.

"This is the beginning of a slippery slope," she said.

Marc Stern, the co-director of the American Jewish Congress'

legal department, said that what distinguishes this case from other works that many would find objectionable is that by purporting to be written by Jews, the "Protocols" is not honest about its origins. "It really is a case of truth in advertising," he said.

At least one American Jewish organization is calling on Barnes and Noble not to sell the book, calling the disclaimers "an insufficient half-measure."

"If Osama bin Laden tomorrow publishes a book to bomb an embassy and kill Americans, is that, too, fair game for reputable booksellers?" said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, using a different "slippery slope" argument.

Harris says the bookseller has not been receptive to the AJCommittee's calls, responding

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