

ברשת

Vol. II No. 3

BERESHITH: "In the Beginning"

5749 Nisan/April 1989

HOW TO FIND G-D AND KEEP YOUR FRIENDS

by Carolyn Sofia

The title may sound tongue-in-cheek, but it's not meant to be. After my own internal struggle to decide about my religious direction was finally over, I was taken aback to find that the war had only begun -- it had just moved location. Now it was an external battle, and the adversaries were my family and friends.



"It's okay being Jewish, but do you have to be so-o religious?" That question -- or accusation -- was constantly hurled at me. By that they meant: why couldn't I just be a Reform Jew, someone who would not stick out in a crowd so much. Perhaps they felt I was being anti-American. After all, if the goal of America's melting pot is to make a person blend in, my choice to keep a kosher home and be Shomeret Shabbos certainly wasn't going to add to my anonymity. Their disparaging comments sometimes angered me. They always depressed me. In the beginning we fought, and nobody really won, until I began to view the problem in a different light.

I think what my family and friends were really feeling was fear. My choice to lead this particular lifestyle disrupted our relationships temporarily and they seemed afraid I would abandon them because they did not share my beliefs. Of course that wasn't what I had planned at all. Once I understood what was bothering them, I began to realize that I could grasp the Torah with one hand and still keep the other outstretched to them. I didn't have to compromise on

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STUDYING TORAH AND MEETING A MATE

by Rifka Olenick

Since the Rosh Hashanna *Bereshith* so much has happened. But, first I want to tell you "HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION." Now just wait a second! It's really about my experience learning in a women's yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael.

I was fortunate enough to be able to take the time off. I'd been hemming and hawing over which yeshiva to go to, which method to learn, what kind of atmosphere, who would I learn with and from, and why was it important in the first place! I drove myself nuts! (Sound familiar?) But believe it or not, about five weeks before I would

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THE "PRAYER-BOOK BLUES"

by Rabbi Fred Hyman

Can you say "Psalms of Praise" ten times, fast? Can you find the first blessing of the "Shema" blind-folded? Do you hum your favorite tune of "Adon Olam" to the clackity-clack of the subway? If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you may be suffering from a spiritual malady called "The Prayer-Book Blues."

"The What-Page-Are-We-On-In-The-Prayer-Book Blues" is the title of a song written several years ago by the singing group Megamah. The entertaining lyrics and catchy melody highlight an area of concern for the Jewish community. Many Jews, desiring to return to their synagogues, find the service alienating, incomprehensible, and uninspiring.

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(cont. from p.1) TORAH

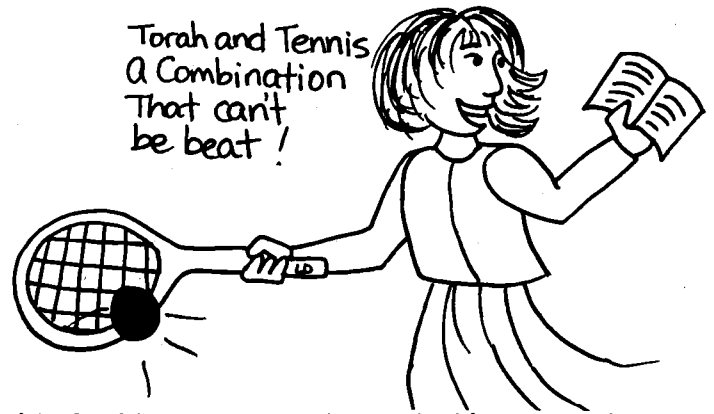
leave, I was at the Orthodox Union Torah Retreat during the Memorial Weekend (there is one every year, and you should definitely go! -- but more on that later.) Anyway, a friend of a friend, who was also on the weekend, told me about "Mission Program" for women professionals who could learn at yeshiva even for a short time and come back with a good foundation of knowledge. In two weeks? That's impossible! Wrong. This program is offered through Neve Yerushalayim, one of the first Ba'alot Teshuva Yeshivas for women, and yes this is a plug for Neve, but the real plug is for learning!

So, what is this "Mission Program" anyway? Since most of us live and work in fast-paced cities where those of us who are into learning more about Judaism very often ask ourselves, "Should I go to that shiur tonight?" "Should I bring my book and try to read a little on the train?" Or the other question: "Should I try to do some reading this Shabbos?" "Maybe I should try to catch up on my sleep!" The truth is, if you don't force yourself to do some learning (preferably a little every day) you really can't make progress. You won't do it on Sunday, because you still haven't called your mother back from last week, or your friend from two weeks ago! Besides there's laundry to do and bills to write and your apartment is a mess -- ah, forget it, go to the movies! And so, you blew it for this week! This small statement taken from Pirke Avot, Ethics of our Fathers 11:5, says it best: "Neither say: When I have leisure I will study; perchance you will have no leisure...." What else is new?

What this mission is really about is the challenge of learning. And learning is best done in an atmosphere conducive to open discussion and thought, and exchange of questions and answers - not ringing telephones and noisy trains. That's the real mission. At Neve, there are classes all day, from 9AM-3PM, at every level from beginner to advanced. There are also shiurim (classes) in the evenings if that time is more convenient. And there are counselors to help you choose a schedule based on your individual learning needs.

And let me tell you that not only are the classes interesting and thought provoking, probing into Chumash, Tenach, Mishna, Rambam, Rashi script, Halacha, Ulpan and I could go on -- but it's fun and stimulating, and cannot be compared to any kind of secular learning. Torah is the truest, purist form of knowledge, because it comes from Hashem. You'll learn with wonderful teachers; some of the most brilliant people committed to Judaism. And you'll share your classes with other Jewish women of every age, from all over the world, and even Brooklyn! Now, what else could you ask for? Oh, I forgot, of course you'll want to explore the Old City and the museums and daven (pray) at the Western Wall and maybe buy some silver Judaica in Mea Shearim. Yes, there is more! Wonderful Shabbosim

Torah and Tennis
A Combination
That can't
be beat!

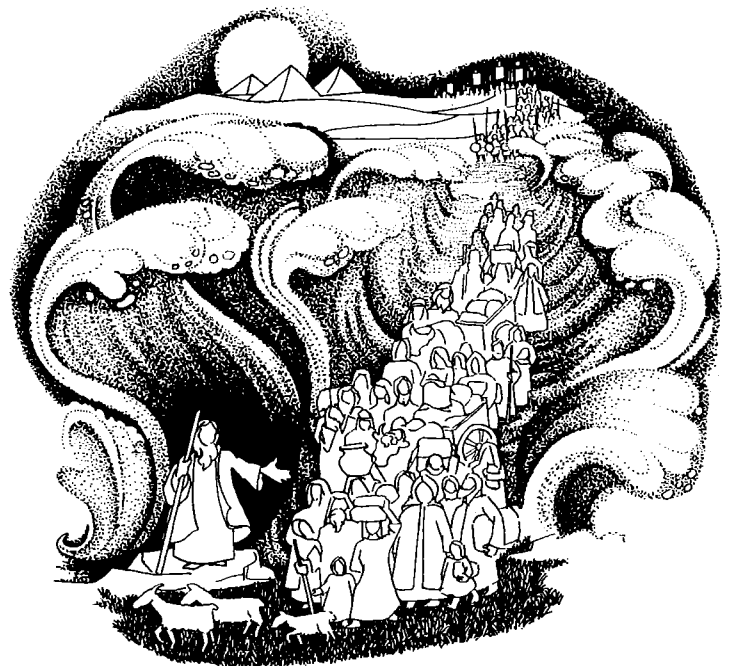


with families who are always looking to make your experience warmer and more complete. Did you ever taste real Yerushalmi kugel? This is much better than Club Med, because what you get from learning doesn't wear off in a couple of weeks like a tan! And what you come back with you can't compare. Once you begin to invest in learning, the return becomes priceless. It's an experience you'll never forget.

Oh! Remember that OU Weekend I started to tell you about? That's also a terrific weekend of learning, and there's also recreation. Since I love volleyball, that's what I did in between shiurim. And it could happen that when you least expect it you could even meet your intended. I did! On the volleyball court! And you know what? Nothing strengthens a marriage more than some good, intense learning for the chassan and CALLA (bride and groom)!

Neve's number is 212-422-4110, ask for Pat. You could also call me if you want: Rifka Olenick (formerly Posner), 718-327-5273.

Rifka Olenick works in Beth Israel Hospital and assists her husband in his medical practice.



SO YOU WANT TO DAVEN!?

by Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald

A not infrequent request I get from members of the Beginners Service is: "Rabbi, How do I daven?" "Davening" is a Yiddish term for praying. Its etymology is a matter of debate. At any rate, depending upon where you're at, the following guidelines may, or may not, prove useful.

1. Since the rabbis say that one can pray in any language, it's entirely acceptable to begin to master the art of "davening" by praying in English.
2. However, once you begin davening in Hebrew, you will realize that there is something very special and very spiritual about praying in Hebrew. First of all, every translation is a commentary, which cannot possibly capture the original meanings. Secondly, by praying in Hebrew you will be saying the exact same words that have been said by Jews for thousands of years. It is a very dramatic experience!



3. Start slowly, pick one Hebrew prayer -- I suggest the "Sh'ma" -- and recite it every day, morning and evening, before retiring to sleep.
4. Practice it slowly and carefully until you read it fluently.
5. Begin to pick out the most prominent Hebrew words whose meanings you know. Study the meanings of the other words with which you are not familiar.
6. Pick a second Hebrew prayer -- I suggest "Aleinu" or the "Amidah" for the more ambitious -- and begin to recite this prayer at least once a day as well, until you master it and its translation.
7. Little by little, add more Hebrew prayers to your daily repertoire.

8. Read some good books on prayer and the philosophy of prayer. I strongly recommend Donin's To Pray As A Jew.
9. Don't give up when things seem tedious. Remember the non-Jew grammarian Gesenius said it was worth studying the Hebrew language for ten years just to read Psalm 104 in the original.

(cont. from p.1) BLUES

The Beginners Service, a special Shabbat service for those with little or no synagogue experience, was created to address this situation. And for many years, Jews from all walks of life -- professionals and students, men and women, young and old -- interested in Jewish prayer, have explored the richness of their Jewish heritage through participation in similar programs across the country. The friendly environment of the service allows each participant to feel comfortable and to learn about the structure and meaning of Jewish prayer at his or her own pace. The leader encourages questions on any aspect of Jewish prayer or any issue related to Judaism.



Learning Jewish prayer is hard work and it takes discipline. But the rewards are worth it: a mature understanding of the Jewish prayer experience, a heightened spiritual awareness, and involvement in a supportive, caring community.

So, if you've just become a part of a Beginners Service, keep it up! If you've been at it for a while, I trust you've had a meaningful experience. Now you can convince a friend or two to find a cure for their "prayer-book blues."

Rabbi Fred Hyman leads the Beginners Service at the Hebrew Institute of White Plains, N.Y.

(cont. from p. 1) **HOW TO FIND G-D**
 my beliefs. All that was necessary was to quietly explain my position and to remind them that I loved them (shown best by actions instead of words). Eventually we came to a truce -- we agreed to disagree.



As the months went by, I did lose some friends. They were the ones who couldn't grow themselves, so they wouldn't let me grow. But others stayed, and my relationships with them and my family have steadily improved. After all, anyone who is striving to live by the precepts of the Torah is, by definition, striving to deal better with fellow humans. That's a lesson that isn't lost on family and friends, and could someday even be the spark that warms their hearts toward the love of G-d too.

Carolyn Sofia attended the Lincoln Square Synagogue Beginners Service many years ago. This article is reprinted from Jan. 1980 because of its timeliness.

KEEL AND RUDDER UNSEEN

by Nachum Cohen

*Through the sea of Life did flow
 The ship of this writer who more oft'
 pens prose
 While the ship was becalmed perforce
 A keel and a rudder kept the vessel on
 course*

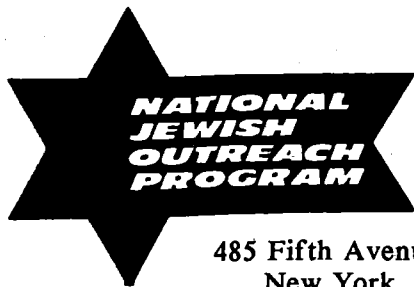
*Though no lighthouse did show its beam
 His ship was steadied by keel and rudder
 unseen
 Now that the boat has reached its bank
 Captain and crew would just like to say
 thanks!*

Cartoons by Lynne Doynow
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בראשית Bereshit: "In the Beginning" is edited under the direction of Beryl Levenson of the National Jewish Outreach Program, Inc. Special Beginners Services are conducted at synagogues throughout the United States to introduce those with limited backgrounds to the beauty of the traditional Hebrew service. For more information regarding the Beginners Service closest to your home, to establish a local Beginners Service, or to learn more about programs of the NJOP, please write or call: 485 Fifth Avenue, Suite 212, New York, NY 10017, (212) 986-7450.

Readers: This is your newsletter, and we'd like to hear from you. Article contributions are always welcome.



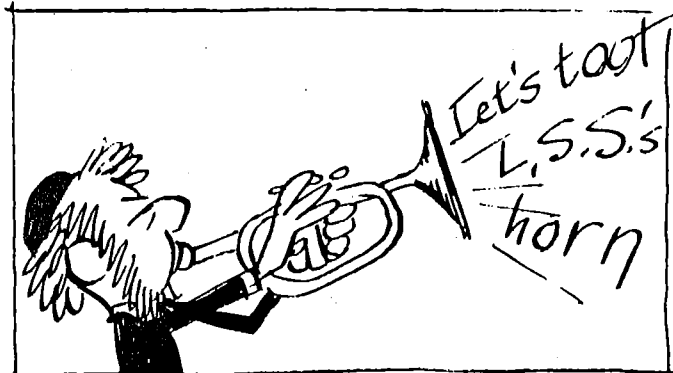
485 Fifth Avenue ~ Suite 212
 New York, NY 10017

GIVING AND TAKING

by Ida Langsam

Some of you have only just begun attending the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square Synagogue; others of you have been coming for months (or years!) Eventually, we all begin to feel like a part of the L.S.S. family, welcomed every Shabbat with open arms.

For me, it began with classes through the Joseph Shapiro Institute in the evenings, and extended to learning the joys of Shabbat. Now I truly look forward to Saturday mornings because I know -- rain or shine -- as soon as I walk through those doors, I've walked into Shabbat.



L.S.S. has given me so much, and I can't begin to tell you how my life has been influenced in so many ways. When I realized this just over a year ago, I decided that I wanted to give back to L.S.S. some of what I had been taking, and so joined the shul's publicity committee. I found that the committee was staffed with bright and interesting people who also attend L.S.S. -- beginners, intermediate and main minyan-ers -- and share a feeling of love toward Judaism, and Lincoln Square. Through a series of events, I became chairperson of the Publicity Committee, and now have the pleasure of working on a regular basis with people from all areas of the media. Whether they are from the world of publicity, writing, advertising, marketing, art, entertainment, journalism or filmmaking, there is one huge factor in common...everyone on the Publicity Committee is a volunteer, working on projects when and to the extent that they have time.

This is an open invitation to members of the Beginners Service to join the L.S.S. Publicity Committee, whether you are a member of the shul or not. Here's a chance for you to become involved in the activities of L.S.S., a real roll-up-your-sleeves opportunity to pitch in and make a difference. We need people to call editors at magazines and newspapers, write articles, place the L.S.S. rabbis on television and radio talk shows, create angles and story ideas about the shul, edit press lists, research new media outlets, draw posters to publicize the various L.S.S. events -- whatever you do best or like to do most. No professional experience necessary; your enthusiasm will make up the difference.

Want an example? OK: know the Turn Friday Night into Shabbos event which took place on March 11th? That's a very special event which L.S.S. has initiated, and coordinated on an international level. Based on L.S.S.'s experience with this program in the past, the shul was able to include 30 other congregations in 25 cities (from New York to Los Angeles, from Miami to Toronto) in an organized effort whereby all these shuls will present the same program on the same night in their individual neighborhoods. The Publicity Committee was able to place Rabbi Berman on the "Ruth Jacobs Show" on radio station WEVD to talk about this major event; the Jewish Telegraphic Agency wire service ran a story, as did The Jewish Press, the Jewish Week, and The Long Island Jewish World newspapers.

If you're interested in becoming involved -- on a volunteer basis -- with the L.S.S. Publicity Committee, please leave word for me with Janet at the Synagogue office (212)-874-6105; I'll be glad to get back to you with details.

Here's your chance to give back some of what Lincoln Square has given to you; it's never too early in your discovery of Judaism to start!