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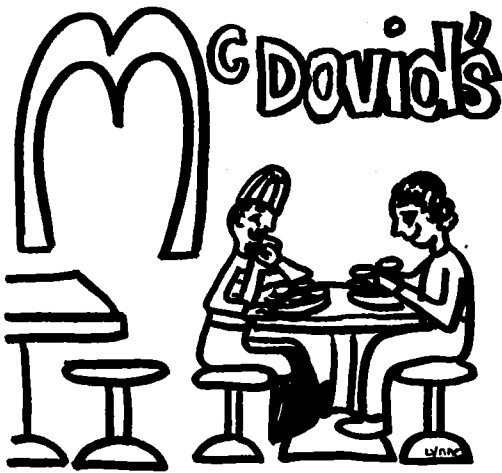
Vol. V No. 2

BERESHITH "IN THE BEGINNING"

Kislev 5752/December 1991

LATKES AND CHANUKAH GELT, ANYTHING ELSE?

By Rabbi Elimelech Gottlieb



"Rabbi, after Yom Kippur are you supposed to break your fast on kosher foods?"

"You should always eat kosher" I replied to the youngster.

"Yes, but you see, Rabbi, after the fast my family always goes out for Chinese."

What struck me most about this exchange (besides the obvious) was the sincerity with which this question was asked. Clearly, the young man sensed some inconsistency in his family's behavior. But how do we account for this behavior? How can people spend a day in the synagogue fasting, searching their souls, returning to G-d and immediately thereafter eating non-Kosher food - on the way home from shul?

Our generation has seen a remarkable resurgence in the observance of religion. People of all faiths have felt the need to bring traditional religious practices into their lives, and Jews are no exception. However, it is possible to introduce these rituals into our lives without seeking their true meaning. If we observe Yom Kippur simply because we need a Jewish holy day, we can go

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CASTING IN MONTICELLO

By Roslyn Dickens

Imagine yourself alone and adrift in the wilds of upstate New York without benefit of friends, without benefit of family, and without benefit of cold hard cash. Such was my predicament this summer, and in a perverse way, such was my good fortune.

It was an emotional rollercoaster of a day that began when, as producer of a fundraising video, I joined some 115 children and 100 counselors en route to CHAI LIFELINE'S CAMP SIMCHA.

The busses were bubbling with excitement as the campers boarded. Ranging in age from seven to twenty, these children were from varied religious, financial and international backgrounds. More than half were Israeli and didn't speak English.

What made this assemblage even more compelling was that these children were afflicted with cancer. Many were on an ever-so-brief vacation from treatments as torturous as their disease. While their greatest connection seemed to be their illness, for the next three weeks, they would be sharing in the sweetness of a stronger bond -- they were all Jewish children.

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DATELINE JERUSALEM: A GULF WAR DIARY

by Uri (Adam) Deblinger

I could imagine it happening in an absurdist play or film. I went to the hardware store to pick up some plastic sheeting and some masking tape to put it up on our windows. The last time I did this was in the winter of '78 to help insulate my drafty off - campus apartment, this time it was to protect myself and my wife and daughter from the advanced chemical weapons of Saddam Hussein. I mounted the plastic over the shaky frames of our Jerusalem apartment and chuckled over the irony of the millions of dollars Saddam spent on his missiles compared to the few dollars it was costing me to defend us from them. I had heard from a woman who had experienced an actual chemical attack in Teheran that anyone who remained shut indoors was protected, and that was without the plastic or the gas masks which we had received. This information alone would certainly not have been enough to aid us in retaining a calm state of being in the face of the hysteria stirred up by the world media. It was our religious faith and closeness with Torah scholars that enabled us to face the tension with self-control, and eventually

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The counselors were incredibly fine, deep and caring young people. I interviewed them at length about why they chose to spend their summer in this way. Their motivations were inspiring, their dedication and commitment astounding. I chalked this up to their religiosity, which I think was correct.

As a film maker, I found the situation wonderfully pithy and dramatic... "good theatre". I shot a million pictures and began to develop my premise about Jews helping Jews in need. (The NYNEX slogan ran in my ear, "WE'RE ALL CONNECTED...")

Arriving at the campgrounds, exhausted and exhilarated, we were treated to a full blown concert by the very popular, charismatic Mordechai Ben David. The energy of the singing and dancing seemed to lift the dusty little social hall right off its foundation, the spirit of Clal Yisrael had already begun to take hold.

I shot more pictures. I laughed and cried simultaneously. I had an all together dandy time. I dissolved by the time the concert ended. And what's more, I was stranded! At 5:15 PM, I was horrified to learn that I had just missed the last bus out of Port Jervis. Invitations to stay on abounded, but my schedule demanded that I return to the City.

Seeing an observant couple bidding farewell to a camper, I quickly insinuated myself into their plans and into their car en route to Monticello. (A stop they had not planned to make.) They were unbelievably gracious about it, even when their car started billowing smoke and squirting green gook all over the road. Guiltily I made my apologies and dashed off in search of the Shortline Terminal. Frantically, I commandeered a lady in a nearby car and beseeched her to drop me at the station. Shortline at last! My troubles were over, but not for long.

Yes, there was one more bus to New York City. Yes, it was at the loading dock at this very moment. (Departure a scant 7 minutes off.) Feeling relieved and redeemed, I offered my credit card. To my chagrin I learned that VISA could more easily transport me to the Himalayas than home from Monticello.

"Cash or Traveler's Checks only, no exceptions", a smug ticket sales man informed me, with what seemed undue satisfaction. No card, check or helpless plea could buy me a passage on the soon to depart LAST BUS OF THE DAY back to (the safety of) the Big Apple. I implored him for a suggestion. "Well, you could try telling your story to the Salvation Army two miles up the road but even if they do decide to help you, you'll still miss the bus." Frazzled and bewildered, I stood there blinking in disbelief.

I looked around me. The bus station sported a collection of ne'er -do - wells and other odd types, people who had no place to go, and no way to get there, and I had just joined their ranks.

Visions of sleeping in a molded plastic chair cradling my Nikons flashed before me. Suddenly out of the blue emerged two lovely young Jewish women, counselors at nearby Camp Sternberg. They approached me cautiously. (Who wouldn't?) They asked, "what seems to be the problem?"



My reply was calm and to the point, "Stuck... no cash... Visa card... no ticket... what now?... can't get home... smoking car... green gook... Salvation Army... two miles... last bus... all alone... help... momma!"

Without a moment's hesitation, Rivka took twenty dollars from her pocket and bought the ticket. Sarah ran to the gate and held the bus. They got me seated, bought me a cold drink and all but kissed me goodbye. Now that I think of it, perhaps they did.

All the way back to New York the warmth of their gesture washed over me. I smiled a lot, thinking again and again about what it means to be a member of the world Jewish community. I considered my experiences of the day and felt, as I often do when I look at this community, like I had struck gold.

It was all part of the seesaw that many Baalei Teshuva experience as we wrestle with our new relationship to Judaism. Even after all this time, there are moments when I ask myself, why I have joined this bizarre, albeit ancient club? Yes, it is sweet (and inexplicably familiar sometimes), but what is it costing me?" Mind you, there is no other area of my life where I am so scrupulous about the books. Mostly the question of where I am and why, doesn't cross my mind, but here I insist upon a running tally. Having never been able to balance my bank statement, I have suddenly become an accountant of life.

"Why am I bothering? Can I imagine that G-d (if he's up there at all) really cares if one Jewish turkey farmer's daughter eats a shrimp or watches TV on Friday night? Will I ever feel like I'm on the inside? Will I ever belong?" (As much as we Baalei Teshuva might want in, sometimes we are an awkward fit.)

Over the years, my positive experience have far outweighed my reservations. More than a happy coincidence, this particular day's events demonstrated once again the beauty of our system. At the Monticello Bus Terminal, I had been the beneficiary of Torah values in action. Not a product of one person's generosity or whimsical behavior, but the result of a great and eternal philosophy and lifestyle.

If idealism and a desire to "fix the world" are the gift and promise of
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youth, one might conclude that the counselors I met that day were characteristic of a generation, a time of life. The reality of the secular world proves otherwise.

That's not to say that those outside the system don't have good hearts, good intentions and high standards. But rather, that the wisdom of Torah provides an outlet for these impulses that nurture us, our families and our communities. Establishing our identity, ordering our priorities, finding our way is not easy to do without a framework. By providing a purpose, structure, and outlet for the goodness that humans have within themselves, I am convinced that the system works, even if individuals sometimes fail.

In Kohellet (Ecclesiastes), Chapter 11 verse 1, King Solomon writes, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it." Rashi, the classical commentary, elaborates that we should have an open hand even in situations where we think we'll never see the person again. Surely this was such a case when Sarah and Rivka cast their bread, (no pun intended) in my direction. They secured with it more than my bus ticket and my eternal gratitude. They gave me food for thought, and illustrated through this act of Chesed (kindness) that goodness is the essence of what our rabbis call "the simple Jew."

Applying our energy to serving G-d through improving ourselves and our world, does more than just keep us off the streets. It offers an order and sweetness to our lives in this world, even as we continue to contemplate the question of a World to Come.

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LATKES AND CHANUKAH GELT... (cont. from p. 1)

through all the motions of its observance - fasting, praying, even wearing sneakers - but it will have none of its intended impact.

Which brings us to Chanukah. Occurring as it does, close to December 25th, Chanukah saves millions of Jews from being left out of a festive American holiday season. Thus Chanukah has become one of the best known and widely observed Jewish holidays.

Yet, the message of Chanukah, so very important for modern Jewry, is often lost in the happiness of its celebration. Latkes, Menorah, Chanukah gelt and presents often combine to cover the real meaning of the holiday. Chanukah came about because the Jewish people refused to change their unique way of life. Though the Greeks offered the most "advanced" civilization in the world, the Jews refused to abandon the Torah and assimilate. When subjected to force, they rebelled, often sacrificing their very lives but thereby leaving us an enduring legacy. The miracle of Chanukah is the miracle of survival and the message of Chanukah is what has enabled us to survive. By clinging to our eternal Torah we remain the eternal people.

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DATELINE JERUSALEM: (Cont. from p. 1)

to grow from the experience.

The night the sirens first sounded was the most difficult. Our apartment was on the ground floor, which wouldn't be so bad in a conventional attack, but we heard that for gas the higher up the better, so we decided to "shlep" upstairs to friends on the sixth floor. The next actions should have taken five minutes according to instructions, they took thirty five. We all set ourselves in our friends' sealed room, and I helped my wife with her gas mask and to seal the inner door with tape and an ammonia soaked towel for the crack at the bottom. I put my daughter in the special infant-to-three-year-old plastic gas tent and made sure our radio was tuned to the information station. I was just placing my mask over my head, when the alert was lightened in intensity and the radio announced that we should stay in the room but remove the masks. An hour or so later we had to put them on again and take them off again, and in another three hours we were allowed to leave the sealed rooms. We had heard in the meantime that missiles had fallen in Tel Aviv, and there was damage but no deaths. This night with its uncertainty and the length of the alert was unusual, and subsequent alerts over the next six weeks were shorter. We also saw that Tel Aviv, and not Jerusalem, was the prime target. We then relaxed our actions generally during the alarms, simply sitting in our sealed rooms. We used the time, like many in the religious community, to pray for the welfare of our fellow Jews who were in danger, and to meditate on our actions with a thought to self improvement.

We were instructed to keep our gas masks with us at all times even during the day. I had been traveling with it to the Yeshiva where I study, but one day, about two and a half weeks after the alarms started, I found myself on the bus without it, having forgotten it at home. When a siren sounded, the bus driver pulled over to wait out the alarm. I had already ceased donning my mask at home during alarms, but here in this open bus I began to feel a bit nervous. Some passengers put on masks, others sat reading, a few left to nearby buildings. I decided to discuss a point of Torah study I had worked on that day with the rabbi seated next to me whom I knew. We both strove to keep our minds on the problem and off the surrounding situation. I felt my nervousness abating somewhat, but then I started to wonder if my wife had noticed that I had left my gas mask at home by accident and if perhaps I should try to get home some other way. Meanwhile a couple of Chasidim were trying to convince the bus driver that if he would read a few lines of Psalms the alarm would end. They finally succeeded in breaking down his resistance, and, strangely enough, as soon as he began reading, the all - clear signal sounded. When I got home, Sheryl, my wife, told me she had thought it was her mask lying on the chair near the door and she wondered how it got there, as she didn't remember putting it there. She also said she would prefer if I make sure however to take it with me from now on. I told her that there is an amazing thing going on here, that the Almighty was obviously raising the consciousness of the entire nation of Israel to the realization of how little control we really have over our situations in life. Here is the powerful Israeli Army and Air Force unable to act due to diplomatic pressure. Here is an expert Civil Defense authority, unable to give clear advice whether to go down into shelters (best for conventional attacks) or up to high floors. Yet weeks have passed with tens of missiles exploding in populated areas,

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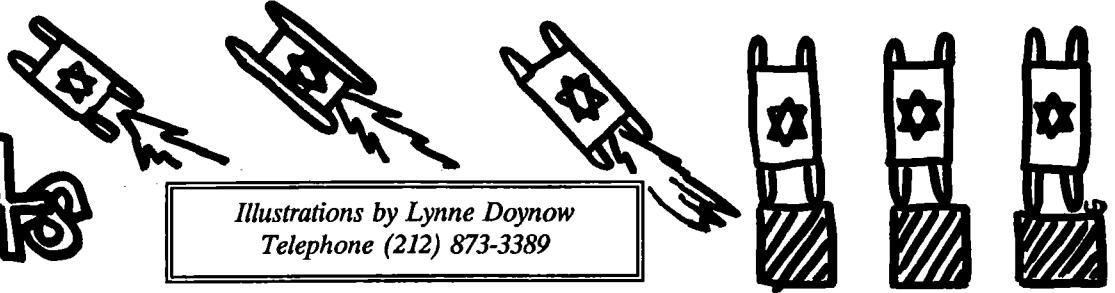
DATELINE JERUSALEM: (Cont. from p. 2)
with only one death.

A collection of reprinted newspaper articles and first hand accounts of missile landings was published here recently in Hebrew. It is entitled, Emunah, which means faith, and the reader cannot help but feel moved at the astounding number of fortuitous "coincidences" described. This one felt a sudden whim to visit her mother who lived four hours away and so there was no one in their home when the missile wrecked it. That one was home and was buried up to the neck in debris, but emerged with just scratches while his two large dogs, one on either side of him, were both killed. This one decided to go help his elderly neighbor with her gas mask, and avoided an explosion. A story which was only released recently for security reasons, describes a malfunction in a major junction of Tel Aviv's gas pipeline which caused it to be shut down several days before the start of the war. This site was hit in one of the first attacks, and, had the junction been in use, half of Tel Aviv could have gone up in flames. As it was, it just wrecked empty pipes. And on and on, until the final day, when the U.S. Desert Commandos found and disabled 26 missile sites. The truce was called the next day, which "just happened" to be Purim, (the Jewish holiday celebrating victory over the anti - semite, Haman).

I will conclude with an observation which made a deep impression on all those, both within and without the religious community, who were aware of it. The rainy season in Israel usually begins in late October or November and is vital to the country, for the majority of our water supply comes from the skies. There had not been a single rainfall through all of October and November. By December the Water Ministry had been making announcements daily on the dangerously low level of the Kinneret, and anticipating emergency actions. The religious community responded with the special prayers for rain, which also include requests for protection from other dangers including hostile foreign powers. These prayers were recited in all religious schools and synagogues throughout the country for several weeks before the start of the Persian Gulf war. The same week that the war started with its miracles, the rain came with their blessing, showers almost daily throughout that period. In addition, we were comforted by the news that chemical bombs are rendered much less effective by rain. I hope that all who read this will pause and join me in reflection and acknowledgment of our debt of thanks to Hashem, the eternal Protector of His people, Israel.

Uri (Adam) Deblinger, formerly a member of the LSS Beginners Service is currently studying in Jerusalem.

**G-D's
Patriots**



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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.

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