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Nimoy's Shekhina Project

## Jews are alive in the Southwest

**Rabbi Marc Jordan Ben-Meir, Ph.D.**

Shalom from deep in the heart of Texas. Although I am a native of the south Bronx, I found a home in Fort Worth, Texas almost 26 years ago. I was pleasantly surprised to find that there had been Jews here earlier than the Republic of Texas which was founded back in 1836.

According to Galveston historian J.O. Dyer, the first known Jew in Texas was Jao de la Porta, a Portuguese Marano, who was a member of Jean Lafitte's pirate crew. Maurice Henry, a merchant from England, settled in Velasco in 1820. In 1826 Adolphus Stern also arrived in Texas and quickly became the alcalde (mayor) of Nacogdochus.

Jews were known to have fought with Sam Houston in the Texas war of revolution. Anthony Wolfe, an English Jew, fell at the Alamo. In 1839 Rosanna Osterman became the guiding light of the Galveston Jewish community forming community organizations for both destitute Jews arriving at Galveston port as well as anyone else needing help.

Many Jews came to Texas looking for a better way of life as merchants. In 1857 Isaak and Lehman Sanger arrived in Texas and started a mercantile business in McKinney. Eventually they opened an additional 12 stores throughout Texas. Today, the name Sanger-Harris is known world wide.

Jews were also active in the civil war on both sides of the conflict. Judah Philip Benjamin, lived in Houston for several years before returning to Louisiana. He later became the Secretary of State of the confederacy. Confederate Captain Levi Harby rammed his steamboat, Neptune, into the federal coastal ship U.S.S. Harriet Lane winning a major victory for the confederate navy.

The Hebrew Benevolent Society of Galveston was founded in 1866 and in 1888 Rabbi Henry Cohen of Galveston became famous for his benevolent and philanthropic work on the Texas coast.

World famous Neiman-Marcus was founded in Dallas in 1907.

Jews have contributed significantly to Stephen F. Austin's early Tejas, later the Republic of Texas, and as volunteer soldiers in the confederacy, as soldiers, merchants, politicians, oil wildcatters, police officers, fire fighters and everyday citizens.

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***Jews were known to have fought with Sam Houston in the Texas war of revolution....***

## IFR Mission Statement

The IFR is a professional organization of rabbis united by a commitment to Jewish tradition and a desire to facilitate the Jewish spiritual growth and life cycle needs of all.

IFR provides a progressive, pluralistic forum, linking member rabbis in a spirit of friendship and a sense of community.

IFR provides support for members in their professional endeavors and offers continuing education. IFR encourages professional relationships with rabbis and other rabbinic organizations.

## A Center for Spiritual Judaism

Rabbi Lewis D. Solomon

Rabbi Dr. R. Zev Wellins

Excerpt from A Center for Spiritual Judaism

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### Adult Education in the 21st Century

Jewish Education in America hasn't changed much since the days of Rebecca Graetz at the turn of the nineteenth century. For the most part, it has been patterned after the public school model and the techniques employed in the European Cheders or learning rooms. In both cases the goal was what we may refer to as "regurgitive" learning. This is the form where the preferred skill is rote repetition and memorization, and where excellence is measured by the volume of information provided by the pupil. The recipient of this kind of education possesses absolutely no intellectual and certainly no spiritual benefit as a result of the experience.

There has been neither understanding nor the development of the essential art of questioning. There has been no transference of real knowledge and no instruction in the necessary discipline of logical thinking. Where quantity of information reigns supreme, no true wisdom may be imparted and no love of learning may be shared. Education - public and private, secular and parochial - continues to this day in the very same way.

Yet despite this, there have been those who have managed to rise above the system to become independent, creative thinkers and lovers of learning. They are the rare exceptions to the rule in this schooling process. It should be evident that forcing this old method upon our children to learn about Judaism hasn't worked for them or us. On the contrary, it has turned them off to Jewish learning and to being Jewish. So much the more so is this the case when it comes to Jewish adults. They are seeking Jewish "wisdom" and an understanding of the Jewish "mind" and are accustomed to gaining knowledge through university style academics.

Unfortunately, both synagogues and Jewish Community Centers make the same error in their adult Jewish educational offerings. They rely upon the local congregational rabbis to do the teaching. While we are blessed with some very talented individuals and although rabbi may mean "my teacher", not all good teachers make good rabbis, and all rabbis are not necessarily good teachers.

Professional Jewish educators and university instructors of Judaic Studies may be better able to provide the kind of Jewish learning that adult Jewish learners are seeking. Based on questionnaires submitted following Jewish educational forums, we have learned that Jewish adults enrolled in classes taught by rabbis often complained that the teachers (rabbis) lacked the teaching skills, intellectual approach, and kind of information they were seeking.

Other complaints included: the instructor's inability to stay on topic or task, reluctance to and impatience with exploring alternative or opposing viewpoints, and unabashed and unrestrained advocacy of a particular theological perspective.

Are we surprised? Unfortunately not! But we must do better if we are to reverse the trend of the past few decades. Jewish adults, especially those who have been alienated from Judaism and Jewish communal life, will come to learn religion through academics; they will not return to learn academics through religion! They require and deserve an intellectually challenging program that is affirmative and demonstrative of positive Jewish values and that is non-threatening and non-judgmental. This is the approach that a Center for Spiritual Judaism is designed to promote.

At The Center for Spiritual Judaism (CSJ) in Tucson, Arizona, all classes and seminars offered are presented from both the spiritual and academic perspectives and are taught by academically qualified educators. The CSJ also cooperates with other Jewish community organizations in outreach educational projects. A sampling of CSJ topics includes:

Pathways of the Jewish Spirit – A Religious Survey of Judaism

What is Spiritual Judaism? – Theology Past, Present, & Future

Kabbalah – A Mystical View of Jewish Spirituality

Jewish Concepts & Customs of Death and Mourning

Spiritual Healing in Critical Care Settings

Is There Life After Birth? – Examining Concepts of the Afterlife

Interfaith Marriage in Judaism – History, Hysteria, & Heartbreak

How Do I Talk to God? – The Spiritual Dynamics of Jewish Liturgy

Directed Jewish Meditation – Pathways to Spiritual Harmony

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These subjects, as well as others, have been offered through The Center and have been positively received by various groups over the last few years. Initially, a prototype institution called Torah Tour Spiritual Center introduced this style of teaching in Southeast Florida.

These groups include: learners from the Jewish community, both synagogue affiliated and non-affiliated, hospital and police professional and volunteer chaplains, members of ministerial or clergy associations, Christian church Bible groups, and Interfaith Seminars. These topics help motivate learning groups to begin a better understanding of Jews and Judaism. Seminars have been presented in a format offering from one to three sessions. Others have been taught in traditional classroom settings, providing from six to ten classes on the subject material.

The CSJ does not offer the traditional array of youth or religious school functions that are a hallmark of synagogue life. The need for Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, youth groups, Hebrew and religious school instruction, and child-oriented programming are best left in the hands of those who have geared themselves for it and who depend upon it for their survival.

A Center for Spiritual Judaism should not compete with other institutions to duplicate their function. Its focus and activities are directed at the unaffiliated and needy adult Jews of the community. A central function of this new institution is to do what the formally organized Jewish community is not doing, or to do what they are doing in ways that they're not doing it!

### **Community Outreach Chaplaincy**

There is a growing need to provide comprehensive, professional Jewish chaplaincy services in almost every metropolitan area. The CSJ in Tucson currently extends the skills of a clinically trained professional Jewish Chaplain to the community at large under its own auspices.

Much needed care is being rendered by The CSJ to unaffiliated, destitute, and elderly Jews in hospital, hospice, skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. Care includes bikor cholim - regular visitation of the sick, spiritual counseling, worship services, social and religious agency referral, and patient/resident advocacy, where warranted.

Training synagogue and other interested groups in these skills and community-wide coordination of such activities is another task that a Center for Spiritual Judaism could take on. The CSJ also offers its resources and expertise to assist Jewish and secular institutions and organizations by providing in-service and volunteer staff training. This kind of educational programming is currently being made available to hospice professional and volunteer staff groups, funeral home employees, and adult health care facilities staff. Certain topics are of more interest to groups because of their function-specific needs, and therefore some of the instruction areas typically include: "Jewish Concepts &

Customs of Death and Mourning" and "Spiritual Healing in Critical Care Settings.

Membership as well as consulting participation on hospital and other health care institution bio-ethics committees should also be a goal of a Center for Spiritual Judaism. This presence would help to provide Jewish input as part of the religious/spiritual component of the bio-ethics team or committee disciples.

### **Rabbinic Life-Cycle Rituals**

The Center for Spiritual Judaism in Tucson, Arizona offers new liturgies, including original translations, for conducting the Jewish life-cycle ceremonies. Creative ritual is available for Baby Naming and Brit Milah; Weddings; Anniversary Celebrations and Vow Renewals; Home Consecrations; Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah; Building and Memorial Dedications; Funerals; Memorial Services; and Unveilings.

By encouraging creative and spiritual input from the participants and their families, the objective of The CSJ is to personalize life-event rituals as much as possible. In this model, a Center for Spiritual Judaism is able to make the occasion more personal and thereby enhance the experience of religion in the families' lives.

It is important to note that by performing these functions, a Center for Spiritual Judaism does not usurp the role of the local congregational rabbis. Rather, its goal is to reach out to the disaffiliated, the elderly, the poor, and to those who do not have a relationship with a rabbi because they are not members of a Jewish faith community or congregation. In this manner, a Center provides a valuable resource to local synagogues and Jewish communal organizations.

### **Innovative Worship Services**

Spiritually oriented liturgy offers a fresh approach to group worship services, especially for those who currently do not find communal religious rites either inspiring or edifying. For those striving to recapture the powerful prayerful experiences attributed to our ancestors, a Center for Spiritual Judaism will offer spiritual pioneering in the realm of creative liturgy and music; word and sound expressions that are at the same time ancient and contemporary, authentic and accessible. These creative spiritual Worship Services and their liturgies are to be provided for the High Holy Days; the Sabbath, Festivals and Holidays throughout the year; as well as for special Healing Services designed to unite and promote the wholeness of body-mind-spirit. The CSJ in Tucson currently provides Jewish worship services where and when needed to Jewish communities and groups that do not have regular access to a rabbi, using the specially designed prayer booklet series entitled: The Spirit of Jewish Worship. In addition, The CSJ has made plans for the coming year to hold a variety of special worship services both independently and in conjunction with other Jewish institutions.

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### The Venue for a Center for Spiritual Judaism

Unlike contemporary synagogues and Jewish Community Centers, a Center for Spiritual Judaism would not be limited to a specific building or location. It is designed to “go to the people” wherever their need exists. Its goal is to bring the fresh, meaningful approach of Spiritual Judaism to a variety of locations, such as Jewish Community Centers, coffee houses, bookstores, community clubhouses, public parks, et al.

Both independently and in cooperation with other Jewish organizations, a Center for Spiritual Judaism can potentially draw disaffiliated Jews to convenient, neutral, non-threatening settings where they and those with interfaith partners can explore, learn, and reconnect with Judaism.

There are other benefits to having a non-fixed venue. One danger in promoting the well-acknowledged “edifice complex” is that the direction of the group’s energy and goal achievement becomes focused on physical and material concerns – namely, the building. As the building becomes the synagogue, the synagogue becomes the symbol that defines the congregation, and the congregation loses the qualities that should define it. Instead of being pro-active teachers and examples of “living Torah” whose defining commandment is to be a “light unto the nations,” the congregation becomes invested in raising the money sufficient to keep the building going.

The “eternal light” becomes merely a mandatory electric fixture that must be funded and kept illuminated, even when there is no one to behold and to be inspired by its radiance.

Apart from the distraction of the sacred assembly from the spiritual to the mundane, another danger of fixed venue is purely the fact of changing neighborhoods and real estate values. Many synagogue structures, at first the result of a congregation’s striving to be installed in its “permanent home”, have become liabilities that have dragged the congregation down the path of financial ruin or have become obsolete due to insufficient size or the movement of the Jewish community to a more affluent or desirable section of town. Whatever the details of the building’s decline, the resources of the resources of the holy convocation have then been funneled to its need for a still bigger, better, and more desirably placed structure, instead of being channeled to the concerns of the heart and spirit of its members, and of the community surrounding it.

A Center for Spiritual Judaism is free of the bondage to bricks and mortar. It can therefore spend its spiritual energy and resources performing those sacred tasks for which it has called itself together. If space for fifty people is needed for a given program, then the appropriate venue can be leased. If a larger accommodation needs to be

dedicated to a given celebration or event, i.e. the High Holy Days, then a facility that will comfortably and safely hold 800 can be rented.

There is no wisdom in having an impressive sanctuary that can seat 1,000 people all year long when the average weekly Shabbat attendance is ninety. In fact, this has a tendency to demean the locus sanctum – the very sanctity of the place.

The overwhelming majority of those Jews who would like to affiliate with a synagogue or Jewish Community Center but don’t, are often unable to do so for monetary reasons. They simply cannot meet the expense of the astounding sum of dues, educational fees, and building fund commitments that are required to maintain their membership. The congregations, on the other hand, are obliged to pay mortgage, maintenance, payroll, and other operating costs that require the constant application of capital.

Some “mega-shul” machers maintain that Judaism is, “just a business like any other.” Yet, how many board members responsible for their own businesses would allow managers to throw away such a high percentage of income and assets on unused and/or unneeded expenditures, without the fear of either bankruptcy or the betrayal of their stockholders? In contrast, the suitable venue for any particular activity of a Center for Spiritual Judaism is determined in each case solely by demographic, geographic, and geometric concerns. Some judicious expenditure of capital may be necessary by the Center at times to keep the venue and other program costs reasonable and affordable for all. Spending donated money for this purpose seems far more appropriate than paying to fix fifty year-old plumbing in an unused part of the “old building.”

**Rabbis Wellins, Solomon and Golbart-IFR 2001 Convention**



## Agudat Achim hosts Leonard Nimoy

Rabbi Foster E. Kawaler



October 29th ended a month-long celebration of Judaism and Jewish presence in Shreveport, Louisiana as the last event of the Shreveport/Bossier Jewish History Month came to a close. The centerpiece of the month-long celebration was the centennial of Congregation Agudath Achim, of which I have been privileged to be the rabbi for the last 8 years.

The celebration included an appearance at the Red River Revel by Hava Alberstein, with later appearances in the community by Judy Kaplan Ginsberg and Steve Dropkin. SciPort, our hands-on science museum here, presented a Sunday "space camp" highlighting the work of Jewish scientists and astronauts in the development of the Space program. There were talks by the Executive Director of the Israeli foreign office, by an actor who does an uncanny impersonation of Albert Einstein, and an art exhibit by the East End gallery of the work of 7 local Jewish artists. Also included was a film festival, consisting of three modern films of Jewish interest, and guest speakers to talk on the subjects of the films. The Meadows Museum, on the campus of Centenary College, hosted an exhibit of ceremonial art from the Goldring-Waldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and 12 prints from Leonard Nimoy's Shekhina Project.

Of course, wherever those photographs go, Mr. Nimoy himself is sure to follow, and he didn't disappoint. On the very last full weekend, Shreveport hosted the annual convention of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, with speakers Dr. Jonathan Sarna, Dr. Harold Rosen, photographer Bill Ahron (Shalom Y'all), and others.

The weekend of October 19th and 29th was our Centennial Weekend, and the organizer, Mrs. Susan Gross, did a monumental job of finding descendants of our founding families all over the country, and in Israel. The Synagogue was packed to the rafters on Friday Night and Saturday Morning with people who know our congregation or had been part of it ever since.

The Kiddush on Friday night was given by the first Bat Mitzvah girl in the history of the Congregation, today at the ripe old age of 44. The Saturday service was a parade of the generations. Our most recent B'nai Mitzvah class led the Shachrit service while members of the next generation "lehned" Torah for the oldest generation, each Aliyah going to a descendant of one of the founding families. Then, the next generation led the Mussaf, and everyone broke for a sumptuous Shabbat luncheon.

Sitting in our Congregation that morning were Leonard Nimoy and Zina Schiff. Zina, one of the premier violinists on the classical circuit these days, actually did the Haftarah that morning. Zina used to live in Shreveport, and her oldest daughter was bat mitzvah here. Mr. Nimoy's story follows.

About 4 years ago, I awoke in the middle of the night with a dream that he, without the pointed ears, was sitting on our Bimah as a scholar-in-residence. To make a long story short, I called around just to see if he would be interested in coming to Shreveport out in the middle of "yenem velt" to talk to our Congregation. We are kind of remote, and someone like him coming to visit and talk to us would give a tremendous boost to morale, and make an impression upon our kids. Now, I've always been a Star Trek fan and, from the beginning, the character of Spock attracted me. Imagine my joy when I discovered that the actor that played my favorite character was not only Jewish, but proudly and actively so.

It was a shot in the dark, and you can imagine my emotions when he actually accepted our invitation! Since then, we have had a corresponding relationship, and, in fact, he has been an active supporter of our youth programs. He is a true gentleman, and a genuine "mentsch."

This year, I stuck my neck out and asked him, "Could you to come for our Centennial Weekend and the Shreveport/Bossier Jewish History Month." And he consented to come!

Our Centennial Weekend was capped by a gala concert by the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Nimoy graciously consented to be the "MC" for the concert, and, using his incomparable narrative voice, he performed the narrative portion of Schoenberg's "The Survivor from Warsaw." Zina Schiff played the Bloch Violin Concerto. The concert was an unqualified success. Zina played like an angel, and Leonard oy Leonard! As the music lovers amongst us know, Schoenberg is the originator of the 12-tone scale basically atonal music. The composer himself wrote the script for "Survivor" him-

self, based upon accounts he had heard from real survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto. It describes a Nazi selection. The narrator, himself, resists the selection, and is hurt in the process.

There is a tension in the music that reinforces the narrative, and the stress level builds and builds. At the end, the narrator talks how they all walked out singing the Sh'ma Yisrael, and a 100-voice male chorus begins to belt out, in baritone, the Kriat Sh'ma through the first two verses of V'ahavta when suddenly, as everything builds to a frightening crescendo, there is a big final chord, everything goes dead silent! The audience just didn't know what to do, and everyone sat slack jawed! And that is the intended effect!

The conductor turned to the audience and bowed, and some nervous applause began. Then Leonard was presented, and there was some more nervous applause. Then, finally, there was a standing ovation. It was an amazingly powerful piece! It's two weeks since that concert happened and people are still talking about it!

On Sunday afternoon, Mr. Nimoy gave a talk and slide show on his Shekhina project at Centenary College. As you probably know, there has been quite a flap over it, most especially in the Orthodox community. Not only are women shown wearing religious gear (tallit and tefillin), but naked women at that! While it came up in our own community that he could be very well breaking the third commandment by trying to picture G-d, that was quickly dealt with in that the photos are an attempt to capture a mood, or to convey an idea, and not trying to depict G-d.

The Shekhina is the female manifestation of a gender-less G-d. Mr. Nimoy says that some of the objections in the Jewish community to his work has to do with implications in the work of the elevation of the Woman in Jewish ritual milieu most definitely feminist in ideation and this is also responsible for raising some hackles.

Mr. Nimoy spoke of the Shekhina in Kabbala, and spoke of his childhood days in an Orthodox shul where the Kohanim would duchan, and one shouldn't look because, should the Shekhina actually appear, one could be fried on the spot! It was from that ceremony that the Vulcan salute was taken, and that some of his pictures show. Indeed, to truly appreciate some of the art, one must know something of the Siddur and Jewish theology.

For instance, there is one photo of the Shekhina, tallit over her head, spreading the sides out in a wing-like posture tachat confei ha Shekhina as in El Molay Rachamim, the book also contains some of his poetry. His presentation opened the audience's eyes to the

beauty of G-d's spirit and the wonderful imagery connected with the Shekhina. If the display is available in your community, I strongly suggest that you take the opportunity to view it and hear Mr. Nimoy speak. When his presentation was over, he signed books out in the lobby, and then went backstage to spend some time with the kids from our youth group. He became Grandpa then, answering the kids' questions, asking some of his own, even dispensing a little bit of advice on photography.

I then took a very tired Leonard Nimoy back to his hotel. All in all, all of the events were well attended, the quality of everything was first rate, the cooperation from the non-Jewish community was exemplary, and it kept all of us on the organizational side jumping! But the Centennial Weekend had to be the most emotional, and the most rewarding of all.

*Mr. Nimoy was asked what his wife thought about his goings-on with beautiful, naked models. He flipped on the slide projector, and showed a picture, which happens to be on the last page of his book, and said "That's my wife!" Question answered. In actuality, he dedicates his book to Susan, who, indeed, helped him with some of the concepts, and even periodically brought him models for possible inclusion in the project.*



Leonard Nimoy showing how the ritual of the Kohen works and where the Shin symbol comes in which later turned into the Vulcan salute on Star Trek.



### Reflections: 31 years later

Rabbi Suzanne H Carter aka "shosh"

I arrived at Lod airport 7/7/71, on one of the first El Al 747 Jumbo jets from New York. The first six weeks in Israel I attended a summer program on Kibbutz Ein Hachosh, near Natanya. Later, I moved to my Great Aunt Hilda Dreyman's flat in Givatayim, giving me time to decide whether or not I would stay in Israel.

Tante Hilda had made aliyah to Palestine from Mannheim, Germany via Metz France in 1934 with her husband Benny and son Shlomo, who later co-founded The Palmach. As one might imagine, Hilda urged me to consider making aliyah.

Hilda, was a tough Yekit Vatikah, her Hebrew was heavily accented, and often peppered with German words. Luckily, I was brought up memorizing Der Struwwelpeter, (a German Nursery Rhyme book) so I didn't find it out of the ordinary.

True to her German upbringing she was also quite frugal, daily she would send me down to the local grocery to buy one package of Osem cr me of mushroom soup, one agvania, one melafifon, and some gvinah tsuba with a freshly baked loaf of bread, that was our usual midday meal.

After calling my parents and telling them I wasn't returning, Tante Hilda and I traveled by bus to the Kibbutz Hamiyuchad office, and made arrangements for me to start an Ulpan on Kibbutz. As I had been active in Ichud Habonim I remembered a tzrif at Camp Tavor in Three Rivers Michigan, named Matzuba, so when I heard there was an opening in September at Kibbutz Matzuba in the Western Galilee, I grabbed it!

Tante Hilda thought it was time I began to study Hebrew, and thought it best I go to Kibbutz. As a former member of Habonim, kibbutz life would fulfill my Labor Zionist leanings.

In mid September, Hilda sent me off on the first leg of my trip to Haifa. In Haifa I changed autobusim, and stopped in the ancient city of Acco, and Nahariya and

eventually onwards to Matzuba in the Western Galil. The Egged bus from Nahariya had dropped me off at the foot of the hill, on one side was the village of Shlomi, on the other side, next to the border road was Kibbutz Chanita.

I stood with two suitcases, wondering how I was going to climb the high hill up to Kibbutz Matzuba, within a few minutes a Chaver Meshek drove by, stopped and loaded my suitcases in the car and brought me up the hill to the kibbutz, which would be my home for the next year.

I lived in a Tzrif, with two other ulpanistiyot, Beth Ginsburg (Alan's neice) and Mary Farber from Chicago, who I knew from Habonim. Like most taken for granted conveniences in the States, our toilet and shower combined was outside the tzrif, taking a hot shower was always an ordeal, the neft (paraffin) heater had to be lit 20 minutes before to obtain hot water. I was always fearful that one day it would blow up!

We would rise at 5 AM and by 6:00 we were in our classrooms for our 4 hours of study. I was in kita gimel, which indicated that I could read and write Ivrit. Bat Mitzvah training did come in handy, although the recitation of The Ahavtah, does not assist one in conversational Hebrew, especially combined with an Ashkenazi accent.

Dina Rosen, was my teacher and later adopted me as her daughter, each ulpan member was adopted by a kibbutz family, and visited their family every day at 4 PM for "Aruchat Arba"

Our ulpan class contained about 25 people, from all over the world, Brazil, The Netherlands, The UK, RSA, and Romania. We were not permitted to speak any other language aside from Ivrit during class, which at times was frustrating, yet somehow after a few weeks, we began speaking amongst one another in Hebrew. We learned several "bituim" which we would often use in our initial attempts to speak like Israelis, *Im yesh ratzui, yesh matzui, pikuach nefesh*...my favorite retort was always "Mah Pitom?"

After class we headed to the chadar ochel for lunch then off to our assigned jobs on the kibbutz. I wore the typical kibbutz "uniform" of short shorts, short sleeve shirt and work shoes, and worked in the midbach, the laundry and the textile factory.

The Jewish Agency sent the ulpanistim 20 Lirot every month, which in those days was a fortune. The exchange rate was 3.50 IL per one US dollar. I would use my money to buy chocolate flakes and take an occasional trip to Nahariya.

Of course we also received TIME cigarettes, kibbutznickim smoked like chimneys, when the rations were depleted, we smoked terrible tasting filter-less Dekels, which combined with a hot cup of Kafe Bots (mud coffee) at 5 AM made your head spin.

The evenings were spent socializing and playing shesh pesh, laughter, conversation and music. There was only one television on the kibbutz and one pay phone, thus we were challenged to entertain one another. Another three years would pass before I would purchase a television set in Israel.

During ulpan I became involved with a South African oleh chadash named Mike, who had been on the kibbutz since 1970 and continues to live on Matzuba. Mike worked in the refet. I experienced my first birth...a calf born on Sylvester (New Years Eve ) naturally we named him "Sylvester."

After the six month ulpan program ended, I stayed on kibbutz as an *orachat* working 8 hours a day. During that time I took a break and *tramped* (Israeli version of hitchhiking), *alone* to Eilat and continued through the Sinai peninsula to Sharm El Sheikh which was an IDF army base and a post office known as Ophira. Those who dive most likely know of *Ras Muhammed*, which is considered next to the Great Barrier Reef, as the most beautiful place in the world for scuba diving.

That was the first of many trips I would make to Sinai in the years to come. On the way to Sharm I stopped in Taba, Nuweba, Dahab (Di Zahav), slept in a pup tent at the Caravanim and ate tamarim picked from date palms, whilst lounging in a white jalabiya next to the magnificent blue waters of Yam Suf (Red Sea) in the hot Sinai sun. I met and traveled to Bedouin camps with Dr. Nelson a British physician who would later open a clinic for the Bedouin in Dahab.

In 1971, the road to Sharm was not yet completed, cars and army vehicles would have to turn off the road every few kilometers. What an adventure it was!

I returned to Nahariya late one night, and caught a ride with some IDF soldiers in an army jeep, there had been problems on the border, the soldiers offered to drop me off at the Kibbutz. Bronzed and a bit more seasoned, I shared some interesting yarns with my friends. Soon after my trip to Sinai Mike and I parted.

In the fall of 1972, I found myself in Tel Aviv, yet again with two suitcases, looking for a job and a flat, this time I spoke Hebrew, and had acquired survival skills learned on kibbutz which came in handy during my ten years in Israel...but that's another chapter.

High Holy days 5763, I came upon a Matzuba web site, and began contacting some of my kibbutz friends, including Mike, some are still on kibbutz and cities in Israel, others living in Europe and the UK. Photos, emails and chats have been burning up the internet between old friends. Now, as middle aged idealists, we conduct online chats in different time zones, reminiscing about our days in Matzuba and sharing both the simchot and challenging events in our lives. Although 31 years have passed since those days at Matzuba, we are still laughing. Some things never change.

shosh and mike on Matzuba 1971



### 13th Matzuba Ulpan 1971

Hector Arjitecter (ARG)  
Helen Biecaowski (CAN)  
Eleanor Bloom (UK)  
Barbara Blume (USA)  
Richard Boim (USA)  
Michael Bortz (RSA)  
Carol Brand (USA)  
Daniel Bueno (ARG)  
Pascu Burah (ROM)  
Edna Buslik (BRA)  
**Suzanne Carter (USA)**  
Karen Cohen (USA)  
Michael Cohen (CAN)  
Thomas Colin (SWE)  
Ilana Cotton (UK)  
Deborah Darzi (EGY)  
Richard de Haas (NED)  
Suzanne de Haas (NED)  
Elizabeth Djocovic (LEB)  
Olaf Ehnevid (SWE)  
Elizabeth Eich (SUI)  
Mary Farber (USA)  
Reuven Frauenglas (USA)  
Stephen Freidman (CAN)  
Shoshana Freire (CHI)  
Jack Geller (UK)  
Beth Ginsberg (USA)  
Ruth Goldstein (NOR)  
Joseph Goldtone (UK)  
Brenda Guttman (AUST)  
Marion Heskia (UK)  
Daniel Jospe (BEL)

Matzuba house



Sharm El Sheikh 2002



shosh and mike in 2001



## The History of Chanukah

Rabbi David Degani  
Congregation Shirat Shalom



**While** we all know the basic Chanukah story, it is very interesting to note there are some very fascinating facts about the origin and the highly political evolution of this holiday. As a national / religious holiday which was not commanded in the Tanach, there were numerous factions in the Judean (and later on in the Jewish tradition ) who wanted to establish different and at times opposing meanings, backgrounds and customs for this holiday.

One thing has become very clear to modern biblical scholars; this holiday echoes one of the most pivotal times in Jewish history, beyond what many of us may realize, a time which is equal in its enormity to the conquering of Canaan by Joshua.

The Galut to Bavel (Babylonia) in the 5 century BCE,. brought with it an amazing realization. This new realization would not be fully comprehended until a few centuries later. Unlike all other nations who never learned the "Secret" , the Jews understood that national survival does not necessarily depend on political independence.

Adhering to the laws of the Torah was the best way to insure national survival in a forever unstable, war torn world. In the years after the establishment of the second Judean commonwealth with the Jerusalem Temple continuing to serve as a strong spiritual center, (536 BCE) Judea remained nothing more than a small Persian province, totally insignificant to world politics.

Most, but not all, of the Persian rulers allowed the Judeans to practice their faith as long as the imposed taxes were received in a timely manner.

However, the Judeans continued to grow spiritually, creating the seeds of what would eventually become one of mankind's greatest scholastic achievements; the Mishnah and G'marah which in turn would become the Talmud.

With the conquering of the Persian empire by Alexander The Great (2nd Century BCE) many nations were introduced to Hellenism which they willingly embraced. In Judean interesting brand of Hellenism was born: Most Jews did not mind Greek culture as long as they were still allowed freedom to practice Judaism. Since Alexander in his wisdom was a tolerant ruler, things did not initially much with the Jews, other than accepting certain Greek lifestyle perks including Hellenizing their Hebrew names.

In order to understand the story of Chanukah we need to be aware of what happened when the Greek empire split after the unexpected death of Alexander.

Judea found itself wedged between two separate and opposing Greek kingdoms led by two former generals in Alexander's army, the Egyptian Greeks from the south and the Syrian Greeks from the north. The two were opposed not only militarily but also philosophically. In Egypt, Greek influence known to us as "Hellenism" was prevalent among the ruling elite only. Separatists by nature, the ruling party considered the "natives" undeserving the benefit of Greek culture. In the northern Greek kingdom, however, Greek was the culture of the mass and was practiced by all.

The two kingdoms constantly fought to control the province of Judea which was geographically situated at the gateway between the east, the far east and the Greek kingdoms. In the ever expanding international commerce and influence Judea was now a very prized territory- a fact that was well known to the Judeans, especially to the more affluent ones. Indeed, the Judean were very much aware of the politics around them.

When Jerusalem finally fell into the Syrian Greek hands, an intensive Hellenizing process began in Judea. Greek games, clothing and theatre were now available to all. Judeans felt very comfortable being Greek by culture and Jews by religion. Slowly but steadily, religious practices were eroding.. As long as the freedom was given to practice Judaism as they wished, most Judeans were very comfortable with the situation.

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## The History of Chanukah

Rabbi David Degani

The drive to further Hellenizing the Judean Greek province came from a small but highly influential wealthy Jewish group who saw an opportunity to create a rich and important center of Greek commerce in Judea, a hub which would not only stabilize the region but insure the survival of Judea.

Things changed when the Syrian emperor, Antiochus Epiphanies was forced to make a difficult but necessary political decision which for him was a survival issue: In order to overtake Egypt once and for all (there were numerous unsuccessful attempts to do so) and in order to be able to effectively stop the ever growing Roman army from the west, it would be necessary to impose a unification code; all nations under Syrian rule must abolish all religious practices and become Greek both culturally and religiously. For the Judeans that simply meant abolishing all Jewish practices.

The eventual victory of the Maccabbs can now be understood with all its enormity. When the rebellion against a strong and determined Syrian emperor started Judah and his brothers faced an enormous challenge. He was considered nothing more than a leader of a tiny group of renegade religious fanatics. Most Jews saw Antiochus' decrees as temporary measures that would be eased as soon as the Emperor felt that his unification measures were accomplished. Besides, Jews were very content with their newly found Greek way of life.

The famous call **Mi LA-Adonai Eli** (whoever is still loyal to G-D follow me) was not heard by many. Judah started with a few hundred untrained warriors. His tactics were simple and effective; raiding and destroying all army supply depots, raiding army camps at night, specifically going after the ranked officers and generals, trapping army camps in huge fires and avoiding traditional battle field contact with the enemy.

It was only when the Maccabbs scored some small victories and reintroduced an intense religious pride among many who almost lost it, that thousands joined the rebellion. It was now a fight for religion as well as cultural survival. The highly motivated rebels, who now understood what they are fighting for, became very ferocious fighters and were able to meet a huge and well equipped Greek army face to face in the battle fields and come out victorious.

It is most likely that Judah and his brothers literally saved Judaism from extinction.. The great majority of Jews who were perfectly willing to take the risk and stop practicing Judaism until Antiochus' decrees were reversed, did not realize how effective Hellenism was in eroding Judaism to an eventual extinction. It is also believed that the Babylonian Diaspora would have never survived without the spiritual guidance of Judea in the next few centuries following the Maccabean victory.



### IFR Rabbis in the News

#### Mazal Tov to:

**Dr. Rabbi Marc Ben-Meir** was recently promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel as a chaplain for his local police department in Dallas Texas.

**Rabbi David Degani's** Congregation Shirat Shalom recently celebrated their four year anniversary. Congregation Shirat Shalom began with 10 families and now has a membership of 150 families, with 140 students enrolled in the The Shirat Shalom Hebrew School. [www.shiratshalom.org](http://www.shiratshalom.org)

### IFR Newsletter

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