

בראשית

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BERESHITH "IN THE BEGINNING"

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THE TRUE LIGHT OF CHANUKAH

by Rabbi Elly Krinsky

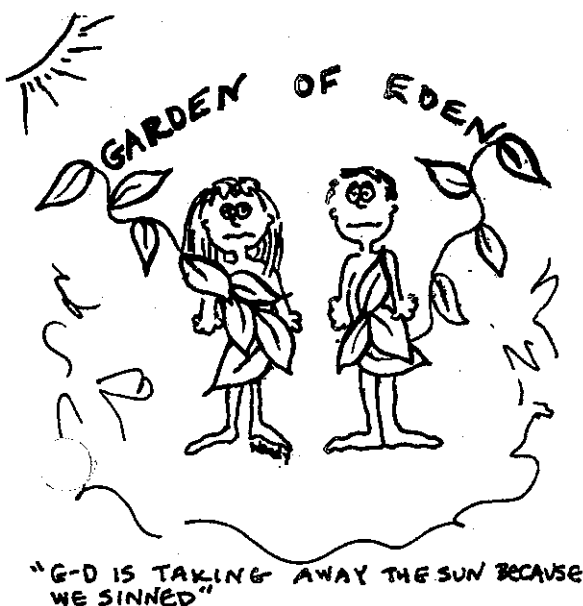
MarCheshvan. (The bitter month of Cheshvan) The very name reminds us of the month's lack of ritual and celebration. It arouses feelings of emptiness, bitterness, negativity. We think of gloomy rainy days, chilly cold weather and runny noses. Even in Yerushalayim, the city of eternal light, I am reminded of these dismal images, as I recall my winter days spent studying in Yeshiva.

Our rabbis teach us that Adam HaRishon, the first human, experienced similar sentiments. Let's quickly review Adam's life. He was created on the first day of Tishrei, a Friday.

On that day Chava, his helpmate, was created as well, and they were placed in the utopian Garden of Eden, to "work it and protect it." They were told that they could benefit from all the fruits of the garden, but must not eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Adam and Chava ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree, and were summarily banished from the Garden of Eden. All of this takes place on Erev Shabbat, of the very first Friday of existence. The humans sinned on the very day that they were created.

Despite the sin, Hashem grants a great chessed (kindness) to Adam and Chava: Despite their sin He allows them to spend the first Shabbat of existence in the Holy Garden.

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IT SHOULD ONCE AGAIN SEE LIGHT

by Blair P. Grubb, M.D.

Several years ago, a physician from southern France contacted me. His granddaughter had taken ill with a disease that baffled the physicians there. He called after reading several of my articles on disorders of the autonomic nervous system. His granddaughter's symptoms seemed to match those I had described, and he asked me if I could help. I readily agreed, and for many months, I collaborated with the child's French physicians by telephone and by fax, directing their diagnostic testing. At last we came to a diagnosis, and I prescribed a course of therapy. During the next several weeks, the child seemingly made a miraculous recovery. Her grandparents expressed their heartfelt thanks and told me to let them know should I ever come to France. In the summer of 1996, I was invited to speak at a large scientific meeting that was held in Nice, France. I sent word to the physician I had helped years before. Upon my arrival at the hotel, I received a message to contact him. I called him and we arranged a night to meet for dinner.

On the appointed day we met and then drove north to his home in the beautiful southern countryside. It was humbling to learn that his home was older than the United

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THE DAY SCHOOL... THEN AND NOW

by Anne Gottlieb

"Please give it a try," he had said. "I think it is important."

I was not sold—either on the importance, or the trying. Day schools, private religious day schools in particular were outside my realm of experience. I am a public school graduate.

But, I was newly married, wanting to please. And, somewhere within the reaches of my conscience, I could recognize a certain truth in what my spouse was telling me.

He and I, each married for the second time, have had to rely heavily on trust and maturity this time 'round. Although he has no children of his own, he has taken on my son and daughter with the warmth and caring of a dedicated parent.

So I said I would look at the Day School. I said I would consider it because I loved my husband, because I believed he had my children's best interest at heart. I said I would look at the Day School because I sensed beneath our surface conversation about Judaism and faith, a depth of understanding which I envied.

My husband has a strong background in our religion. He

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THE DAY SCHOOL... (cont. from p. 1)

attended yeshivot from kindergarten through college. He read, studied, argued, rejected and accepted. My husband was reared in an Orthodox home where being Jewish meant simply, to be.

I, on the other hand, while labeling myself a proud Jew, am perhaps more honestly, an assimilated American Jew. I hesitated at the thought of a day school for the liberated identity I thought my children would lose.

I wanted my son and daughter to mix with other youngsters--to know that there are black people, yellow people, tan people. I want my son and daughter to feel strong and secure in a world of many races and faiths.

And my husband said, "They will. They will," he said, "because they will be strong and secure in their knowledge of who they are. They will be proud, and their pride will allow them to accept other people's individuality."

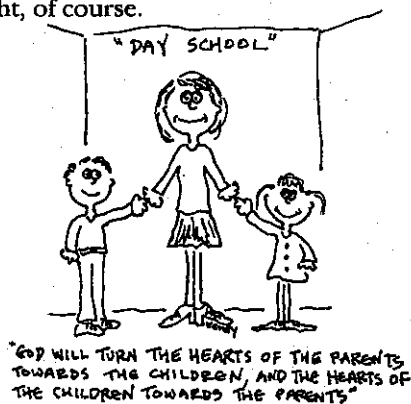
"But what about the indoctrination?" I asked. "Will the Day School teach my children that Jews who eat McDonald's hamburgers are bad? That Jewish people who drive on Shabbat are not Jews?"

In my attempt to protect my offspring, and because of the fear of the unknown, I wavered. "Too much," I said. "Perhaps a day school will be too much."

I cried. At 1 am on a weekday night three days before the start of school, I agonized at the change in direction my life might take. I cried until my daughter, age eight at the time, tiptoed out of her bedroom to comfort me.

"Mommy," she said, "are you worried about the school? Mommy," she said, "don't worry so much. Maybe the day school is an opportunity we shouldn't pass up."

She was right, of course.



The Day School . . . it has added songs and prayers and a sense of security to my life. It has given my son and daughter an understanding of who they are. They tell me stories about their ancestors, my ancestors - - brave, powerful, real - - men and women.

The Day School has taught my children to accept differences among people, to see the good in others. They climb on the bus each morning, smiling. They come home singing, laughing, spilling their tales of math and social studies, science, literature, the prophets, the holidays.

They love no one more or less for his level of Jewish observance. They are growing quickly in their range of understanding. And, they are teaching me.

They continue to play softball and baseball, to take dancing lessons and piano lessons, to play with children of all ages and races. They have lost nothing by attending the Day School. They have gained everything.

And so have I.

. . . And Now

Rockland Hebrew Day School--it's as much my school, as it is my children's. It is the place which has given me a daughter who now attends Yeshiva High School and a son who learns at Yeshiva

Shaarei Torah every Wednesday night. But more than that, it has given me the ability to appreciate what it is my son and daughter have achieved. And further, it has touched something within me.

From the time a number of years ago when my children first entered this place, I would volunteer to serve hot lunches as often as I could--not so much because I wanted to give something to the school--but rather, because I wanted to take something from it. I never told this to anyone, but long before I understood the meaning of the *Birchat HaMazon*, I used to stand just outside the lunchroom doors to listen while the children bentedched (said grace). And I would cry at the sound of their voices.

And whenever I could, (without seeming overly anxious), I'd pick up the children from school on Friday afternoons so I could watch the Oneg.

Without their knowing it, I used to practice all the songs the children learned in school--I'd sing them to myself before I learned to read the words.

And then, one day I had the courage to ask my children to teach me to read. Which they did, with patience and with pride. Each day they'd help me stumble over letters until at last I could follow one line and then another--and every afternoon when they'd come home from school, I'd borrow my son's first grade book, and he would help me print the letters.

And then, they told me that they'd learned in school that we could build a Sukkah in our own yard if we'd like. They said, "please" and my pulse quickened, because I think it meant as much to me as it did to them. And then their classes came to visit -- came to visit our Sukkah. And I served them fruit and juice and cookies in our Sukkah -- and I had to turn away because my eyes were filled with tears . . . again.

And I volunteered to serve lunch at every Model Seder because I needed to see the children in their beautiful clothes sitting beside the deaf children from HID (Hebrew Institute for the Deaf) and the children with Down Syndrome from HASC (Hebrew Academy for Special Children) whom they'd invited to share the meal, sitting beside strangers, reaching out to strangers with whom they shared something in common. And in their reaching out, I learned to reach out too.

And I chaperoned the class trip to the Kosher Food Fair in New York. And I chaperoned the class trip to the Brochos Bee (competition for Blessings). And my son was asked to join the T'Zlil V'Zmer Boys Choir because the music teacher who taught at the Day School was the choir master. And while my son sang his heart out, I sang silently, always grateful to this little school.

And we visited Israel twice, where my children could understand the language and the road signs, could converse with the people, could shop in the supermarket, could talk to the children, could show me our history.

And on Purim, we received baskets of fruit and candy and the children called it *Sbalach Manot*. And we made baskets of fruit and candy and we called it *Sbalach Manot*. And we drove all over Monsey and Spring Valley delivering the baskets.

And I dressed as a clown because it was Purim. And my son played the saxophone at the Rockland Hebrew Day School Purim party.

Oh yes. . . and then, one of the teachers invited us to spend a Shabbat at her home--and she taught me how to make a pot of cholent and our children played with her children. It was winter time--Chanukah--and when we arrived home, my son and daughter said, "Let's keep Shabbos."

And we did. And we do. And it's beautiful. And it all has to do with this school, which I love . . . very much!

Anne Gottlieb is Director of Public Affairs for Rockland ARC, a resource for people with disabilities, and she is finishing a book on her personal experiences of growing with Judaism.

THE TRUE LIGHT (cont. from p. 1)

For this kindness, Chazal (our Rabbis) teach us that Adam composed "Mizmor shir l'yom haShabbat," psalm 92, the Shabbat psalm which we recite weekly to welcome the Shabbat. Adam, however, lived a life of great despair, constantly repenting, constantly recalling his sin, and living with the chilling realization that his act had changed the status of humanity forever. As Adam immersed himself into despondency, he noticed a natural phenomenon that also frightened him. He realized that as every day passed, less and less daylight showed on earth; the world was getting darker! Adam thought that, because of his sin in the garden of Eden, the Almighty planned to eliminate light from the world. He saw that the days were getting shorter and panicked. The Talmud in tractate *Avodah Zarab* (8b) notes that in response to his fear Adam fasted for eight days, and begged Hashem not to remove light from the earth. He beseeched the Almighty not to condemn humanity to eternal torture by casting it into a bleak and blind existence.

The eighth day of Adam's fast coincided with the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. After the fast, the amount of daylight began to increase day-by-day, and Adam was relieved. Adam then celebrated an eight day holiday, and this holiday was observed year after year, until it was lost.

Years later, in the desert of Sinai, the Jews completed the construction of the Mishkan (the Tabernacle) the "this world" abode of the Almighty. This project was completed on the exact same day of the year that Adam's ancient fast began—on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev, the first day of Chanukah.

Chanukah does not only represent the victory of Shem over Yefet, the Jews over the Greeks; it does not merely recall the great miracle of the lights and the oil. Chanukah is always celebrated during the darkest time of the year. Chanukah, in effect, cries out to the Jewish people not to despair.

Imagine, if you will, a marathon. The runners fly by in a sea of perspiration, the crowds cheer the runners' speed and courage. When I grew up, I lived down the street from the 24½ mile mark of the Boston Marathon. As the runners ran by, we would hold up signs informing the runners that only two miles were left. Many spectators would provide the runners with water, which the runners drank, poured over their heads and bodies, and smiled, all because they saw that we cared. Chanukah too, comes in the darkness of the winter, to encourage us to persevere, and to remind us that spring is just around the corner.

Jewish holidays often parallel the agricultural cycles. The holidays associated with the fall are holidays of prayer for a fruitful rainy season, as we gather our food in from the fields for the winter. We pray that the rainy season will provide the appropriate amount of nourishment for the ground. Not too much, yet not too little. The spring holidays are times of thanksgiving for the bountiful crops which Hashem gives us.

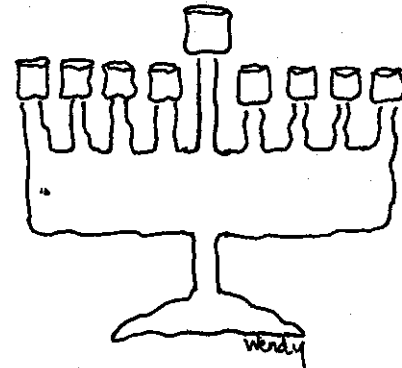
Our beautiful and meaningful calendar teaches us that in the doldrums of bitterness, in the midst of the murkiness of winter, we need a spiritual wake up call. The history of Chanukah also attests to this fact. After the grim sin in Eden, Adam and Chava needed to be reminded that they must move on with their lives. After *Chet ba'egel*, the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people were given the opportunity to redeem themselves, by erecting the Mishkan, a tangible home for G-d's presence. A thousand years later, in the darkness of the Selucid persecutions, the Jews were given an opportunity to redeem themselves once again—through the festival of Chanukah.

During the daily prayer liturgy after the reading of the Torah, we implore the Almighty to remove our brethren from current persecutions and situations of suffering. We ask Hashem to

"have mercy on them and remove them from pain to gain, from light to dark, from subjugation to redemption . . ." For those who are suffering, maintaining hope is a life-line. Without that hope, we could lose our sanity and our will to live. And so, we must always pray to Hashem to help us keep our heads up, especially in the darkest of days.

Rabbi Elly Krinsky is Assistant Rabbi and Outreach Director at Congregation Beth Sholom in Potomac, MD, where he leads the Beginners Service.

"IL FAUDRA VOIR LA LUMIERE ENCORE
UNE FOIS"



IT SHOULD ONCE AGAIN . . . (cont. from p. 1)

States. During the drive he told me that his wife had metastatic breast cancer and was not well, but she insisted upon meeting me. When introduced to her, I saw that despite her severe illness, she was still a beautiful woman with a noble bearing.

I was thereafter treated to one of the most wonderful meals I have eaten, complemented by the most exquisite of wines. After dinner, we sat in a 17th century salon, sipping cognac and chatting. Our conversation must have seemed odd to the young man and woman who served us because it came out in a free flowing mixture of English, French and Spanish. After a time the woman asked, "My husband tells me you are Jewish, no?" "Yes," I said, "I am a Jew." They asked me to tell them about Judaism, especially the holidays, I did my best to explain and was astounded by how little they knew of Judaism. She seemed to be particularly interested in Chanukah. Once I had finished answering her questions, she suddenly looked me in the eye and said, "I have something I want to give you." She disappeared and returned several moments later with a package wrapped in cloth. She sat, her tired eyes slowly looking into mine, and she began to speak slowly.

"When I was a little girl of eight years, during the Second World War, the authorities came to our village to round up all the Jews. My best friend at the time was a girl of my age named Jeanette. One morning when I came to play, I saw her family being forced at gunpoint into a truck. I ran home and told my mother what had happened and asked where Jeanette was going. 'Don't worry,' she said, 'Jeanette will be back soon.' I ran back to Jeanette's house only to find that she was gone and that the other villagers were looting her home of valuables, except for the Judaic items, which were thrown into the street. As I approached, I saw an item from her house lying in the dirt. I picked it up and recognized it as an object that Jeanette and her family would light around Christmas time. In my little girl's mind I said 'I will take this home and keep

(cont. on p. 4)

IT SHOULD ONCE AGAIN (cont. from p. 3)

it for Jeanette, till she comes back,' but she and her family never returned." She paused and took a slow sip of brandy. "Since that time I have kept it. I hid it from my parents and didn't tell a soul of its existence. Indeed, over the last 50 years the only person who knew of it was my husband. When I found out what really happened to the Jews, and how many of the people had collaborated with the Nazis, I could not bear to look at it. Yet I kept it, hidden, waiting for something, although I wasn't sure what. Now I know what I was waiting for. It was you, a Jew, who helped cure our granddaughter, and it is to you I entrust this."

Her trembling hands set the package on my lap. I slowly unwrapped the cloth from around it. Inside was a menorah, but unlike any I had ever seen before. Made of solid brass, it had eight cups for holding oil and wicks and a ninth cup centered above the others. It had a ring attached to the top, and the woman mentioned that she remembered that Jeanette's family would hang it in the hallway of their home.

It looked quite old to me; later, several people told me that it is probably at least 100 years old. As I held it and thought about what it represented, I began to cry. All I could manage to say was a garbled "merci." As I left, her last words to me were "Il faudra voir la lumiere encore une fois"-it should once again see light.

I later learned that she died less than one month after our meeting. This Chanukah, the menorah will once again see light. And as I and my family light it, we will say a special prayer in honor of those of those whose memories it represents. We will not let its lights go out again.

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Shabbat Across America

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Bereshith: "In the Beginning" is edited under the direction of Beryl Levenson and Amy Gugig 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 701, New York, NY 10017, (212) 986-7450.

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