ללמוד וללמד

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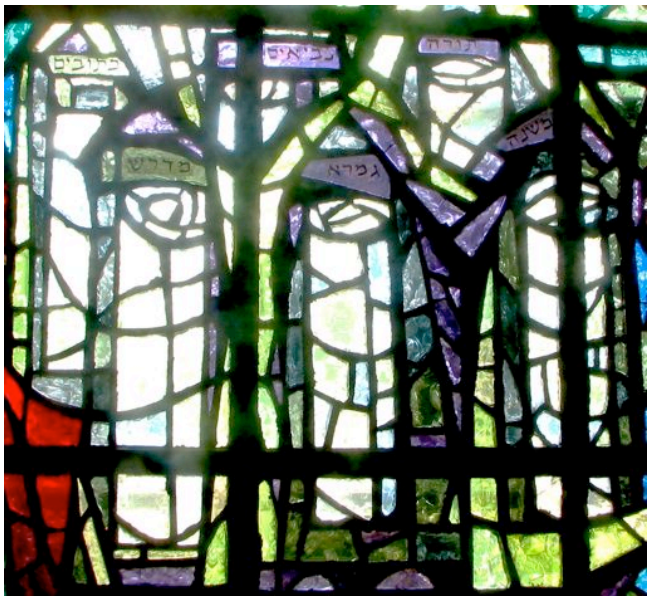

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Congregation Rodfei Zedek www.rodfei.org
5200 S. Hyde Park Blvd., Chicago, Illinois 60615

Introduction to Volume VI Number 1

ישראל ואורייתא חד הוה

"Israel and the Torah are one" – Do you remember learning the song as a child? The words come back as we delve into this new issue. One author after another speaks of how important Torah is to each of us separately and to us as a community, of how essential it is as an aid in thinking about and living in our world. They bear out This American Shabbat participant Mark Sorkin's assertion "that each of us, no matter our personal background or depth of experience studying Torah, has the capacity to add something of value to a discussion that has been carried forward for centuries."

As we enter into this Fall's holy days, culminating with the celebration of Torah – שמחת תורה – we can be inspired by the words of those around us at Rodfei Zedek, young or old, scholarly or not. From recent bat mitzvah Ilana Deutsch to retired presidents of the congregation, our contributors bring insights from Torah into society – into hierarchy and responsibility and individual autonomy. They draw applications to current events and guidance for personal interactions.

Everyone who studies Torah confronts difficulties. Rebel Without a Clue Jeff Ruby talks about overcoming avoidance of Torah study. Lisa Rosen describes how her own struggles inform how she teaches her children. And Mark Sorkin finds pointers in the Torah itself for dealing with challenging material.

Much of our study of Torah is shaped by our Rabbi, David Minkus, who last July 15 celebrated the completion of his first three years with Congregation Rodfei Zedek. It was he who created the This American Shabbat program, which has extended our dedication to Torah study and spreads responsibility for learning ever more widely throughout the Congregation. In his July devar Torah contemplating his renewed commitment to Rodfei Zedek, Rabbi Minkus invoked "Torah, lived seriously, and eternally relevant."

Past and current editions of this publication are online at http://www.rodfei.org/To_Learn_and_To_Teach

Eternally Relevant (Pinchas)

***by* Rabbi David Minkus**

Three years ago I sat on the phone, as I often do, with a classmate of mine, who like me is a rabbi of a smaller congregation and also began her tenure that week. But unlike Rodfei Zedek, her synagogue, in suburban New York, is viewed as a transit stop, a stepping stone shul for those fresh out of rabbinical school. You put in a few years and you move on to the next size synagogue that the Rabbinical Assembly allows you to accept. And, despite this not being a good institutional trend turned norm, this community has not invested in tinkering with the recipe that would ameliorate this trend. It is a place like far too many in the synagogue world, a place that asks it rabbis to fit into a mold, living in *once upon time*, a time of renowned rabbis; and despite that era being long gone, that is the identity they are trying to recapture. As we began our rabbinic expedition, that was the background noise; these were the issues that painted our conversation and informed the torah we were hoping to share.

My classmate and dear friend is a great rabbi; she is smart and wise, as well as emotionally intuitive – she is the rabbi you want. But this shul is unclear on what they want and need, because they do not know who they are. They see larger synagogues and communities as successful, as doing it right, as the ones that have cracked the code, possessing the secret ingredient that every bbq master locks away in a vault. My friend's synagogue lacks the wherewithal to recognize that that secret ingredient, whether it is cooking or building community is always basic, always something we have or should have in abundance. Coffee, cinnamon, inclusivity, warmth.

I asked my friend, so what are you going to talk about for this Shabbat? After all, this is a rich parasha. She told me that she was considering talking about leadership, about the paradigmatic leader, Moses, passing the baton to future leader, Joshua. Based upon conversations she had already had with members of the community, she felt they wanted or needed to hear about transitions, about a smooth transition from the leader they had loved but who had left, to this new, young, and female rabbi. That made sense but as I sat down to write my devar Torah, those words missed the mark. That was not what I needed to say, it was not what I wanted to be heard – that Torah did not match the tenor of the conversations I had had.

One of the things I have learned, and it feels cliché, but Torah is precious and needs to be treated as such. To study Torah and live in the world of Torah is a luxury but to walk the journey of the five books with other people and then start that again, and then again, is really an act of sanctifying the tradition. We become more whole within the tradition, and, in large part, because it is a passage of time marked less through words and wisdom but through love and relationships. What makes Talmud study meaningful is not the law or lessons learned, it is that you are doing this in partnership with someone else, that the

tradition is being sustained and furthered through the love and joy that is being shared with your study partner (hevruta). And, like all relationships, at first it could be awkward, you might be used to learning at different speeds or might not know the best technique to articulate your needs for this relationship because you do not really know your hevruta yet – you might know the person but not the learner. Your skills have not developed within the framework of your values yet.

And this, not knowing my hevruta, my partners in Torah, became clear to me with each deleted sentence and wise point of torah I wanted to impart to all of you but could not. I, now, have a sense of who I am as a rabbi, I have an understanding of who Rodfei Zedek was, a pretty clear sense of who Rodfei Zedek is now and an emerging picture of who we are to become. And who we are to become is, perhaps, best informed not by the skills and legacy of Moses nor by the ruach, the spirit that was within Joshua that allowed for him to become Israel's future leader. Searching within their character bio to find a shiny insight into the trajectory of our future is akin to attempting to recreate someone else's secret sauce – wisdom is not found when looking outward.

We make the community richer by building a sincere awareness of who are filling the seats and who have left their seats empty, and why.

What spoke to me three years ago, on my first Shabbat at Rodfei Zedek, during a week that saw the beginning of a war in Israel was the Torah's insistence, for good or bad, on naming the Israelite and Midianite whom Pinchas had killed. That was not, or at least not so much, a political stand but a moral affirmation of the Torah's place in our lives today and the direction I thought I would and am taking as a rabbi; that the torah, when lived seriously – which is defined differently for us all – and read closely is, eternally relevant. That has not changed and will not change – rabbis and communities go astray when they are guided by things other than Torah and Judaism.

Three years ago, as I prepared for Shabbat, it was someone else's community, who we were not, who I did not want to be that inspired my torah. And that was in some respect, appropriate because it would have been wrong to speak to or for a community I had been a part of for a minute and half. Thanks to you all of you, that is no longer the case. As I speak I am no longer sweating, nor am I looking to find a spot on the back wall to focus on in order to ground myself.

What spoke to me this week was the census. The first two portions of the book of Numbers deal with a census of the Israelite community and then of the priestly class. And now, here towards end of the book, we get another census, with numbers and demographics that have not changed all that much. What purpose does this census serve?

Some commentators note that a census is often a prelude to war. Robert Alter affirms this in part, by pointing out that the first census was for militaristic reasons but notes that, here in Parashat Pinchas, it is accounting for tribal divisions and their required land allotment. Bible scholar Adriane Leveen differs from many commentaries who preceded her by positing that two censuses are connected and must be read as such. She says that they both mark turning points; the first one (Numbers 1:1) introduces a section that will

be characterized by rebellion and here, in Pinchas, the census introduces the approaching redemption. But what Rashi said about our first census is what I found to be most compelling. He said that the Israelites were precious to God and so God counted them – God did this as they left Egypt; after they sinned with Golden Calf, God counted them; as they wandered the desert, God counted them.

And, today, as we are here to count, to mark time, what does this repetition of communal numbers teach us? This census provides the framework to think about community and not only how we exist within it but how we craft it and, perhaps of greater significance, how we maintain it. We know what preceded the census here in Pinchas, but what immediately followed it is what really hammers home this point: The Daughters of Zelophehad. Zelophehad died without any sons and his daughters are left with nothing. They approach Moses demanding they get their father's land and that this system is unjust, which forces Moses to ask God for a ruling since he does not know how to respond properly. God tells Moses to grant them their father's land. When we count, as one midrash about the daughters points out, women can emerge to correct the shortcomings of men. This very well may be true but we ought to broaden it, expand and extend this communal act of devotion. When we count, when we make an ongoing effort to assess who we are and where we were in the context of thinking of who we want to be and where we would like to go, we recognize not only our strengths but the errors of our ways.

A thoughtful practice of measuring of who we are will, inevitably, yield a recognition of where we need to be more inclusive, we will see how to give voice to expressions of practice that may be different than what we are comfortable with yet make the community richer. And we do this not by counting households, dollars raised, or empty seats, but by carving out the difficult path towards building a sincere awareness of who those people are who are filling the seats and who are the individuals who have left their seat empty, and why. This can only be done when we count those in our building as individuals, as people who are looking for community but also able to give to this community. Yes, this is a building for prayer, for schools, for meetings but above all else, it is a building for community.

The *hidush*, the creative reinterpretation or innovation I see in the census, which later allows for the daughters of Zelophehad to claim their land, forever altering Jewish law and, later, the fixing of holidays on the calendar, comes from the awareness that our path, goals and needs, change and as a community rather than either doubling down on a historical notion of who we were or adopting a wholly new mission, we need to count our community, reflect on what that means, get to know and challenge this collection of diverse individuals. And we are doing that and I am honored and continually humbled that I get to be a part of this journey of assessing who we are while finding where the promise of community will take us.

Rabbi David Minkus and his wife Ilyssa came to the Congregation in June, 2014, where they were joined in September by baby Raia. He earned a BA with a major in psychology from the University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana in 2008 and also studied at Hebrew University and at the Machon Schechter Institute in Jerusalem. In 2014 he graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary with a Masters in Jewish Education and received ordination.

Comfort Ye (Vaetchanan)

***by* Edward Hamburg**

I became a Bar Mitzvah in Washington, DC on the last shabbat in April 1964. The parasha that week was Kedoshim (Lev. 19-20), and I chanted the haftorah that accompanies it for Ashkenazic Jews from the Book of Amos.

A week later in Baltimore a girl I then didn't know named Stacey Poland was called to the bima to become a Bat Mitzvah — the same bima on which we would be married nine years later. The parasha for that week was Emor (Leviticus 21-24), but she didn't chant from Ezekiel like any other b'nai mitzvah on that shabbat. Instead, she read Haftorah Va-etchanan, the first of seven haftorot of consolation from Isaiah, the one we read today on Shabbat Nachamu, The Sabbath of Comfort or Consolation.

This was not a mistake or because her synagogue was on some alternative reading cycle.

Stacey's bat mitzvah occurred less than four months after her younger sister and three younger brothers were killed in an arson fire. Their names — Starr Poland, Donald Poland, Joel Poland, and Norman Poland — are read here every December on their yarhzeits on the 7th of Tevet. The rabbis of her congregation had dispensed with convention and assigned Stacey this morning's haftorah for her May bat mitzvah because of its beginning: "Comfort, comfort my people." This decision, in retrospect, was an incredibly thoughtful one.

By twice chanting the haftorah's opening word, Stacey was not trying to comfort herself or her devastated parents who somehow marshaled the power and strength to be in the front row of the synagogue for the occasion. In his commentary, Rabbi Hertz makes this clear: "Nachamu Nachamu Ami" does NOT mean "be comforted, O my people." Rather, it's a command to the prophets — or as he says, to "all who love Jerusalem" — *to provide comfort* to a people who have suffered.

In was in this sprit that Stacey read the charge of Nachamu Nachamu to those seated throughout the sanctuary — to the members of her community. *For it is communities, as individuals and collectively, that are responsible for providing comfort to those who suffer*.

Here I want to talk about what it means to "comfort," particularly in situations when death is the cause of suffering. Many of us are uncomfortable providing comfort. How do you do it? How do you do it well, for both you and those you are trying to comfort?

I would like to discuss three things that I've learned in contemplating these questions.

The first is that many times an effective way of providing comfort can be the simplest: just be present when comfort is in order.

Declare “Heneini,” “Here I am,” with your presence. Show up at a funeral, visit a shiva house, arrange for meals or childcare for those in grief. Simplest of all, be present to respond to the Mourners Kaddish whenever it is recited by those in mourning or observing yahrzeits. The Mourners Kaddish is meant to be publicly recited — and it is meant to be responded to, seven times, by those present. Hearing these responses provides comfort to the reciter; they realize they are not alone, that they have a community behind them, and that their suffering, whether past or present, is recognized and understood by others. I experienced this support the first time I was a mourner when my mother died twenty-five years ago. To be present to respond to those reciting the Mourners Kaddish is the primary reason why I have continued as a regular daily minyan participant ever since.

A second and somewhat harder way that I’ve learned to comfort is to enable stories to be told.

A recent NPR StoryCorp episode exemplified this point. A veteran hospital counselor recalled her earliest days on the job. She so wanted to be effective in her role and was so afraid of failing. Her anxiety peaked when she was called to talk with the family of a young man who had been accidentally shot and killed by his best friend. They were all in a room: his family and the friend who killed him. She came in and sat down, saying nothing for what seemed like an eternity. Finally she said: “I didn’t know Jim. Please tell me about him.” The atmosphere in the room completely changed. She saw in those moments how the telling of stories had the power to comfort. She also realized then that she was really right for difficult job she would go on to do for many years.

Stacey was originally denied the ability to tell her story. Consistent with the norms of the day, the death of her sister and brothers was not discussed openly as the family was encouraged to “move on.” But stories denied result in comfort denied. Almost thirty years after we came to Chicago, Stacey resolved to end this protected silence and began to tell her story, finding the comfort from others that was uninvited for so long. Last year she was contacted by a reporter from the Baltimore Sun to do a podcast about this terrible episode in her life. The comfort she received from participating in this remarkable project and from its many listeners was palpable.

Stories can bring the dead to life again — if only for brief but precious moments. The comfort derived from their telling should never go unrecognized or unappreciated.

A final point about providing comfort that I will make this morning is that we should learn how there are times when comfort should NOT be provided. Pirke Avot teaches us, “Don’t try to comfort someone whose dead still lies before them.” In Jewish terms, this is in the period of “Aninut" — the time span between death and burial. My friend Rabbi Steven Sager describes this period as when “there is no breath deep enough for comfort; there is no hope of putting together enough thoughts to make sense of anything.”

He goes on to explain that:

> Formal mourning, to be sure, offers a linear, measurable, quantifiable framework for mourners: 7 days, 30 days, one year. Aninut anticipates a short time but does not quantify the time as an independent unit of mourning. The framework of Aninut protects the raw mourner and prescribes only for the surrounding community: show restraint, compassion, flexibility, and tolerance. Do not hold anyone responsible for cursing God or the world. Your role as a community is to guard and to protect the mourner.

Steve and I have discussed how, in some instances, we should appreciate how the Aninut period might extend beyond burial — that sometimes the state of raw mourning can persist beyond the burial of bodies. We should understand that there are losses, like what Stacey and her family experienced, that can be so profound that they cannot be contained within the measurable, quantifiable framework of Jewish mourning. In these instances, the community should continue its protective role, prioritizing demonstrations of restraint, compassion, flexibility, and tolerance over comfort.

So in closing, I encourage you to think about how you can provide comfort by acts of presence and by enabling stories to be told, as well as how you might respond to suffering if you are asked to provide protection instead of comfort.

With thanks to Rabbi Minkus for inviting me to speak to you on Shabbat Nachamu, I'll leave you with these thoughts — along with the hope that we may all find comfort when we ourselves are among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Edward Hamburg serves on the boards of directors of high technology companies after a career as a senior executive in the computer software industry. He also serves on the boards of Sicha, The Institute for the Next Jewish Future, and Congregation Rodfei Zedek (where he is also a past president). He received a Ph.D. from the department of political science of the University of Chicago. Ed and Stacey raised their sons, Michael and Adam, in this community; they live in the South Loop.

Distinctions, Connections (Bemidbar)

***by* Ilana Deutsch**

The Torah portion I read is called 'Bemidbar' or in English 'Numbers'. In this story God commanded Moses to take a census of all the Jewish men who were of military age. Moses did as he was told and in the process appointed a leader of each tribe to help him count. In the end he came up with around 600,000 people, not including the Levites. Moses was commanded by God not to include the Levites in this census, as they were to have a special job.

The Levites were in charge of caring for the Tabernacle. Next, Moses was commanded to take two more censuses. He took one of all the male Levites over the age of one month, and one of all the firstborn Jewish men. Since firstborn were considered holy, Moses's next task was to transform all the firstborn into Levites. There were around 300 more first-born than Levites so Moses was also told to collect five shekels from each of the extra first-born sons and give them to the priests or in Hebrew, Kohanim. Moses then took one final census of a smaller group of Levites, who were the priests, which concludes this week's portion.

From this portion I wanted to talk more about the separation between people because of both their origin, gender, and age. In the Torah their society is set up with a hierarchy. People are ranked as more important or better than others because of certain traits that I think personally and I know most of you will agree shouldn't define you.

Origin and gender are things you have no control over, and they're things that shouldn't have control over you. Neither one of these traits can deem you less, or more capable than another person.

Another thing I'd like to point out is that this separation does make the Levites seem special compared to the other Jews, but it came with consequences. Just like any form of power, the Levites' job came with responsibilities. They were required to care for, move, and protect the Tabernacle at all times, which was not easy.

This status also probably left the Levites as outcasts. Power and separation probably led to the Jews distancing themselves from the Levites.

Although the Torah was written thousands of years ago, this theme of a hierarchy is something we see in our modern society as well. Today in both the government and in social groups we are divided. Luckily today where we live gender and origin don't usually have a say in this separation. For the most part, our way of separation is much more justified. In most cases people in the government work hard for their money and position, unlike in the Torah where people were born into different groups. In social situations our status often divides us as well. Whether we realize it or not, having power in a public way can greatly distance us from people of lower power. This high ranking again leads to

responsibilities and in most cases people will expect more from you, and even look up to you if you're on top of this social hierarchy that we have created for ourselves.

Twelve months ago when I began studying for my bat mitzvah, I didn't understand what was so important about having one. My only thoughts on why I wanted to have a bat mitzvah were that one day it would have meaning. Some day I knew I would realize the importance of becoming an adult in the Jewish community; and if I passed up the opportunity, I knew I would regret it in the future. But why? Why was this occasion so important? Why did I want to have a bat mitzvah? Sure, I would be considered an adult; but what did that mean? Over the last twelve months I have found the answers to these questions, and my perspective and opinion have changed drastically.

First of all, having a bat mitzvah doesn't just mean you're a grown up. It means you're part of the community. Rather than in previous years when I trailed behind my parents, I'm now an individual member of the congregation. I choose to be here and choose to pray and participate in services along with everyone else. Another thing I realized is that this is separating me from the rest of the children in the Jewish community. As I said earlier, a higher ranking comes with both responsibilities and power, meaning that now, as an adult, more will be expected of me; and I will try my hardest to complete the tasks thrown my way.

The final thing I learned that makes becoming a bat mitzvah important is reading from the Torah. It's more than just a few lines read from a book. The Torah is holy and a staple in our community. As my dad once told me on a long drive back from synagogue, there once was a time when religion and belief fell apart. During the dark ages, the chaos in the world distanced people from each other. But this holy book, the Torah, held the Jewish people together. It gave them something to connect with and something to hold themselves together with. The Torah is one of the main reasons that today we all have the same ancestors and that the Jewish community is so tightly knit. Besides this, reading from the Torah is a tradition passed on through generations. In the Jewish community, reading from it is the true difference between childhood and adulthood. In conclusion, these past twelve months, although not easy, have expanded my view of the world as well as of our community. I'm so thankful that I got the opportunity to do this and will definitely not take it for granted.

Ilana Deutsch is a seventh grader at Chicago City Day School and volunteers with The Honeycomb Project to help families in need. Ilana has both attended and led a variety of Honeycomb Projects. She and brothers Zachary and Aiden live on the North side. Her father, Harel, is a neurosurgeon, and her mother Danielle is a tax consultant and member of the Rodfei Zedek Board.

This American Shabbat

Since arriving at Congregation Rodfei Zedek Rabbi David Minkus has created and nurtured a program originally suggested by NPR's This American Life. Invited by the Rabbi, participants in This American Shabbat study together and discuss, then present their interpretations at a Shabbat service. Over and over participants express their appreciation for each other's insights, and the entire Congregation thrills to the rediscovery of its members' talents and commitment. The first three talks included here were originally presented on June 3, 2017, while Lisa Rosen's dates from May 21, 2016.

Naso

***by* Lydia Polonsky**

It's difficult to forget the image of a bloodied United Airlines passenger being pulled from a flight, when he refused to give up his seat for crew members. Initially, the United Airlines CEO apologized, not for the man's treatment but for disrupting the other passengers. Following a public outcry and dropping stock prices the CEO offered a second apology, this time calling the incident horrific, offering his deepest apologies, taking full responsibility and promising that this sort of incident would never happen again. All the passengers received monetary settlements from the airline.

Have you noticed how frequently we see apologies in the news? They range from significant apologies by Pope Francis for the church's "grave sins", to Jennifer Lopez saying sorry for singing Happy Birthday to the President of the repressive government in Turkmenistan. We see world leaders, politicians, sports stars, actors and corporations all expressing remorse for some infraction.

These public apologies are carefully tailored, crafted meticulously by PR teams, analyzed for potential offense, misinterpretation or misreading. But most of us in our daily lives do not have a PR team. In our everyday interactions we often get apologies wrong. Have you ever felt disappointed or even made angrier by an apology? When someone says, for example, "Sorry I hurt your feelings but you really are overly sensitive". You know – the non-apology. We all find ourselves having to apologize for some infraction or other. Apologies are an integral part of strengthening and maintaining social relationships, so we continue to work at them.

Parashat Naso includes two verses that underscore the necessity of confession and restitution in a successful society. In Ch. 5, v. 6 and 7 we read, *"When a man or woman commits any wrong to a fellow man, thus breaking faith with the Lord and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess the wrong that he has done. He shall make restitution in the principal amount and*

add one-fifth to it, giving it to him who he has wronged."

This parasha and Rashi's commentary teach us that in order to be truly repentant and have a chance for forgiveness, the guilty person must publicly acknowledge guilt and make adequate restitution. Rabbi Eve Posen points out that the Hebrew word used for confession in this verse is "Hitvadu". This is the reflexive form, which suggests that before we admit guilt to the person we have offended, we must first admit it to ourselves. Her interpretation suggests that a meaningful apology must truly signify and express remorse. Such an apology brings healing not only to the injured person but also relief for the person who messed up. It doesn't always bring forgiveness. Some-one may accept your apology but not yet be willing or ready to forgive.

Our parasha, written a few thousand years ago, provides ancient words of wisdom on the subject; but I decided to turn to a trusted technological tool to see what would constitute a 21st century perfect apology. I obviously turned to Google and put in the phrase "the right way to apologize". This revealed a vast literature on the subject. There are books, articles and academic research devoted to various aspects of apologizing. Then there are the websites *sorrywatch.com* and *perfectapology.com,* which analyze apologies, current and past and give sample apologies if you are having trouble coming up with your own.

Culling from many of these sources, conventional wisdom states that the elements of any compelling and genuine apology are the same. These work for transgressions ranging from minor to major. The most important elements are: **Acknowledging your mistake and explaining what happened. Accepting responsibility for the hurt you've caused**. **Being willing to compensate if appropriate.** Some sites included: **Reassuring the person that it won't happen again.**

Maimonides obviously agreed with this last one. He elaborated on this step by saying *"whoever merely verbalizes his confession without consciously deciding to give up his sins is like a person who immerses himself in the mikvah in order to cleanse himself but is holding a dead reptile in his hand."* It's such a vivid image, perhaps a bit disturbing; but it underscores that confessions don't work if you keep on repeating the same offense. It seems that the body of scholarly research echoes the parsha in its simplicity regarding the steps necessary for an acceptable apology.

A legendary textbook apology that incorporates all of the steps came from the CEO of Johnson and Johnson in 1982 when seven people in Chicago died after ingesting cyanide-laced Tylenol gel caplets. The CEO immediately took responsibility, recalled all the gel caplets around the country, warned people not to use any Tylenol products, gave vouchers for future products, and reintroduced their tablets using tamper-resistant packaging. The second United Airlines apology, certainly written by a PR team could have been perfect if they hadn't issued the first offensive "sorry I'm not sorry" apology. This makes one wonder if the company followed the 'reflexive form' of confession and truly felt that they made a mistake or if this second apology was just a desperate attempt to salvage their reputation.

We have the blueprint for a perfect apology, grounded both in our parasha and reiterated by our most contemporary sources of information.

Why then is it so difficult to apologize? People fear a loss of self-esteem and an appearance of weakness. Research has shown that compassionate, self-assured people have the capacity to confess wrongdoing and address it. Their self-esteem remains intact. Overly egocentric people with a grand view of themselves, find it more difficult because an apology is a humbling experience.

The most important skill for being a good partner, friend, and family member is the ability to apologize. Recovery from disagreements by apologizing if you are wrong is a mark of empathy and a way of keeping relationships strong and long-lasting.

How do we benefit from reading Parashat Naso year after year? Is it still relevant today? The perfect apology on paper is not always meaningful. Naso points us to the integral parts of a meaningful apology.

Most of us strive to be good citizens contributing to the well being of our communities. The teachings in this parasha set a good example.

Lydia Polonsky grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa. She attended The King David Jewish Day Schools and the University of the Witwatersrand. After immigrating to Chicago, she taught mathematics at The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Lydia and her husband Kenneth have been members of Rodfei Zedek for over 30 years. Their three children were Bar and Bat Mitzvah'd at Rodfei Zedek.

by Leslie Jellinek

My job title is budget director, and over the years I've created budgets for large health care institutions as well as community organizations.In each case we begin with a little chaos and end with clarity and balance. I write in bullet points, charts and graphs. If it takes more than two minutes to explain a handout, that handout has failed. I was hoping the rabbi would give us the bullet point version of this Torah portion, but he did not. It was up to us to find them.

Toward the end of the portion the chieftains of the tribes assembled before the Tabernacle with gifts for the dedication of the altar of their synagogue in the desert. God tells Moses to have the chieftains present their gifts for the altar, one chieftain each day. Then the Torah goes on to describe the gifts in detail: "one silver bowl weighing 130 shekels and one silver basin of 70 shekels by the sanctuary weight, both filled with choice flour with oil mixed in, for a meal offering; one gold ladle of ten shekels, filled with incense; one bull of the herd, one ram, and one lamb in its first year, for a burnt offering; one goat for a sin offering; and for his sacrifice of well-being: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five yearling lambs." Then it gives exactly the same description, in exactly the same detail, eleven more times.

It occurred to me that it would have been a lot easier and faster just to say that the twelve tribes gave a list of the same gifts. So why list each one separately? Then I thought that each gift needs to be

appreciated in a special way as if it's the only gift. We've probably all been at a birthday party or shower, hoping our gift would be opened early, in case someone else was giving the same thing. We want our gift to be received as if it's the only one; we want it to be appreciated; *we* want to be appreciated. In this Torah portion each day brings a new gift – exactly the same as the one before it – but the only gift on that day. So each gift is received as the only one; it *is* the only gift. Each giver is really recognized, so both the gift and the giver are appreciated as singular and special.

This made me think about how we appreciate (or don't appreciate) things people offer or share with us, whether they are gifts, discoveries, or feelings of joy or sorrow. For example, each time a person experiences or learns something new, it's a new discovery. We all cheer when a child learns to write his name. We've all done that before, and there's nothing new about it, but we cheer for that child! In contrast, a colleague of mine told me that when she was a child drying dishes, she discovered that if she rolled up a towel and inserted it into a wet glass, it would dry the glass quickly and efficiently. She proudly told her mother who dismissed her with "Everyone knows that." She had been so proud of her discovery, but the way her mother received it turned her sense of pleasure and accomplishment to embarrassment and shame.

Each gift needs to be appreciated in a special way as if it's the only gift.

We have similar issues with pain and sadness. We've all had that before, too. A few years ago I broke my foot. It was painful, and using crutches was difficult. One day I left my office building with the idea of hailing a cab and discovered that the entire street was closed to traffic. I had to get myself to the corner before I could get a taxi. It was only half a block, but it was incredibly difficult for me to do. A few days later I was in physical therapy feeling sorry for myself, and I shared a walking track with a woman learning to walk on her new lower limb prosthesis that attached to her knee. So I stopped feeling sorry for myself and felt ashamed instead. I was living the expression, "I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet."

But my pain was real, and I was entitled to experience it, even when someone else's pain was worse. You wouldn't say to someone who is happy that he shouldn't be happy because someone else is happier. When we are experiencing pain or sadness, the acknowledgement of others is validating and comforting. Just as we want our gift or our discovery to be appreciated as if it is singular and special, we want our pain to be appreciated in the same way.

However, it is easy to forget this when someone else's injury doesn't seem as great as ours. I had a broken foot, and the woman down the hall was complaining about her head cold? Bah, humbug! What we have to remember is that when ours is the worse pain, we still need to appreciate the pain of others because it is singular and special to them.

In studying this portion we came across parts that we felt were mean, unfair, or just horrible. Finding the parts that were good and meaningful was not so easy, but we kept searching. Maybe it could mean this, or maybe given the context of history it could mean that. We really tried to "make it

work". Isn't that a metaphor for relationships and life? We all encounter lots of things that are mean and unfair, although hopefully not too many that are horrible, but we do keep looking for meaning and ways to make it work. People do this in the face of terrible odds and great sacrifice. And maybe it's not the words or the meaning of this portion that inspire us to keep trying - but the experience of trying, itself.

To summarize, I will give you my bullet point version of this section of the Torah portion Naso:

• We should accept each gift we receive as if it is the only one. That will be a benefit to the giver, and to us, too.

• We should receive the discoveries of others as if they are new, even if they are not new to us. If your spouse says one day that he realizes it makes no sense to put his used tea bag in the sink when he could just as easily put it in the garbage, you don't say, "Everyone knows that."

• We can appreciate our pain and injuries of whatever degree, but we have to appreciate those of others as well. We all have broken glass under our canopies.

• There are times when the process becomes the outcome. We weren't able to explain everything we came across in this Torah portion, but the process of trying became the lesson itself.

Leslie Jellinek has been the budget director at the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab (formerly Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago) for the past eighteen years. She is married to Robert Channon, a psychiatrist and former president of CRZ, and is the mother of three daughters (Eleanor, Rebecca, and Alison) and grandmother of one granddaughter and two grandsons (Rania, Adam, and Alexander). In her spare time, she loves playing with her grandchildren and keeps trying to improve her French.

by Mark Sorkin

I should preface my comments on this week's Torah portion with a brief disclaimer. I really don't know what I'm talking about. I approach this text from the only perspective I know, which is my own. I was deeply humbled to be asked to speak today, and I am even more deeply moved by the message it sends to the congregation—or, at least, the one it sent to me. Each of us, Rabbi Minkus seems to suggest, no matter our personal background or depth of experience studying Torah, has the capacity to add something of value to a discussion that has been carried forward for centuries. My experience here is limited, but with thoughts and sentiments emerging from a close reading of the text, I feel sufficiently equipped.

Naso, the second reading in the book of Numbers, continues the Census begun in the first book of Numbers. But whereas the first book is concerned primarily with young men of fighting age, here the Census extends to include men above thirty. (We'll get to the women in a moment.) The social hierarchy is stark and clearly delineated through the various roles assigned to the clans, all of whom share responsibility for transporting the Israelites across the desert. The Gershonites, for

example, carry cloths and hangings and other light-weight accessories that help sanctify the tabernacle, whereas the Merarites schlep the heavier stuff—the planks and bars that lift the tent off the ground. Better to be a Gershonite than a Merarite, I'd wager.

The case of the Nazirite is given unusual attention, a full chapter in what turns out to be the longest portion in the Torah. Nazirites take a vow setting themselves apart from the community in order to avoid temptation and be closer to G-d. The conditions are strict, requiring total abstinence from wine and shaving and funeral ceremonies, and the complex ritual for completing one's vow sets a high bar for re-entry. It's interesting that individuals can *choose* this role for themselves—no one is *born* a Nazirite, at least not at this stage in our history, a time we don't typically associate with self-determination. It's interesting, too, that Nazirites seem to be the source of ambivalence in the commentary. The community makes room for them, to be sure, but they are not revered. The message here may be that devotion to God is meant to inform but not replace the work of the community.

Parshat Naso doesn't just specify roles. It also lays out some rules: what to do with those who may be carrying contagious disease; how to make offerings, and with what; how to make restitution for wrongs done. What to do with a woman accused of adultery, referred to here as a Sotah, is detailed in a long passage I found deeply troubling. The accused must submit to a public ordeal in which her guilt or innocence is assessed by way of a water treatment. If she has been faithful, she will be immune to the so-called "water of bitterness." If she has strayed, the water will cause her thigh to sag and her belly to distend. I find the misogyny and presumption of guilt here alien at best; more to the point, it offends my belief in the universality of human rights. I simply can't accept a law that is so cruel and unjust, much less one that purports to represent God's dictation to Moses.

This may seem like a heretical position to take, but it's actually the opposite, for two reasons. First, there is a rich Talmudic tradition of challenging the wisdom of the Sotah trial. Many scholars believe the practice was abolished at some point during the Second Temple era, if it was ever more than a metaphor. Second, more broadly, there is a rich Jewish intellectual tradition of wrestling with the Torah, period. Most famously, Spinoza pitted Jewish exceptionalism against the universality of reason, and lit the kindling of the Enlightenment by siding with the latter. "The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition," wrote Isaac Deutscher. Perhaps, he suggests, the reason skepticism and doubt are so deeply embedded in Jewish identity is that Jews have historically "dwelt on the borderlines." It is this "neither here nor there" quality, this positioning at the margins of society, that enabled Jews to transcend the limitations imposed by the nations in which they lived—and, in some cases, the religion into which they were born.

For a long time I felt trapped by the contradiction between my commitment to universal values and my commitment to Jewish values. This, too, I now realize, is a deeply Jewish exercise. I suspect some in this congregation grapple with the same paradox, and like me, you may find comfort in knowing that Judaism makes room for this mode of thinking. Like the Nazirite, the questioning Jew is welcome in the tent. And like the Nazirite, the questioning Jew is the source of some ambivalence. Just as the community wouldn't thrive with an overabundance of Nazirites, each one

withdrawing into ascetic devotion rather than carrying out the work of the day, so an overabundance of doubt would pose a serious threat to the community's survival. There must be some balance.

So where does this leave us? Here, again, the Torah is a helpful guide. The story of the Israelites' migration through the desert retains its power and immediacy if we read it as allegory. We're on a journey, and we're on it together. Each of us has a role to play, and there are many rules we must follow, to ensure the community survives. We will be judged by our ability to endure.

Mark Sorkin and his wife, Janet, joined Rodfei Zedek in 2015 with their two children, Adele and Ari. Mark manages communications and strategic events for the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, a collaborative research institute at the University of Chicago. He earned a BA in English from Northwestern University and an MA in journalism from New York University.

Emor

***by* Lisa Rosen**

I was raised in a liberal, reform synagogue, where we seldom read the primary texts. Or we read only the feel-good, easy parts that sat comfortably with our modern liberal sensibilities. So, I was looking forward to engaging in some direct study of the primary text with the Rabbi in preparation for This American Shabbat.

You can perhaps imagine my shock, then, at what I found when I opened this week's parasha and read, for the very first time, passages such as God's statement to Moses that the daughter of a priest defiles her *father* by engaging in harlotry and that such daughters should be "put to the fire" as a consequence. Or God's instructions to Moses that the whole community should gather together and stone to death those who commit blasphemy. Or how the Israelites dutifully obeyed, rather than rebelled against these instructions.

I felt physically ill after reading this portion the first time. It embodies all of what I regard as the worst, most dangerous aspects of traditional organized religion: the oppressive patriarchal values, the misogyny, the authoritarianism, the punitive approach to justice, and worst of all the justification of all of this by recourse to God's word.

What kind of God would instruct his or her people to act like this? And what kind of people would blindly follow? In other words, what does this parasha say about what it means to be a Jew? And, given it's focus on controlling female sexuality, what does it say about what it means to be a Jewish woman? Or for that matter, a Jewish man? How should I explain passages like these to my three little boys?

I did share some of the text, in a very general way, with my 7.5 year old son, Miles who said: "Mommy, let's cut out the parts we don't like, crumple them up, and throw them in the garbage." That's one option, and I admit it's appealing. Indeed, this seemed to be the *de facto* stance of the reform community in which I was raised.

Ultimately, though, I find this stance unsatisfying. It strikes me as a profoundly anti-intellectual and cowardly form of cultural censorship. Or like a collective game of let's pretend, as in "Let's pretend Judaism does not have violent, barbaric and misogynistic strains in its sacred text." Besides, how can we pride ourselves in being the "people of the book," if we don't actually read the book, but just rely on the Cliff Notes?

A related strategy is to acknowledge what many have called the "difficult"—and what I would call the misogynistic and barbaric—parts of the parasha and instead just focus on the good parts. That, to me, is also unsatisfying and somewhat dishonest. There is nothing about all the good stuff in this parsha--such as the instructions to keep the holidays and the Sabbath, or to leave the edges of your field for the poor—that could ever make palatable the other parts.

I also worry that both strategies can lead to an individualistic, "salad bar" approach to religion, where each person picks and chooses the parts they like, kind of like Madonna combining elements of Kabbalah with yoga to form her own New Age self-help program. On the contrary, one of the things I value most about Judaism is its collective nature: the sense of being part of an ancient tradition that is larger than myself and that includes a central text (even if I strongly dislike parts of it) that tells our story and prescribes our traditions and practices as a Jewish people.

This past Passover, I attended the Freedom Seder at the City Winery. One of the performers, an African American singer named Lynn Jordan, opened her performance by saying that, as a descendant of slaves who were kidnapped from Africa and violently severed from their cultural traditions, she had always envied the Jewish people for having a five thousand year old set of traditions, stories, and rituals that provide the foundation for a sense of identity, both individual and collective. The Torah is a problematic text, to say the least. But it's the text that we have and I feel fortunate to have a tradition with which to wrestle.

So where does that leave me? Well, because I am an academic, and because I was particularly disturbed by this parasha's treatment of women, I turned to feminist biblical scholarship—which regards the Hebrew Bible as a socially constructed document that not only reflects the human values of its time (especially patriarchy), but also reinforces such values in our own time. Scholars such as Esther Fuchs invite us to view the Hebrew Bible as "a *literary* text authored by men," rather than a source of divine or absolute truth. Fuchs writes: "no amount of trotting out exceptional female figures, such as Deborah the judge and Miriam the prophet, should blind us to the

overwhelming presentation of women as male-dependent and male-related ciphers, who appear as secondary characters in a male drama." Fuchs further argues that, as a "foundational cultural script" the Hebrew Bible "continues to define our own perceptions of gender and sexual politics"

I happened to read a lengthy interview that Monica Lewinsky gave to the Guardian newsaper on the same day that I read this parasha for the first time. The Guardian article (https://www.theguardian .com/technology/2016/apr/16/monica-lewinsky-shame-sticks-like-tar-jon-ronson) which I highly recommend, calls Lewinsky "one of the 20th century's most humiliated people." Lewinsky, as most of you know, was publicly branded as a tramp, tart, slut, whore and Jezebel because of her affair with Bill Clinton. At the time of her public humiliation, Lewinsky was a young woman from my own city, hailing from the priestly class of Jews of Beverly Hills. She was approximately my own age and a little on the zaftig side, as was I. In other words, she was someone with whom I could easily identify. I recall being both riveted and horrified by her ordeal, in which she was essentially "put to the fire" in the public square of television and the internet. Her public humiliation served as warning to a whole generation of young women of the consequences of transgressing the rules of proper sexual behavior. Reading this week's parsha on the same day as Lewinsky's interview provided a clear reminder of the ancient origins of what we now call slut-shaming and of the urge to monitor and control women's sexuality and their bodies more generally, which continues today.

Reflecting on this, I take comfort in viewing this week's parasha as "a literary text written by men," following Esther Fuchs. Because that means I can challenge it.

In that spirit, inspired by Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, I have decided I would prefer to think of Jews as "People of the Scroll," rather than people of the book. This concept is both historically more precise and also metaphorically liberating. As Hirschfield notes: *Unlike a book, which not only has a clear beginning and ending, a scroll just keeps turning. Unlike a book, which must be broken in order to add to it, a scroll simply needs a bit more parchment, a needle and some thread. And in those differences, a huge statement is being made. There is a fluidity and flexibility to scrolls, which books simply do not have. There is remarkable power in telling ourselves and others, that that which is most sacred is also fundamentally open and expandable.*

Returning to the question of how to explain this week's parasha to my three little boys, the answer seems to me to be not to censor or redact the Torah, but to teach my children to understand it in context; to know Judaism's central texts, but also to question them; to know that such questioning is also part of our tradition; and finally, to think of themselves not so much as people of the book, but as people of the scroll.

Lisa Rosen is Executive Director of the U. of C. Science of Learning Center. She holds a PhD in cultural anthropology and is an author of The Ambitious Elementary School: Its Conception, Design, and Contribution to Educational Equality. She lives in Hyde Park with her husband, Steve Fram, and their three young sons, Miles, Charlie and Zack. She is a member of the board of CRZ and co-chairs its Youth Education Committee.

The Power of the Person (Korah)

by **Shirley Holbrook**

When Rabbi Minkus invited me to talk about Korah my heart sank. And as I confronted the portion I kept returning to thoughts of terror and depression. So I'm going to begin by talking about my feelings.

I come to shul on Shabbat seeking feelings of joy and peace. We sing yismachu. We greet each other with "Shabbat shalom." Joy and peace seem central to Shabbat. But holding a pivotal spot in our services is the Torah reading, and the feelings it inspires are another matter.

Over the last months we've read words of great beauty and exaltation – the awesome account of the time at Sinai, the promise that we shall be a holy nation, the vivid contrast of the sound of horns and the voice of God, the loving description of the building of the tabernacle with its fine linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and onyx and gold and silver and brass all worked by craftsmen with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and all manner of workmanship.

Reading Torah, I'm overwhelmed by the beauty of the words, the beauty of the ritual objects described, the grandeur of the horn music, the loveliness of the craftsmen's work and dedication. And, still more impressive is the noble character of Aaron and Miriam, and trandscending all, of Moses. And, to crown the magnificence, there is Torah, the law itself.

It may seem as though I should be able to leave a Shabbat's Torah reading uplifted and inspired.

But interspersed with all the beauty and grandeur, and tragically ironic are the apparently endless failures of our people, including even Aaron, Miriam, and Moses. What do I make of these miserable stories of kvetching and sinning and punishment?.... I see that the Torah gives us real people, with familiar failings. Last Shabbat we talked about fear and inconstancy and susceptibilty to evil influences. Perhaps grappling with our history of failures can give me strength for recognizing my own temptations and weaknesses and those of my neighbors. Perhaps I can learn empathy and patience.

And now I come to Korah. It appears to be the story of a political rebellion. Korah, with Dathan and Abiram and two hundred and fifty princes, rise up in the face of Moses and declare, "You take too much upon you, why do you lift yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" This is certainly another instance of Israelites losing their way. After all their previous mistakes and frightful punishments here they go again.

The rebels' behavior is expressed in the most calculatedly offensive language. Dathan and Abiram choose to characterize *Egypt(!)* as a land flowing with milk and

honey, reversing the application of God's promise. They charge Moses with bringing them out of Egypt only to kill them in the wilderness. And they accuse a humble and self-sacrificing leader of making himself a prince over them.

Is this rebellion worse than all the misbehavior in previous Torah portions? If I judge by the punishment, I think so. The punishment of the rebels is utterly terrifying, "a new thing" made by God. The ground opened her mouth, and swallowed up the followers of Korah and they went down alive into the pit. And the other rebels were devoured by a fire that came forth from God.

What was so bad about Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? Was it their motives? Unlike some of the complainers and foot-draggers we've read about recently, they don't seem motivated by fear and weakness. They sound arrogant and ambitious and greedy.

And what of the substance of their plot? Various commentators focus on several different elements. Some dwell on Korah's followers' efforts to democratize the priesthood. The rebels reproach Moses and Aaron with "You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; why then do you lift yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" The idea that we are a holy people is certainly appealing, and grounded in Torah. But arguing from it at the time seems another instance of devious and seductive speech. The wandering Israelites have not often evinced holiness and show no readiness to lead as priests. More fundamentally there's the question of oneness. The sense of unique god and unique peoplehood, so central to the experience at Sinai and in the desert, would be undermined by replacing a single high priest by many. Part of what makes the arguments of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram so bad is the time and place where they were made.

Other commentators focus on the difference between legitimate and illegitimate forms of dissent, and between legitimate and illegitimate exercise of authority in response to dissent. They contrast Korah's arguments with those of Abraham on Sodom and Gomorrah or with those of the daughters of Zelophehad. Unlike them, Korah was destructive. He attempted to undermine the authority of Moses, just as Moses was presenting the Torah and trying to maintain the people's commitment to it. Undermining Moses' authority in the desert meant threatening the covenant itself. Only the radical suppression of the rebellion by God's interventions could dramatize for the people the dire consequences of Korah's project....

The Torah itself gives us another clue to the severity of Korah's sin. It places the Korah story immediately after the words that ended last week's reading, highlighting how the rebels directly contravene them. Those words, which we recite daily in our shema, bid the Israelites to make fringes in the corners of their garments so that when they look upon them they remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them. They are not to go after their own hearts and own eyes but to remember and do all God's commandments, and be holy unto God. The passage ends with the affirmation, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God."....

I began by telling you how I dreaded thinking about Korah. I'll end by letting you in on something else: Years ago, in 1989,

Rabbi Gertel invited me to give a dvar Torah on Korah; and I did. I didn't peek at it when I wrote this one but went back to it after I'd finished. I discovered that the talk was organized essentially in the same way, struggling with the repeated failures of our people and the particularly terrible trangsgression of Korah. My conclusion then was that we have a tradition not only of repeated failures but of repeated attempts to do better.

But today I find a different lesson in this portion. Korah highlights the tension between individual holiness, power, and autonomy and the constraints of our covenant, constraints which guide our worship, our lives, and our people.

It is easy to fall into a pattern where self is an unquestioned value. Parents and teachers work to bolster the ego of the child. Physical programs and spiritual regimes aim at self improvement. We defend entitlements. We take selfies.

Our Torah places a high value on the person, created in the image of God. But in the story of Korah I see a balancing of individual rights against the needs of a community and the imperatives of a people. Further, the story shows the person as defined not by himself but by relationship – to people and to Torah.

The rights and powers of individuals form the stuff of much of our news, news from which I'm tempted to hide. The Torah doesn't give any easy answers, but it does help me confront questions.

Shirley Holbrook, a founding editor of To Learn and To Teach, retired after teaching mathematics at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. She and her husband Richard have served on the Board and children Daniel and Nina grew up at Rodfei Zedek. Shirley is a past president of the Congregation.

Doctors in the Desert (Tazria)

***by* Diane Altkorn**

Immediate past president Diane Altkorn was invited by the Sisterhood to speak at their luncheon. This is an adaptation of the talk she presented Feb. 18, 2017.

We read in Yitro about leadership and a structure for governing a people. Next week we read Mishpatim, which sets out laws to regulate the society. And then we read about the construction of the Mishkan, which provides for the spiritual needs of the Israelites. But where are the doctors? Who is taking care of the physical needs of the Israelites? Maybe doctors were not necessary—perhaps manna was a perfect low sodium formulation of the four food groups essential for good health: olive oil, almonds, dark chocolate, and red wine! And the Israelites did get plenty of exercise wandering around the desert for 40 years. Perhaps those were the days when high blood pressure and diabetes ceased, when you just had to worry about incurring God's wrath and being smitten. But when we get to Parashat Tazria, we see that the Israelites did indeed need doctors, as they seemed to have some serious skin problems. The Etz Hayim commentary suggests that the priests were the doctors. This makes sense to me, since when I read Tazria, I see a textbook of clinical reasoning for the priests. Before we look at the text to see if my idea is plausible, let's talk about the clinical reasoning process--in other words, given a symptom, how do you figure out the diagnosis? I spend much of my time at U of C teaching clinical reasoning to medical students, and I could talk about this topic for hours, but I'm just going to hit some highlights.

The diagnostic process is complex, hard to describe, easy to oversimplify, and hard to mimic. There are a lot of opportunities to make mistakes in one's reasoning, and in fact, it is estimated that 15% of diagnoses made by primary care doctors are wrong—that would be the non-U of C primary care doctors, of course. And even though it seems that computers would do a better job, in general they don't. A recently published research letter compared the performance of doctors to symptom checkers, websites intended to help patients self-diagnose. The doctors' accuracy was 84% compared to only 51% for the symptom checkers. Another study did find that having a computer provide lists of relevant diagnoses to doctors helped their diagnostic accuracy, presumably by helping them remember all the diseases they needed to consider, and you can find reports of the IBM Watson computer outperforming doctors. But overall, computers have not been found to be better than humans when it comes to diagnosis.

So since we're stuck with humans, let's talk about what a doctor does when he or she is trying to determine the diagnosis. In general, there are three steps. The first step is to acquire the necessary basic data; that is, take a history, perform a physical exam, and if available, review initial laboratory tests or imaging results.

Although I am not going to talk about history and physical exam skills today, clearly obtaining an accurate history and physical is crucial to determining the diagnosis; without a valid database, the most logical reasoning process will fail. The second step involves interpreting and synthesizing the data, and the third step is coming up with one or more diagnostic hypotheses, sometimes called the "working diagnoses."

How does this integration and hypothesis formulation work? The process begins as soon as the patient starts talking—as the doctor listens, he or she is considering, rejecting, and reconsidering multiple diagnostic hypotheses, continually revising as the patient provides more information. Many experts believe that there are two, often simultaneous, cognitive processes driving the doctor's reasoning. The first is called system 1 thinking. This is an intuitive rapid thought process that searches the doctor's brain for patterns, or illness scripts, that match the patient's symptoms. For example, what would your diagnosis be if you saw a patient complaining of an excruciating pain in the great toe, accompanied by redness and warmth, occurring after eating a large meal consisting of meat and red wine? You would immediately diagnose gout—the patient's description perfectly matches the illness script for gout. The second, cleverly called system 2 thinking, is a slower, logical, more analytic approach. The more experienced the physician, the more system 1 thinking is used. The less experienced the physician, or the more complex the problem, the more system 2 thinking is used. Most of the time, the two approaches are seamlessly combined—no one is sitting in the office saying to themselves, "ok, I'm going to use the system 1 approach now."

As you might expect, there are a lot of cognitive biases that can interfere with the reasoning process. The list of biases goes on for several pages, and I'll just mention a couple of them. One is premature closure—deciding that you know the diagnosis and no further reasoning is necessary; doing this causes you to ignore inconsistent data and dismiss alternative diagnoses before they have really been eliminated. Another is availability bias--considering more easily remembered diagnoses to be more likely. More easily remembered diagnoses might be more common diseases, but also might be the diagnosis you missed. Just a few weeks ago, in an essay published in JAMA, a physician reflecting on his retirement focused on a mistake he had made 37 years earlier, one that influenced the way he approached every subsequent patient.

That's enough theory for now. I want to talk for a few minutes to talk about how we teach clinical reasoning to medical students. First, they have to develop a knowledge base, so we have them spend a lot of time learning illness scripts: what are the typical symptoms and physical manifestations of pneumonia? Of a stroke? Of a heart attack? Of an ulcer? Of Parkinson's Disease? What causes the disease? What are the risk factors for developing the disease? They start by learning what we call the "textbook presentation," the most typical or classic way a given disease manifests. Over time, they refine their knowledge and the illness scripts as they see more patients and learn the subtle variations of disease presentations. Refining illness scripts is a lifelong task.

This knowledge base is essential but not sufficient to learn how to make a diagnosis. After all, people don't walk in and say, "I'm here because I have heart failure." They say, "I'm here because I am short of breath when I walk." So next the students must learn how to start with a symptom and get to a diagnosis. We give them a book to help, called *Symptom to Diagnosis: An Evidence-Based Guide*. Well, we don't really give it to them--we tell them to buy it! Although there is some information in here on how illness scripts for different diseases often vary from the classic presentation, the book primarily provides an organized, logical, approach to reasoning, really providing the students with a system 2 approach customized for each symptom, an approach that is validated by the literature and our clinical experience. I'll quickly run through the steps we teach them.

First, you have to identify the problem. This seems obvious but that's not always the case—for example, if I come in to the office and tell you that I am tired, what do I mean? Am I sleepy? Or lethargic? Or short of breath with exertion? Or existentially tired? Once you have identified the problem, you need some way to organize all of the possible causes of the problem, which is called the differential diagnosis. Each chapter provides a logical, practical, and clinically useful way to organize the differential, and also an algorithm to facilitate reasoning through differential. Next, using cases rolled out bit by bit, the chapter discusses how to narrow down the differential and how to develop diagnostic hypotheses using data from the history and physical provided, in combination with knowledge of diseases and risk factors. In addition to the leading hypothesis, the diagnosis that seems most likely, there are almost always alternative hypotheses--serious diseases that must not be missed. The role of testing is discussed at length: how do you decide when to do a test, what do the results mean, how good is the test, how certain must you be to eliminate a diagnosis or to proceed to treatment. If you reach a diagnosis and treat, you must observe the outcome; in other words, see if you were right. If you don't reach a diagnosis, you revise your hypotheses based the new data you have, and consider further testing. Diagnosis is an iterative process.

And then the students need to practice, practice, practice, and practice, by working through cases in the book or on a computer, but most importantly, by seeing lots and lots of patients. There is no substitute for seeing lots of patients when it comes to learning medicine.

Now, finally, let's look at Tazria and see if it teaches clinical reasoning in a way similar to *Symptom to Diagnosis*. First, were the priests the doctors? Chapter 13, verses 2 and 3 say, "When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron or to one of his sons, the priests. The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body . . ." Sounds to me like the priests were the doctors.

Next the text contains many if-then statements that help the priest know if he can declare the person pure or impure, in other words, make a diagnosis. Or does he have to do a test? Here are a couple of examples.

Leviticus 13:41-42: If he loses the hair on the front part of his head and becomes bald at the forehead, he is pure

(in other words, the diagnosis is clear—no tests are needed and no treatment is necessary). But if a white affection streaked with red appears on the bald part in the front or at the back of the head, it is a scaly eruption that is spreading over the bald part in the front or at the back of the head... the man is impure (again the diagnosis is clear).

Leviticus13:3-9: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin, it is a leprous affection (another clear diagnosis). But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his body which does not appear to be deeper than the skin and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days (now the diagnosis is not clear: a test is needed, with the test being observation). On the seventh day the priest shall examine him again: if the affection has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him pure . . . And if the priest sees that the rash has spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him impure (after the period of observation, the diagnosis is clear).

So I hope I have convinced you that parshah Tazria is indeed a clinical reasoning textbook, and also have given you a sense of how doctors reach a diagnosis. I also hope that you will not spend all of your time worrying about whether your doctor is employing proper reasoning!

Diane Altkorn is Professor of Medicine at the University of Chicago. She has an active practice in the Primary Care Group, and does extensive teaching in the clinical setting. She is coauthor of Symptom to Diagnosis: An Evidence-Based Guide,which has been translated into Russian, Japanese, Turkish, Chinese, and Portuguese. Diane is married to Bob Altkorn, a Senior Technical Advisor at Intertek, a consumer product safety testing and consulting firm. The family, including children Danny and Emily, have been members of Rodfei Zedek since 2000 and Diane has served on the Board and Executive Committee. She is greatly enjoying her current position as Immediate Past President.

The Place of Making (Vayakhel)

***by* Stephanie Friedman**

Look around the space in which we come together to study, pray, and be together. What physical properties make it meaningful to you? You might value the people surrounding you in splendid profusion, each engaged in their own individual thoughts and prayers, but also in close proximity to one another. You might draw comfort and strength from the doors of the ark and the neir tamid, if you cherish the connection they provide to the congregation's former building on this site and the long communal history they represent. You might find inspiration in the framed sections of parchment that unscroll on the walls around us, visual reminders of how Torah embraces and surrounds us. For me, I find that my gaze often fixes on the windows and the green and urban world they reveal, not to be like the proverbial distracted student staring out the window, but because the connection they provide to the constantly changing world of light and weather and movement embodies for me my constantly changing responses to the weekly repetition of Shabbat's liturgy and ritual. Perhaps it's a chicken and egg question, whether I have come to associate aspects of this space with spirituality and community because I daven here, or whether the physical characteristics of this space make it possible for me to feel as I do. The feelings and associations are there, in any case, bound up in this place where I dedicate myself to offering up the prayers of my heart that I hope ascend, at least sometimes, the way the smoke from the sacrifices they are supposed to substitute for ascended.

There was a meme making the social media rounds recently with a quote often misattributed to C. S. Lewis: "You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body." My reaction—and I like to think it was a Jewish reaction—was to say to myself, "Actually, I am a body and a soul." The body is not merely a disposable container; it is the only way that we have to experience and enact holiness. Conversely, the soul, with its constituent aspects of neshama (breath) and ruach (spirit), animates the body with that spark that comes from and will ultimately go back to God, but also with individual consciousness. Body and soul together record who and where you have been, and make possible who and what you are and might be. If we rise up on our toes three times while saying the Kedusha, we come back down to stand full-footed on the ground three times as well. I don't see this as a descent, but rather as a recognition of our nature as human beings rather than angels, of the earthly realm we inhabit and through which we necessarily connect with the divine. We aspire toward the numinous at times, and might even achieve glimpses of it, but it's workaday holiness—the mitzvot, the middot—that makes up the bulk of our lives.

All of this was rattling around in my head when I read Vayakhel, with its repetition of what goes into the making of the mishkan, and I thought to myself, "Why

make a place at all, when we have all of God's creation to move through as a space for connection with the Holy One?" Why couldn't the Israelites find divinity in the vastness of the desert, beneath the immense blue sky, like proto-New Age "wanderers who are not lost"? Why make the mishkan, that elaborate yet portable (and therefore temporary) thing, decorated with other things that artfully recall the natural, such as the menorah with its "cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals" (37:20)?

Arnold Eisen argues that the mishkan allows the Israelites to "dwell" with their essentially imageless, unphysical God: YHWH their God, they now knew for sure from close encounter, could not be imaged, could not be seen or touched, is forever ethereal and beyond definition… And yet, having built the Tabernacle, they are promised that God would dwell “in them” or “among them.” (http://www.jtsa.edu/wonderment-and-order-a-path-to-the-heart)
In other words, the mishkan provides a place, a locus, where the Israelites can encounter God. We can say God is everywhere, or God is wherever we let God in, but it seems important to have a place dedicated to focusing one's energies on that possibility of encounter. Furthermore, this needs to be a made place: a sacred mountain on which to see God's back or a rock on which to rest one's head and dream of angels may work for prophets and patriarchs, but not for this stiff-necked people. The Israelites, at this point in their journey and our story, seem to need this elaborate, furnished structure, with all of its carefully delineated appurtenances.

We can better understand why they need this place if we look to its makers. Everyone whose spirit (ruach) moved them—men and women alike, the Torah specifies to an unusual degree—brought the gold, silver, copper, yarn, goats' hair, ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood necessary for the building project, so much so that the artisans asked Moses to tell them to stop (35:20-24, 36:5-7). The people's offerings make this place possible, and their gifts are important. But the artisans who use these gifts to make this place and its contents are more than unthinking laborers following detailed instructions to the cubit. They are described as "chacham lev," which Etz Hayim translates as "skilled," but says in the commentary can literally be translated as "wise-hearted" (p. 556). If we look more closely at the implications of this term, we will better understand what it means to do this work, and why it is important, both for the community and for God.

The Chasidic master Aaron of Karlin commented, "Wisdom of the mind alone, without wisdom of the heart, is worthless," and sentiments like this are often invoked to gloss the term "chacham lev" (see, for instance, Etz Hayim, p. 556, n. 36:2). We should remember, though, that the cultures of the place and time that gave birth to the Torah thought that the heart, not the head, was the seat of intelligence and consciousness. For example, when preparing a body for mummification, the ancient Egyptians would carefully preserve the heart, liver, spleen, and other organs deemed vital for the afterlife, but discarded the brain after removing it from the skull in pieces, using a long, buttonhook-like tool inserted through the nostrils. To preserve almost every major organ except the brain sounds funny to us, who believe that we are what is in our heads, but consider what it could mean for the self's center of gravity to shift from the head to the chest, to lead ourselves through life from the more centrally located torso, rather than from the

very top, with the rest of the body following after. Rather than distinguishing between the head and the heart, rationality and emotion, thought and experience, theory and practice, we might view intelligence and understanding as a more unified aspect of ourselves, one that inheres in particulars rather than abstractions.

This unity of thought and experience makes possible the relationship between mind and making, for both God and human beings. Speaking about the chief craftsman Bezalel, the rabbis comment in Midrash Sh'mot Rabbah:

The world was created with three elements as it is written: "In wisdom God founded the earth, with understanding God established the heavens, with knowledge God broke up the depths" (Prov. 3:19-20). And the tabernacle was made with these three elements as it is written: "and God has filled him [Bezalel] with God's spirit, in wisdom [chochmah], in understanding [t'vunah], and in knowledge [da'at]" (Exod. 35:31). (48:6)

In other words, God has imbued the chief maker of the mishkan—he who not only does the work but can direct others similarly skilled in this work as well—with those aspects of God's self with which God created the three realms of our visible existence (35:34). In his commentary on Exodus 35:31, Rashi interprets these three terms so that chochmah refers to "what a person learns from others," t'vunah to "the result of one's own insight and experience," and da'at as "divine inspiration, ideas that suddenly come to a person from an unknown source" (Etz Hayim, p. 355, n. 35:31). If we combine Rashi's insight with that of the Midrash, we could say that these three terms encompass the realms of human understanding: knowing through community, self, and God. Just as the earth, heavens, and depths represent what we can explore in terms of physical creation, community, self, and God represent what we can explore in terms of human experience. The master craftsman of the mishkan, that place where aspiration and experience are supposed to take their highest forms, excels in all three of these forms of knowing. Just as God is master of all realms of divine creation, Bezalel is master of all realms of human knowledge and experience.

Looking at our master makers, both human and divine, we can see why it matters to make a place like the mishkan. The earth is God's and all that fills it, including the work of our hands when this can be described as "chochmat lev." When our making connects human efforts with the modes of divine creation, we are working b'tzel'el, in God's shadow, making it possible for ourselves and others to rise and to remain rooted, to feel and to know, body and soul.

Stephanie Friedman holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts and an MA in English from the University of Chicago. She teaches writing and serves as Associate Director of Summer Session Programs in the Graham School at the University of Chicago. Stephanie and her family belong to Rodfei Zedek, where Stephanie chairs the Adult Education Committee.

Learning in a Holy Place

***by* Jennifer Moran**

What is your Holy Place? Where do you feel your soul come alive? Where do you feel a sense of awe and connection to the world, to humanity, to history, to the Divine? Where do you hear the Still, Small Voice? Is it in shul during Kol Nidrei, when the *Hazzan*'s voice reverberates off the ceiling tiles? Is it at the edge of the ocean with the waves crashing? Or beneath the giant redwood trees? Is it singing around the Shabbos table? Or listening to a Beethoven sonata? Or holding your grandchild?

One of my Holy Places is the *beit midrash*, the house of study. The *beit midrash* can be anywhere that a group gathers regularly for intensive Torah study, and especially for the study of Talmud. It is where we engage deeply with the sources of our tradition, grapple with them, argue with them, and make them our own. It is for me all of these things: a place of connection and community, of history and the present moment, of the universal and the particular, of closeness to God.

When I was a young science teacher at a Modern Orthodox yeshiva high school, I had the privilege to engage in regular Talmud study, as some of the rabbis would let me sit in on their *shiur* (lesson or lecture). The arguments and the debates delighted me. But I did not sit in the *beit midrash* and learn with a *chevruta*, or study partner. I listened to what a teacher told me the text said, but I did not decipher it for myself. I was a passenger, not a driver. I was given my first chance to "drive" when I spent the summer of 1998 learning at the Drisha Institute in New York City, which was at that time one of the few places offering full-time Talmud study to women. Although my text skills were rudimentary, I thrived on the challenge and delighted in entering the world of *Chazal* (an acronym for

חכמינו זכרונים לברכה

"Ḥakhameinu Zikhram Liv'rakha", "Our Sages, may their memory be blessed"). I also thrived on the sense of community and shared purpose. There's a reason those who have learned in yeshiva speak fondly of their *chevruta* twenty years later. Working through a text with someone, day after day, can create an enduring bond.

In the intervening years, it's been harder to find the time for Talmud study. As a single mom, my time is devoted to working and parenting. In my few spare moments, I've rarely had the energy and focus for intensive text study. But as my children get older, I've been trying to carve out more time for this precious part of my Jewish life. Which is why I was delighted to learn that my friend Jamie Weisbach, a full-time student at SVARA Yeshiva, would be leading a SVARA Beit Midrash in Hyde Park.

SVARA is a very special yeshiva. Founded by Rabbi Benay Lappe and

infused with her unique teaching style, SVARA invites those on the margins of the Jewish community, especially LGBTQ Jews, to engage in Talmud study, to take ownership of the texts and the tradition, and to become future leaders in the Jewish community. The name *Svara* means moral intuition -- a source of legal authority that the Rabbis placed on the same level as the written Torah. Part of the approach of the yeshiva is to help us bring our own sense of right and wrong, informed by our experience with pain or marginalization, into dialogue with the traditional sources in a sophisticated way. Just as the law without compassion is not justice, the written text without compassion is not Torah. When those whose voices and lived experiences have been silenced are empowered to interpret and shape the tradition, our tradition becomes better: more inclusive, more loving, more just, more whole. In reflecting the Divine Image in every human being, the SVARA beit midrash is a uniquely Holy Place.

Time in the SVARA Beit Midrash has its own unique rhythm. We begin by singing a *niggun* (wordless melody) to center ourselves and focus our thoughts on the holy work ahead. We each dedicate our learning -- to a beloved teacher or mentor, to a supportive partner, to a friend in need of healing, to the healing of our world. Then we recite together: *Blessed are you Adonai, Sovereign of the Universe, who makes us holy with Your mitzvot, and who instructs us to immerse ourselves in Torah study.* Jamie offers opening remarks and context, teaches us principles of hermeneutics, and then we plunge into learning in *chevruta*.

First, we do *Chazarah* on the previous lesson. This means reviewing the previously-studied material to the point of complete mastery. To the observer, this might look like memorization, but there's a difference: the goal here is not to parrot the text by rote, but to know it so well that we can reconstruct it. *Chazarah* immediately reveals exactly where you stand vis-à-vis the text. You can't fake your way through it.

Next, we move on to the new material. We work directly from the Vilna Shas, never from a translation. We will translate and interpret the material for ourselves, working together with our *chevruta*. Since none of us is fluent in Aramaic, this usually begins with looking up every word in our two trusty dictionaries, "Jastrow" and "Frank". We try to piece together the grammar and punctuation, to locate the root of the word, to identify bits of Talmudic jargon and legalese that indicate the form of the argument being made. Will we be generalizing from a specific example or restricting a previous generalization? Will we be comparing the case at hand to that in another section of the Talmud? Will we be presented with a proof text or a case study? The Rabbis speak to one-another in fragments and allusions and inside jokes. Like married couples, they finish each-other's sentences, or go off on a tangent about something that happened twenty years earlier. We strain to understand them, grimacing, pulling our hair, throwing our gaze upwards. We struggle to enter the discussion. Finally, a breakthrough: something makes sense; we think we've got it. Moments of elation. Jamie gets excited for us, assures us we're on the right track, but he won't lead us along. We need to do the heavy lifting ourselves.

Finally -- usually too soon -- we're called back for *Shiur*. Usually we're still in a state of partial confusion mixed with euphoria: the sensation of having pushed ourselves hard and done something worthwhile, but of still not being quite there.

We recite the old material that we've mastered, celebrating our accomplishments. At SVARA, the traditional *bracha* on completing a successful recitation, coined by Rabbi Benay, is "Memorize that feeling." We don't only commit the text itself to memory. We try to internalize what it feels like to own the text, to be an active participant in learning, interpreting, and transmitting Torah.

We then discuss the new material, together working through the translation, the meaning, and the structure of the argument. Once we've deconstructed and reconstructed the text for ourselves, we move on to the broader philosophical problem. How does this text relate to similar discussions elsewhere in Jewish thought? How does it relate to our own lived experience? Are we comfortable with the arguments the Rabbis are making, with the moral conclusions they draw? Do they frustrate us, make us angry? If so, do we have the tools to argue back? Can we make our case in a way they would understand and appreciate?

Sometimes, it feels like we can engage directly with them across the generations. I wonder at times what they would think of us -- this motley group of Jews on a continent they never visited, Jews they might not have welcomed into their own *beit midrash:* women, LGBTQ folk, people from the margins. And then I wonder what our great-grandchildren will be like, and whether they will try to engage with our Living Torah, to tell us what we got right, and who and what we left out -- and to make it better. And I hope they will make the effort.

Jennifer Moran is the Scientific Director of the Genome Engineering Core Facility at the University of Chicago, where she contributes to research on gene expression. Jennifer received her SB in Biochemistry and her PhD in Genetics from the University of Chicago. lives in Hyde Park, where she has been a participant in various minyanim and a member of Rodfei Zedek for seven years. She has two sons, Shaya (15) and Zachary (10) from her ten-year marriage to the late Bill Maddex z"l, whom she met at U. Chicago Hillel. Jennifer spends as much time as possible in outdoor recreation and in Jewish text study.

A Spectacular Sensation of Learning

***by* Rebel Without a Clue/Jeff Ruby**

Torah study.

Not long ago, the very words—Torah study—served as some kind of narcotic for me. I didn't care for much for Torah, nor was I particularly interested in studying, so the idea of putting the two of them together was not exactly high on my to-do list. The seeds for this attitude were planted when I was seven years old, suffering through Sunday after Sunday under the indifferent tutelage of unqualified teachers who had one eye on the clock and the other on their paycheck. It carried me through adolescence just long enough to become a bar mitzvah and never look back.

It's no surprise my aversion to Torah study continued into adulthood. By that point, I had begun to imagine the only ones who engaged in biblical discussions were scholars and zealots who actually *enjoyed* Halachic throwdowns. In my mind, this strange and irritating breed argued over the most esoteric details, spending entire sessions debating the meaning of single words and numbers, gesturing wildly at texts and talking over each other in their dimly lit chambers. This was no place for a guy like me, who was not a deep thinker, a true believer, or much of a scholar.

As usual, I had it all wrong.

My awakening wasn't sudden. In fact, I have fallen back asleep many times. But at some point it hit me that studying Torah was no different than studying philosophy, which was my major as an undergraduate at the University of Colorado. (Full disclosure: I probably understood only about ten percent of what I learned in philosophy classes; of that ten percent, I remember approximately one percent. I still can't believe they gave me a degree.)

Philosophy appealed to me because none of its lessons came easy. You had to *earn* it. I still remember when difficult subjects, after much frustration, finally came into focus in my brain—usually late at night while bleary-eyed at my desk—and suddenly I understood everything with absolute, technicolor clarity. It was a spectacular sensation, almost euphoric. It was the feeling of *learning.*

As I grew older and joined the work force, those moments happened less and less. Three children and 10,000 diapers later, the part of my brain that had been tweaked in college and grad school had gone pretty much dark. Once I realized what had happened, I was too tired to do anything about it. It was like going to the gym every day for four years, sweating and grunting like an animal, and then never exercising again. When you're that out of shape, where do you even start?

Torah study, that's where. The big, earth-shattering awakening I alluded to earlier? The Torah = philosophy. So I went to a study group.

Of course, I found myself surrounded by intellectuals, and most of them knew the text inside and out, so I listened far more than I talked. Two things became clear to me. First: It wasn't the messages in the Torah themselves that had always turned me off; it was the Hebrew. My eyes found the English-language commentaries in the margins, which contained unlimited mysteries, some fascinating, some impenetrable. If I were open-minded enough to dig in, I would find endless questions asked and almost answered.

The other thing I realized was that the "scholars" surrounding me had the same goals I did. When they dissected, say, the various views of the Mishkan—is it an image of a royal palace, as Maimonides believed, or a reflection of the process of the universe's creation, per the Zohar?—they wanted only to better understand their lives and the world around them. If they could draw some nugget of wisdom from the way people lived and thought long ago, then maybe they could improve the world's current situation. Or at least comprehend it.

During the next few Torah study sessions I attended, I spoke up more. And I began to find lessons that applied to my own life. That was reassuring; the notion that my problems and weaknesses had always been universal somehow implied that they were possible to overcome. All of this may seem obvious to any Jew who has been paying the slightest bit of attention over the years. I guess I'm finally doing that.

In June, I led my first Torah study, and was awfully proud of myself. It was at a Na'aseh V'Nishma service in the Glick Chapel, and the crowd that morning included both professional philosophers and antsy children. All of us rolled up our sleeves and discussed the well-known parsha in the Book of Numbers in which Moses sends the spies into the land of Canaan, which I had heard before but never paid much thought.

After listening to multiple interpretations from people in the room, some young, some old, all thoughtful, I felt that same curious euphoria I had felt 25 years ago in a Boulder basement with my dog-eared Nietzsche paperback. And it felt awfully good. I may have been at the lectern at Na'aseh V'Nishma, but I wasn't teaching. I was learning.

Jeff Ruby is the chief dining critic of Chicago magazine and is the author of the forthcoming middle school age novel, Penelope March is Melting, which will be released in November. He is a graduate of the University of Kansas journalism school and also has a bachelor's in philosophy from the University of Colorado. He is the husband of Sarah Abella, who grew up at Rodfei Zedek; and they are the parents of Hannah, Max, and Abigail.