

בראשית

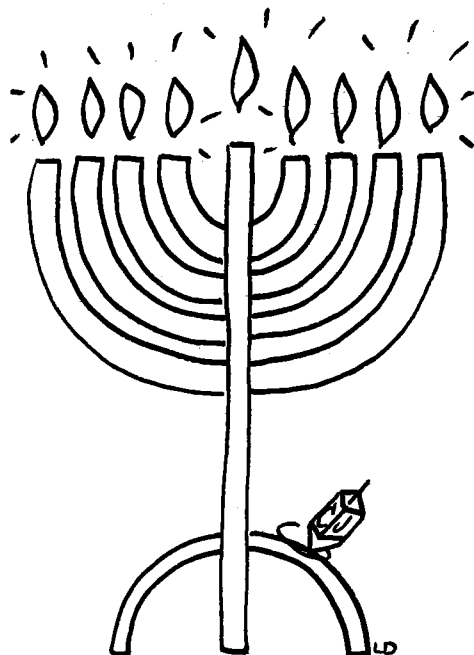
Vol. IV No. 2

BERESHITH: "In the Beginning"

5751 Kislev/Dec 1990

DREAMS THAT LEAD TO ACTION

by Rabbi David Zlatin



Everyone has dreams of what they want out of life. Why do some succeed, while others wallow in rigidity, in lack of direction, in unimaginative and uncreative directions?

There is a common theme to both Chanukah and Parshat Miketz: Face life's challenges with a creative response, and your dreams will lead to fulfillment. Let's look at the dreams of Pharaoh and Yosef. Of Pharaoh dreams, the Torah says: "And for that, the dream was doubled for Pharaoh twice, it is because the thing was established by Hashem, and Hashem will shortly bring it to pass," (Gen 30:41). We know that the seven years of bountiful harvest began that year, followed immediately by seven years of famine. Yosef also had a set of dreams, one in which he and his brothers were tying sheaves of wheat, and the other where the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed to him. Yet the fulfillment of Yosef's role as family leader did not occur for twenty years. If dreams are to lead us to action, why did Hashem cause one set of dreams to be fulfilled immediately, and the other set two decades later?

(con't. p.2)

A GIFT TO LAST A LIFETIME -- THE BEGINNERS' PRAYER SERVICE

Lorey Axel

Perhaps my story will sound familiar to you. I grew up in a Reform temple and, from the age of eight to age thirteen, went to Hebrew school. After confirmation, I attended Hebrew High School till I was eighteen. In my early years of Hebrew school I learned the Aleph Bet, and once a week after public school the teacher called on me to practice my reading. But, when I went to Friday night services at the Reform temple I really didn't need the Hebrew because most of the service was in English.

Two years later, I began learning more about Judaism and chose to pray in an Orthodox shul. Suddenly, I had a great need for Hebrew. I needed to find my place in a siddur. I needed to keep up with the reader, and I needed to have some understanding of the prayers. I had

(con't. p.3)

"IN THOSE DAYS, IN THESE TIMES"

Ephraim Z. Buchwald

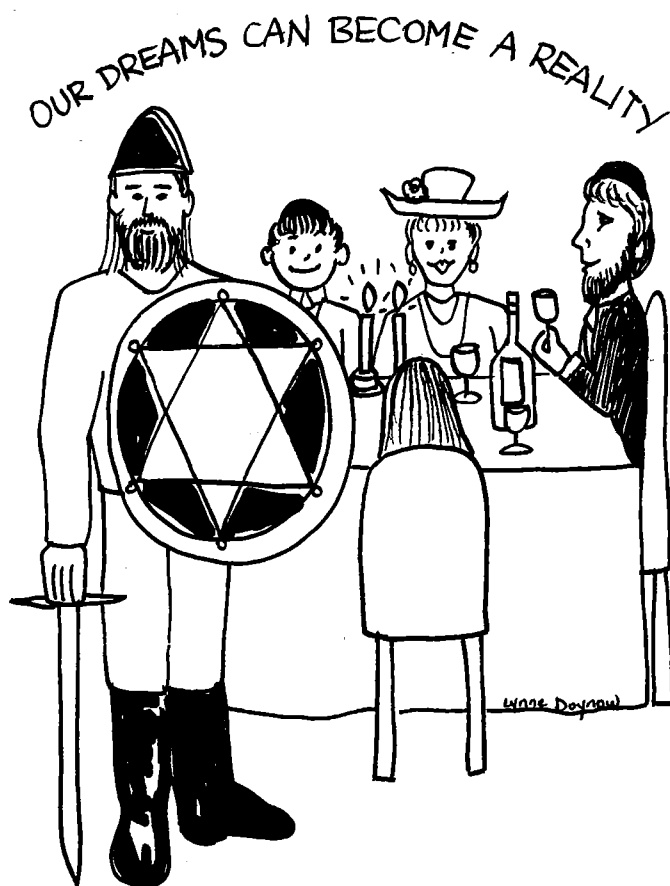
One of the primary features of Jewish life is the cyclical nature of Jewish history. Our rabbis teach that the "Deeds of the fathers, is a sign for the children." -- Jewish history repeats itself. That's why Chanukah is such an intriguing holiday.

The second blessing for the Chanukah candles says it all: "Blessed are you G-d... who has performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, in these times." You see, the battle of Chanukah was not so much between the Jews and the Syrian-Greeks. It was much more a battle between the traditional Jews and the Hellenist Jews who wanted to assimilate by adopting Greek values and practices. Numerous young boys ran to exercise naked in the gymnasiums, and some young men even went through

(cont. p.4)

DREAMS (con't. from p. 1)

The Zohar tells us that there are two kinds of dreams. One is a product of the angel, Michael, and the other the product of Gavriel. Each angel fulfills dreams; but in a different way. When Michael fulfills dreams, every word, every feature of the dream will happen, but it may take a very long time until it is fulfilled. When Gavriel fulfills dreams, parts of the dreams may not be fulfilled, but other parts, the significant ones, happen immediately. When Hashem wants to show a man exactly what is going to happen and that it is going to happen immediately, Hashem causes the man to dream a similar dream twice in the same night. This is why Pharaoh dreams twice. The first dream is delivered by Michael, indicating that everything will come true. However, the second dream is delivered by Gavriel, to indicate that the events are going to occur immediately.



But Yosef also had his dream twice -- should it not have been fulfilled immediately and completely? Look at the response of the brothers: (Gen 37:8) "And his brothers said to him: Shall you reign over us?...*They hated him because of his dreams.*" Yet at this moment, the brothers have heard only *one dream*. Apparently, Yosef did not tell his brothers about the first dream until after the second one. He knew that they would attribute the dream to his desire for grandiose leadership and not as a message from G-d. But he was confident that the dream was from Hashem brought by Michael, and thus every word would be true. Yosef had just one question: When

would it happen? Would Gavriel deliver the same dream again thereby indicating a speedy fulfillment? This question was answered when he dreamed the second dream, but later, much later, indicating that the dreams' fulfillment would also be delayed. This delay might bother the brothers, but did not bother him. He had a goal, a mission -- and as long as it was going to take, he was prepared to stay with it.

On Chanukah, we see the same message -- every night we put our Menorah in the window for *Pirsumay Nisah*, to advertise the miracle of Chanukah. But not just for the miracle that the oil lasted. *It was that the people lasted.* When it seemed impossible to overcome the odds, when the fulfillment of our dreams and hopes seemed so far away, we persisted and produced a new generation dedicated to Jewish ideals. What had been an impossible dream became a reality.

The key to Jewish survival today is the same. Each of us has that unique and special opportunity to make a difference in the history of our people. But only if we dream. And only if we turn those dreams into reality.

In order to do that, we must articulate our dreams, our aspirations, and our goals in life. We must write them down, we must think of them, act on them, and from time to time, improve and upgrade them. These lessons can be applied to everything: career, family, children, and even to ourselves! Are we as involved as we ought to be, in leading, in teaching, in building the environment needed for good Jewish living?

Yosef gave specific advice to save the people during the coming famine. Judah Maccabee reacted to Antiochus' decrees and to Jewish apathy with his personal involvement which eventually made the dream of freedom a reality. Miketz and Chanukah have one message -- *care enough to get involved, begin doing things, and your dreams of today will be the reality of tomorrow.*

A person takes a quantum leap in his/her life and begins to attend a Beginners Service. Questioning and learning, lives are re-evaluated. Slowly but surely changes begin to happen. Individuals begin to make major commitments -- Kashrut, Shabbat, and Taharat Hamishpacha. For the past five years, we at Taylor Road Synagogue have been privileged to watch these *miracles* unfolding in our Beginners Service so expertly led by Dr. Stuart Chesner. All of us at Taylor Road Synagogue and his friends throughout the country join in wishing him, Rachel and the children all the very best in their imminent Aliyah to Israel. They are turning their dream into reality. Now it's time for all of us to do the same.

Rabbi David Zlatin is the rabbi of the Taylor Road Synagogue in Cleveland, Ohio.

A GIFT TO LAST A LIFETIME (con't. from p. 1)

no idea what the *Shemoneh Esrei*, or the *Pesukei D'zimrah* were. I didn't know what *Shacharit*, *Mincha* or *Maariv* were. I was a little familiar with the *Shema*, but I had no idea it contained three paragraphs. Despite feeling frustrated and uncomfortable when I got lost and confused during davening, I didn't allow my lack of knowledge to stop me from attending the Orthodox service.

Almost one year ago, I began attending the Beginners' Prayer Service on Sunday mornings at the Jewish Heritage

Center of Queens and Long Island. I remember my first reaction: "Wow, the Rabbi is going slow enough for me to follow along!" It was an amazing feeling. The letters I had learned in Hebrew school were forming words, and I was pronouncing them! I was learning the order of the morning prayers and why we read them. I was learning why we cover our eyes during the *Shema*, and learning how to bend and bow during the *Amidah*. I was learning how the service is divided, what the names of the prayers are, what we read silently, and what we read out loud. I was also learning the most common melodies for certain popular prayers.

Most of all, I had gained confidence in myself. I finally felt that I belonged.

One year later, I still attend the Beginners' Prayers Service at the Jewish Heritage Center. Now, the service is even a bit too slow for me. Yet, I attend because each week I gain new insights as the rabbi comments on the prayers, and conveys their profound meanings. And, since the class is only one hour long, we read different paragraphs of the service each week. In fact, I find that when I daven by myself (something I could not do before), I chant the prayers using the same tune used in the service.



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I remember attending an Orthodox shul after my first time in the Beginners' prayer class. All of a sudden I realized that the prayers sounded familiar to me! I was able to find my place in the siddur, and wonder of wonders, I found myself keeping up with everyone else!

This Chanukah will be my first Chanukah as an observant Jew. As I review my first year of growth, one of the things that comes to mind immediately is how much the Beginners' prayer service has helped me, not only with the service, but also with my self-esteem. When the National Jewish Outreach Program advertises, "This Chanukah, give yourself the gift of Hebrew" they really mean it. For me, the Beginners' prayer service has been a special gift that will last a lifetime. I am grateful to the National Jewish Outreach Program for sponsoring the service, and to the Jewish Heritage Center for offering it. Wishing you all a happy and healthy Chanukah!

Lorey Axel is a senior at Hofstra University and former president of the Hillel there. She attends the Beginners Service of the Jewish Heritage Center of Queens and Long Island.

IN THOSE DAYS (cont. from p.1)

the painful procedure of reverse circumcision in order to cover up any outward signs of Jewishness. Assimilation was rampant!

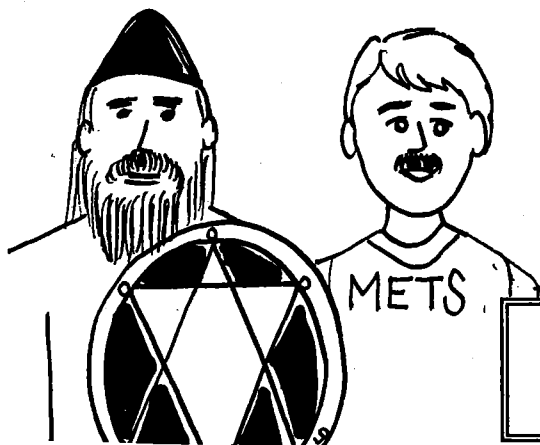
The parallels between the Hashmonaic period and contemporary American life are striking. Today the North American Jewish community is losing tens of thousands of young Jews weekly, not because of disenchantment with Judaism, but out of ignorance. Most young Jews have just never been exposed to positive Jewish experiences nor tasted the sweetness of Torah study.

That is why Chanukah today takes on added significance. Chanukah should not be construed as being merely a celebration of the ancient victory of Jews over an

oppressive nation who tried to force us to assimilate. It is to be seen as a struggle for Jewish identity and Jewish survival, and should serve as a source of inspiration to those who see little hope in the horrifying statistics of North American Jewry. The message is clear: we can fight back, and we will prevail.

May we continue to see the lights of Chanukah as lights of growth, and may these lights serve as a source of encouragement to all Jews who seek to embrace Jewish life.

Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald is the Director of the National Jewish Outreach Program, and leads the Beginners Service at the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York.



*Illustrations by Lynne Doynow
Telephone (212) 873-3389*



בראשית

Bereshith: "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.



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New York, NY 10017

DATED MATTER

NOT "YET" RELIGIOUS

By Alan Magill

I was at a Bar Mitzvah recently when someone asked me if I was "religious" from birth.

"No," I said, and with a twinkle in my eye, added, "I became religious at 6 months."

He laughed, but in my joke was the ambivalence towards what it means to me to be "religious," and who and when someone deserves that title.

Today, I wear a yarmulke, I am Sabbath observant, and I aspire to eat only kosher food and follow the laws of family purity.

Growing up in my house, I learned by the examples set by my parents, may they rest in peace, about the importance of keeping your word, respecting others, providing hospitality to the needy, and caring for the sick.

Therefore, today, I find it difficult to answer when someone asks, "Did you come from a religious home?"

To be sure, growing up we didn't observe the Sabbath or eat only Kosher food, but the things that we did do, must have had something to do with religion.

When I became "religious," - a gradual process that began around eight years ago - my parents respected my choice, and pleasantly took part in the religious rituals that I suggested for them (i.e., having a Sabbath meal when I visited from New York, lighting Chanukah candles).

At my father's funeral, a co-worker of his told me that the religious rituals I had brought into the home had meant so much to my father. I fondly recall my father sitting at the dining room table with a yarmulke perched on his head, singing Hebrew Sabbath songs, together with my mother and me, from a transliterated prayer book. Although cancer had claimed my mother's voice box, I still heard her loud and clear as she put her thumb on and off an opening in her neck to make the sounds she wanted.

I see my parents as good people, who were always willing to do more, even though it meant trying to do something a little different from their regular routine.

What I have encountered in the "religious" world in which I now travel, has at times given me pause to wonder about this new "religious" path I have chosen.

People ask me, "What prompted you to take the 'right' path?" What, after all, is that right path?

Is it the path travelled by a "religious man," well respected in the community, who owed me money for work performed for him for 2 months, making promises for payment, not kept, until finally coming through last night, when I saw the check in the mailbox?

Doesn't he read the Jewish law that says you must pay your workers before the sun goes down?

Around 75 suns rose and set before he finally paid me!

More important, he told me he was going to do something, and, on at least two occasions, did not do it. In the so-called non-religious home in which I grew up, if someone gave their word, they kept it.

Or is the right path the one that takes me to a minyan where "religious" men have casual and distracting conversations very close to me while I am trying to concentrate on saying the Mourner's Kaddish.

At one minyan, I had politely asked two men, who had been talking during the Kaddish, if they could please not talk while I said the mourner's prayer. They respected my request that day. The very next week, however, when I said the Kaddish, they were talking again and continued to talk throughout the prayer. And Jewish law says they're not supposed to.

And these are well-respected men in the "religious" community.

Does the right path lead you to Avenue J or Avenue M in Brooklyn (and probably elsewhere) on a Thursday night or a Friday afternoon, where scores of "religious" people double-park and snarl up traffic just for their own convenience? It's the law of the land not to double-park, and Jewish law says that Jews are

required to obey civil law.

This is not intended as put-down of religious people who do not entirely live up to the laws and ethics by which they profess to live. I know that NOBODY is completely perfect. That is the human condition.

G-d knows, and people who know me know, that there is much that I have to work on to live up to even half of what I believe in.

But this examination has given me a new perspective: the "right path" is simply about being ready to grow, about being good people, willing to do more, willing to try something a little different.

That "something" would vary from individual to individual: For one person it could mean lighting candles on Friday night, for another it could mean giving up eating ham, or visiting an elderly lonely aunt in a nursing home, or paying bills a little sooner, or talking a little less in synagogue, or parking in a legal spot, even if it is a block farther away from the convenience store.

So let's drop the monikers. I now see that there are no "religious" and "non-religious" people. We are all in process - not "yet" purely "religious." And may we all be given the strength to try and do a little bit more for ourselves, for others, and for G-d.

Alan Magill is a writer-recreation therapist who is happily married to Miriam Magill. They live in Brooklyn.



BEGINNER'S ANGST

by Lisa Lauer

Today, angst is as common as household word as Roloids. The quintessential difference is that only one of them spells R E L I E F.

Existential philosophy describes angst as "the dread occasioned by man's realizations that his existence is open towards an undetermined future, the emptiness of which must be filled by freely chosen actions... Anxiety characterizes the human state which entails constant confrontation with possibility for decision with the concomitant burden of responsibility." Angst is basically a 20th century phenomena, since before this century, religious dogma and spirituality had always been the main focus of people's lives.

In Judaism, for example, the Haskala, or the enlightenment movement, rejected the traditional practice of religion, and a new secularized view emerged, calling for a more formidable and free lifestyle. The rejection of sacred doctrines and blind faith were easily rationalized by the new modern man: Man had a subliminal need to create God and religion in order to give reason to his being, and not necessarily vice versa. New ideas of evolution, progress and technology, became the enlightened man's answer to prayers. The Haskala too granted asylum for those who wanted to live the Shtetl life and assimilate freely in the modern world without a complete loss of identity.

The Haskala, therefore, let man determine the meaning of religion and God. Point in fact, Albert Einstein summed it up succinctly, "To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull facilities can comprehend only in the most primitive forms this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong to the ranks of the devoutly religious man."

With the rise of these new feelings, God and the Bible became increasingly

* IF YOU WISH
TO RELIEVE
YOUR ANGST,
GO TO THE
BEGINNERS
SERVICE *



insignificant, and angst started slowly but surely to creep into man's psyche. The separation between man and his inherent spirituality left him in an emotional abyss.

Here we are in 1990, and the New Age trend shows signs of people returning unabashedly to religion. I witnessed this as I visited for the first time the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square Synagogue, led by Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald. I would not doubt that heavy doses of introspection, or at least a quest for knowledge, had led most people to this room.

I came into the room as Rabbi Buchwald was reading the story of "The Life of Sarah". He captured my short attention span as he portrayed the biblical narrative with great wit and as a true-to-life soap opera. His references to camels as stretch limousines, power and wealth capturing a desert virgin, predestination as a poor excuse for lovers' ulterior motives, and feminism reigning supreme when Rebecca's consent is a necessity to the art of the deal, made the story come to life in a contemporary manner.

As the ancient story penetrated, I felt the contemporary feeling of angst quickly disappear.

Lisa Lauer was a sales associate with Emanuel Ungaro, the fashion designer in N.Y.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Friday, December 21	
Kindle Shabbat candles.....	4:14 p.m.
Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....	4:25 p.m.
Shabbat, December 22 (VAYIGASH)	
Shabbat Morning services.....	8:45 a.m.
Talmud and Bible classes.....	3:30 p.m.
Mincha.....	4:15 p.m.
Daily Mincha and Maariv.....	4:25 p.m.
Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....	6:20 p.m.
Tuesday, December 25th	
Morning services.....	7:15 and 8:30 a.m.
Mincha.....	
No Maariv only	
Thursday December 27th	
(Maarah Stevat) Fast day	
Fast begins.....	6:05 a.m.
Morning services.....	7 & 7:30 a.m.
Mincha.....	4:15 p.m.
Fast concludes.....	5:06 p.m.
Friday, December 28	
Kindle Shabbat candles.....	4:18 p.m.
Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....	4:30 p.m.
Shabbat, December 29th (VAYECHI)	
Shabbat morning services.....	8:45 a.m.

Talmud and Bible classes.....	3:30 p.m.
Mincha.....	4:15 p.m.
Daily Mincha and Maariv.....	4:30 p.m.
Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....	6:20 p.m.
Monday, January 1st New Year's Day	
Morning Services.....	7:15 & 8:30 a.m.
No Maariv only services	
Friday, January 4th	
Kindle Shabbat candles.....	4:24 p.m.
Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....	4:35 p.m.
Shabbat, January 5th (SHENOT)	
Shabbat Morning services.....	8:45 a.m.
Talmud and Bible classes.....	3:40 p.m.
Mincha.....	4:25 p.m.
Daily Mincha and Maariv.....	4:35 p.m.
Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....	6:20 p.m.
Friday, Jan 11	
Kindle Shabbat candles.....	4:31 p.m.
Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat Rosh Chodesh.....	4:40 p.m.
Shabbat Jan 12 (VAERA)	
Rosh Chodesh Shevat	
Shabbat Morning services.....	8:45 a.m.
Talmud and Bible classes.....	3:45 p.m.
Mincha.....	4:30 p.m.

Daily Mincha & Maariv.....	6:40 p.m.
Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....	6:20 p.m.
Wednesday, January 16th	
Rosh Chodesh Shevat	
Morning Services.....	7 & 7:40 a.m.
Friday, Jan 18	
Kindle Shabbat candles.....	4:39 p.m.
Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....	4:50 p.m.
Shabbat, Jan 19 (BO)	
Shabbat Morning services.....	8:45 a.m.
Talmud and Bible classes.....	3:55 p.m.
Mincha.....	4:40 p.m.
Daily Mincha and Maariv.....	4:50 p.m.
Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....	6:20 p.m.
Monday January 21 Martin Luther King Day	
Morning Services.....	7:10 & 8:30 a.m.
Friday, Jan 25	
Kindle Shabbat candles.....	4:47 p.m.
Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....	5:00 p.m.
Shabbat, Jan 26 (BESHALACH)	
(SHABBAT SHEIRAH)	
Morning Services.....	8:45 a.m.
Talmud and Bible classes.....	4:00 p.m.
Mincha.....	4:45 p.m.