

# Tefilla Notebook

15 Iyyar • Emor

Steven Dorfman, President

Rabbi Pini Dunner, Senior Rabbi

May 5-6, 2023

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Dear Members and Friends,

There is a widely held view that people of faith are kinder and more altruistic than non-believers. Let's face it, we all think that religious people are far more likely to give charity, be nice to strangers, volunteer for needy causes, and use their resources – even if it means that they will personally have less, or even suffer, as a result. After all, isn't that what religion

demands of them? Every major religion's primary texts explicitly promote altruism as a core value. In 2007, a widely publicized study revealed that the link between religion and altruism is so deeply embedded, that even when individuals are conditioned to have a more positive view of religion and God-belief, they become more altruistic.

And yet, there is another much darker side to religion and its adherents. History is littered with religious persecution, and violence perpetrated in the name of God. At least one million people were murdered by Christians in their quest to seize the Land of Israel from Muslims during two centuries of crusades. Aside from those who perished, millions more endured misery and poverty as a result of Crusader fanaticism. And it didn't stop there. The Inquisition caused indescribable misery to the population of Europe for centuries, while 200 years of religious wars between Catholics and Protestants beginning in the sixteenth century resulted in a drastic decline in Europe's population – in Germany alone, the population dropped by at least a third – as a result of violence and famine, all of it caused and justified by Christian leaders, who saw what they were doing as a necessary expression of their devoted faith and religious values.

And needless to say, Islam is hardly innocent of religious persecution and violence. Beginning with the Umayyad conquests of the seventh century, and ever since, the pain and suffering perpetrated by Muslims against each other and others in the name of their faith has been utterly devastating.

In an attempt to mitigate all of this, you might be thinking that while religious fanaticism does exist, it is a minority of extremists who occasionally dominate and then cause devastation. Meanwhile, the vast majority of God-believers are fine upstanding people, whose natural kindness and altruism are superlative as a result of their devout faith. But, quite remarkably, that view is wrong, as a number of studies have demonstrated. For example, a 2015 study conducted by researchers from seven universities around the world showed that children who come from religious families tend to be less kind, and more inclined to treat others harshly, as compared to children from non-religious households. The study focused on children from Christian, Muslim, and non-religious backgrounds in an attempt to understand how religion and morality are related – but the researchers were stunned to discover that religious beliefs could actually have a negative impact on a child's altruistic behavior.

"Overall, our findings... contradict the commonsense and popular assumption that children from religious households are more altruistic and kind towards others," the authors said. Almost 1,200 children aged 5-12 – from the US, Canada, China, Jordan, Turkey and South Africa – participated in the study. Of those, 24% were Christian, 43% Muslim, while 27.6% were from non-religious homes.

In 1973, the "Good Samaritan Study" tried to determine if a person's religious faith played a role in altruism. Researchers monitored students from a religious seminary walking from one seminary building to

another, who encountered an injured person lying in an alley. Surprisingly, they found that individuals who were highly religious were not more inclined to help the injured person compared to those who were less religious or not religious at all – and that this was even the case if the seminarian in question was on his way to deliver a talk on the Christian parable of the good Samaritan, an emblematic lesson of Christianity's focus on altruism. Startlingly, this result has since been confirmed in numerous other studies, all of which indicate that regardless of how morality is defined, religious individuals do not by default behave more morally than atheists, despite their beliefs and claims.

Some people are inherently kind and always put others first, irrespective of their religious faith. Belief in God may enhance their altruism, but it is clearly not the deciding factor. And then there are others – those who are uninclined towards kindness and altruism. For them, faith can even be an excuse to ignore their social obligations, or worse: to be cruel. They might rationalize their behavior, and claim they are charitable – but in truth, their kindness is tactical: they help those who are like them, or to elicit some kind of benefit or reciprocal act. Such kindness is hardly altruism, which requires self-sacrifice. Rather, it is self-serving, and about as far removed from altruism as it is possible to get.

The Torah has many references to self-abnegation in the pursuit of social justice. We are told countless times to take care of the widow and orphan, categories of people who, in ancient times, were cast to the margins of society – but whom God thrusts to the forefront of Judaism's quest for social responsibility. But the Torah is not only hyperconscious of society's social needs, it is also acutely aware of the fact that a religious person's God-focus might very well become their justification for ignoring their social responsibilities. It is for precisely this reason that there is a reference to this Achilles heel in the section of Parshat Emor which deals with the festivals.

In the course of discussing the Omer offering on Pesach, and the double bread offering on Shavuot, the Torah interjects with a verse that describes a mitzva which is unrelated to either offering, nor to any of the festivals (Lev. 19:9): וּבְקָצְרְכֶם אֶת קִצְרֵי אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִקְלָה פֶּאֶה שְׂדֶה בְּקָצְרְךָ וְלָקַט קְצִירָךְ וּבְקָצְרְכֶם אֶת קִצְרֵי אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִקְלָה פֶּאֶה שְׂדֶה בְּקָצְרְךָ וְלָקַט קְצִירָךְ - "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger."

Abarbanel provides an insightful explanation for this apparent incongruity – an explanation that has faith-induced social deafness at its very core. Both offerings use grain, he says, and someone who is very devout but not socially conscious might assume that by giving these offerings to God they have fulfilled their religious obligations, and can now do whatever they please with the rest of their grain harvest. Which is why the Torah reminds us then and there that serving only God with our harvest is not enough; we must also provide for our fellow human beings – we must never forget the poor and needy.

It is a powerful lesson embedded at the heart of a section that deals primarily with rituals, and an important reminder that faith has no value whatsoever if it comes at the expense of others.

Wishing you Shabbat Shalom and a great week ahead,  
Rabbi Pini Dunner



## FRIDAY, MAY 5

7:22pm CANDLELIGHTING  
6:30pm KABBALAT SHABBAT

## SATURDAY, MAY 6

8:30 am GEMARA SHIUR  
9:15 am SHACHARIT  
7:05 pm PIRKEI AVOT SHIUR  
7:30 pm MINCHA  
8:20 pm MAARIV  
8:23pm SHABBAT ENDS

## WEEKDAY DAVENING

|         |        |        |
|---------|--------|--------|
| Sun     | 8:00am | 7:30pm |
| Mon-Thu | 7:00am | 7:30pm |
| Fri     | 7:00am | 6:30pm |

## UPCOMING EVENTS/ SAVE THE DATES

**Lag B'Omer**- Tues, May 9th  
**YINBH Gala** - Sun, May 21st  
**Shavuot Dinner and Learning** - Thurs, May 25th  
**Melanie Phillips Guest Speaker**- Sat, June 10th

# Sisterhood Corner

## A Letter from Cecile and Ruthie, Sisterhood Co-Presidents

It has been an incredible honor to serve as Sisterhood Co-Presidents, and we have been privileged to serve the members and friends of our YINBH community.

We are proud of our accomplishments, but after a long and gratifying tenure, we are stepping down. It is now time to transfer the baton to new leadership.

We are reconstituting the YINBH Sisterhood with Gina Raphael as the new Sisterhood President, who will move things forward.

With Gina's talent, dynamism, and her endless devotion to our community, she will help our shul Sisterhood continue to thrive in the future.

We wish Gina the best of luck in her new position as the Sisterhood President and we feel confident of her future success.

We will remain involved with Sisterhood events and fully support all fundraising activities.

With best wishes for growth and success in the future,

Cecile & Ruthie  
Sisterhood Co-Presidents

## YAHRTZEITS



### Emil Kestenbaum

Menachem Mendel ben  
Mordechai Gimpel z"l

Father of

### Mark Kestenbaum

Yahrtzeit - 15 Iyyar

### Laszlo Weiss

Shmuel ben Yosef HaLevi z"l

Father of

### Suzi Weiss

Yahrtzeit - 17 Iyyar

### Barbara Doppelt

B'er Shifra bat Moshe a"h

Mother of

### Julie Boyer

Yahrtzeit - 21 Iyyar

### Rita Miller

Rivka bat Israel Moshe HaLevi a"h

Mother of

### Stuart Miller

Yahrtzeit - 21 Iyyar

## STEVEN & VIVIAN DORFMAN KEILIM MIKVAH



The Keilim Mikvah is now open for use. You can buzz-in for access via the intercom at the entrance to the garage, during weekday office hours. It is customary to give tzedakah before doing to mitzvah of tovelling Keilim. You can give a donation directly to the keilim mikvah by visiting [beverlyhillssynagogue.org/keilim](http://beverlyhillssynagogue.org/keilim)



We have two gorgeous displays of marble yahrtzeit plaques on the back walls of our sanctuary. This is a beautiful way of memorializing the names of departed loved ones. Yahrtzeit plaques cost \$1,800.

To order a plaque or for more information contact Madeline Kramer at [mkramer@yinbh.org](mailto:mkramer@yinbh.org)

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Wendy Wallack

Suzi Weiss

Karen Parver

Behrouz Soroudi

Ava Brenner

Sonya Kest

## Paul Feder z"l Gemara Shiur

לע"נ פנחס אליהו בן שמשון הלוי

Join Rabbi Dunner for his  
Gemara Shiur on Shabbat  
45 minutes before Shacharit



# *Yinbh Gala Banquet Committee*

## Chairs

Lee Samson • George & Irina Schaeffer

## Committee

Michael & Susan Baum • Barry Novack & Annie Baum • Jonathan & Julie Boyer • William & June Brenner • Elliott & Robin Broidy • Hart & Debbie Cohen • Steven & Vivian Dorfman • Rabbi Pini & Sabine Dunner • Marty & Eva Feldberg • Howie & Shirin Fialkov • Richard & Shawney Fine • David & Gloria Frankel • Jerry & Jean Friedman • Larry & Judith Garshofsky • Bob Zeller & Nadine Gerson • Ernie & Regina Goldberger • Ed & Cecile Gromis • Phillip & Janice Kaufler • Jonathan & Faye Kellerman • Hillel & Ruthie Kellerman • Hillel Laks • Simon Elihani & Rita Lewkowitz • Marvin & Rachel Mandelbaum • Vera Markowitz • Stuart & Fran Miller • Raphy & Rivka Nissel • Michael & Ariella Novack • Jeff Gross & Gina Raphael • Howard & Judy Raykoff • Weston & Denise Richter • David & Auralee Ring • Eric & Hilary Rothman • Rosalyn Rothman • Elisha & Kellie Rothman • Simon & Susy Rubinstein • Franck & Evelina Ruimy • Tuvia Ganz & Joanne Sacks • Joe & Galina Samuel • Stephen & Jessica Samuel • Sunny & Debbie Sassoon • Moshe & Helen Sassover • Adam & Jesse Shaked • Aubrey & Jill Sharfman • Jaime & Marilyn Sohacheski • Seymour & Grace Stoll • Bart & Arleen Tanenbaum • Sam & Sue Varon • JJ & Wendy Wallack • Jacques & Natalie Wizman • Rosalie Zalis

JOIN OUR BANQUET COMMITTEE

[banquet@yinbh.org](mailto:banquet@yinbh.org)

# *Yinbh Mikvah*



## HOURS

The Mikvah is open every evening including Shabbat, Yom Tov and Motzei Shabbat.

Kallah appointments also available.

All appointments must be made in advance.

## TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

[www.yinbh.org/mikvah](http://www.yinbh.org/mikvah) or Download the MikvahCloud app



## OUR LOCATION

9261 Alden Drive  
Beverly Hills

## CONTACT US

310-299-1792 (Text Only)  
[www.yinbh.org/mikvah](http://www.yinbh.org/mikvah)

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# 75

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ANNUAL BANQUET

*Honoring*  
**BILL LOPATIN**  
WITH A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO  
STEPHEN ROTHMAN Z"L



*Sunday, May 21st, 2023*

**FEATURING THE FAB FOUR**  
**AT JIM HENSON STUDIOS**  
1416 N La Brea Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90028

*5:30pm*  
*Cocktails*

*6:30pm*  
*Dinner*

*8:00pm*  
*Concert*

RSVP at [WWW.BHSBANQUET.COM](http://WWW.BHSBANQUET.COM)