

A BAAL TESHUVA'S AKEIDA*

*The binding of Isaac represents an ultimate test of belief

by Mark Ellman

It was every single man's dream. And every married man's nightmare...

All year I'd wanted to write one of those "About Men" columns for the *Sunday Times*. Unfortunately, nothing manly had happened to me in--well, longer than I'd care to admit to you, anyway. Until last Thursday.

That night I decided to see Michael Feinstein on Broadway. Mike's a friend (we're both from Columbus) who within the last year has ascended to major stardom. After the show, I made my way backstage where I was forced to wait for a reception with groupies and autograph hounds, like a common fan.

From outside the dressing room door I observed one such fan, rather stunning, extremely blonde, and most probably not affiliated with the Orthodox, Conservative or Reform movements. She delivered to Mike a charming spiel--not too giddy or self-conscious--just sweet and endearing, enough to make me want to fall in love with her.

She finished her thing and left the room, and my life, so I thought.

Mike and I visited. Then, on my way out, I heard a sweet and endearing voice from on high asking for directions to the exit. I glided up the stairs. It was she. I offered myself as an escort, and in no time at all we were both trapped in the mezzanine of the Lyceum Theater.

And I mean trapped. It was well past midnight. The building was dark and deserted, with every reachable door chained and padlocked. Grasping the situation, I decided the only reasonable course was to panic, but desperate cries to "Anybody out there" only made it more difficult to maintain my poise while hyperventilating.

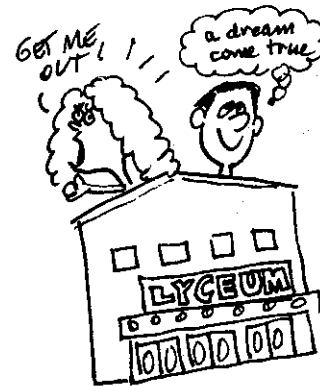
So we parked ourselves in Mezzanine F43 and F44 and discussed the irony of our

predicament, until a janitor came and sprung us. (I considered telling him to go on ahead, that we'd lock up when we're done, but he had an attitude, evidently he was a very important janitor.)

Once outside, I invited her, if she had no plans, to continue our discussion over coffee. For the next two hours I listened to her hopes and dreams, shared a few of my own, and basically became captivated.

We shared a taxi home and as I was being dropped off, she made a confession. She had had plans when I asked her for coffee, but preferred spending the time with me. Then she asked me out.

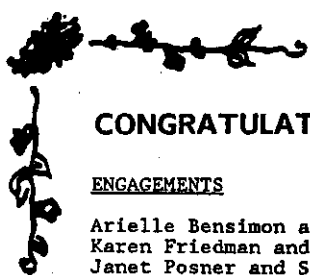
As a man of principle and steadfast proponent of traditional Jewish values, the lightning speed with which I accepted very nearly startled me.



You see, I should explain something here, I'm not a stud. The last time a flaxen vision of budding gentilehood had asked me out...All right, a flaxen vision of budding gentilehood had never asked me out, that I recall.

I remember noting how crucial positioning is. Were I on the make, engaging her at some bar, it would have been hopeless. But here I had status. I knew the celebrity. More to the point, I was not hitting on her, and she knew it.

(cont. on back page)



CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZEL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Arielle Bensimon and Jacob Feit
 Karen Friedman and Stuart Adler
 Janet Posner and Sam Horwitz
 Susan Schneider and Chaim Banner
 Miriam Torkan and Tod Jacobs
 Carole Weisz and Michael Putter
 Jan Zipnick and Roger Wingard Wallach

MARRIAGES

Donna Blackman and Jack Mensch
 Shelly Cohen and Morton Goldberg
 Abigail Hirsch and Dr. Michael Kessin
 Susan Lazow and David Cohen
 Beth Miller and Sean Gordon
 Andrea Nevins and Alan Sherman
 Rivka Posner and Levy Olinick
 Pam Stern and Benjamin Sherr
 Viva Welles and Michael Feiner

BIRTHS

Arlene and Ephraim Arfe on the birth of a daughter Avichayil Sarah
 Leslie and Phil Berger on the arrival of a daughter Julia
 Lorraine and Rafi Epan on the birth of a daughter Alexandra Naomi
 Deborah and Gary Goldstein on the birth of a daughter Rachel Jessica
 Wendy and Dr. Seymour Gottlieb on the birth of a daughter Serach
 Hadassah and Bill Greenbaum on the birth of a daughter Aliza Yocheved
 Orah and Dr. Manfred Hahn on the birth of a daughter Paloma Mia
 Ruth and Jack Raisner on the birth of a son Yitzchak Shlomo
 Sharona and Steve Spivak on the birth of a son Adiv

BAR AND BAT MITZVAH

Eleanor Garz-Grossblatt
 Benjamin Mordechai Blumberg, grandson of Marion Friedman

REFUAH SHELEMA (Speedy Recovery)

Greg Sholom

CONDOLENCES

Miriam and Sam Glick on the loss of their son Mennashe Aaron
 Daniel Katz on the loss of his mother Dora Epstein Katz
 Bruce Teleky on the loss of his mother Rose Teleky

CONGRATULATIONS

Bracha Leiberman for organizing LSS's successful toy drive
 To Betty Jacobs upon the publication of "Why Was this Sabbath Different
 from All Others," Jewish Week, Sept. 9, 1988 and "Thou Shalt Get
 Married (Already?)" Moment, October 1988
 Nesta Feldman on granddaughter Emily White winning Chopin piano competition



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 * **Beginners & Intermediate** *
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 * **Chanukah Party** *
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 * Dec. 10, 7:30 pm, \$15 *
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 * **Beginners Luncheon** *
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 * Jan. 7, Feb. 4, Mar. 4 *
 *
 * cost \$10 *
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 * **Beginners Schmooze** *
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 * Jan. 2, Apr. 3, 8:15 pm *
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 * "Turn Friday Night into Shabbos" *
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 * March 31 *
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 * **Beginners Shabbaton** *
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 * April 14-15 *
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 * **Reserve the dates** *
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 * **Details to follow** *
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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Shabbat, November 26 (VAYISHLACH)
 Shabbat Morning Services.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....3:30 p.m.
 Mincha4:15 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....4:25 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Friday, December 2nd
 Kindle Shabbat Candles.....4:11 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:20 p.m.

Shabbat, December 3rd (VAYAYSHEV)
 Shabbat Morning Services.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....3:25 p.m.
 Mincha4:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....4:25 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.
 Saturday Night December 3rd
 Kindle First Chanukah Candle

Sunday, Dec 4th Chanukah
 Morning services.....7 and 8:30 a.m.
 Monday-Thursday Chanukah

Dec 5-8
 Morning services.....7 & 7:50 a.m.

Friday, Dec 9 Chanukah
 Rosh Chodesh Teveth
 Morning services.....7 & 7:40 a.m.
 Kindle 7th Chanukah Candles by.....4:05 p.m.
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:11 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:20 p.m.

Shabbat, Dec. 10th (MEKAYTZ)
 Shabbat Chanukah
 Shabbat Morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....3:25 p.m.
 Mincha.....4:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha & Maariv.....4:25 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 11 Chanukah
 Morning services.....7 & 8:30 a.m.

Friday, Dec 16th
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:12 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:20 p.m.

Shabbat, Dec 17th (VAYIGASH)
 Shabbat Morning services.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....3:25 p.m.
 Mincha.....4:10 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....4:25 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 18th
 (Asarah Btevet) Fast day
 Fast begins6:03 a.m.
 Morning services.....7 & 8:30 a.m.
 Mincha.....4:10 p.m.
 Fast concludes.....5:02 p.m.

Friday, December 23rd
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:15 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:25 p.m.

Shabbat, December 24th (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.....4:25 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Friday, Dec 30th
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:20 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:30 p.m.

Shabbat, Dec. 31 (SHEMOT)
 Shabbat Morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible classes.....3:35 p.m.
 Mincha.....4:20 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....4:30 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 1
 Morning services.....7:15 AND 8:30 a.m.

Friday, Jan 6
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:26 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:35 p.m.

Shabbat Jan 7 (VAERA)
 Rosh Chodesh Shevat
 Shabbat Morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible Classes.....3:40 p.m.
 Mincha4:25 p.m.
 Daily Mincha & Maariv.....4:40 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Friday, Jan 13
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:33 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:45 p.m.

Shabbat, Jan. 14 (BO)
 Shabbat Morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible classes.....3:50 p.m.
 Mincha.....4:35 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....4:45 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Friday, Jan 20
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:41 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....4:50 p.m.

Shabbat, Jan 21 (BESHALACH)
 TU B'Shevat (SHABBAT SHIRAH)
 Morning services.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible classes.....3:55 p.m.
 Mincha.....4:40 p.m.
 Daily Mincha & Maariv.....4:55 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Friday, Jan 27
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:49 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....5:00 p.m.

Shabbat, Jan 28 (YITRO)
 Shabbat Morning services.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible classes.....4:05 p.m.
 Mincha.....4:50 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....5:05 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Fri, Feb 3
 Kindle Shabbat candles.....4:58 p.m.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat.....5:10 p.m.

Shabbat, Feb 4 (MISHPATIM)
 Shabbat Morning service.....8:45 a.m.
 Talmud and Bible classes.....4:15 p.m.
 Mincha5:00 p.m.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv.....5:10 p.m.
 Maariv only Mon-Thurs.....6:20 p.m.

Rosh Chodesh Adar I
 Sunday Feb. 5th
 Morning Services.....7:00 & 8:30 a.m.
 AND Monday Feb. 6th
 Morning Services7 & 7:40 a.m.

(cont. from front page) AKEIDA

In fairness to myself, I did turn her down for Friday night, but only because she offered Saturday as an alternative. Saturday night was ideal. I could date a gentile woman and still keep the Shabbos!

She explained that she'd have to juggle her schedule; she'd call Friday to confirm. I told her to be sure to call before dark, and we said goodnight.

By thirty-one, I've always held, brief encounters mean nothing. That's why I was caught offguard when moments later my central nervous system threw a party. Lying in bed too excited to sleep, I considered my soul.

To suggest that I was agonizing over how far I'd go would be an untruth. I knew before we said goodnight. Not that I was planning to carry this beyond all limits, but the limits I had in mind would still be respectable among the more conservative elements in the suburbs of Sodom.

I felt like Israel, having enjoyed the conviction of being morally superior over centuries of powerlessness. Now, with power, it seemed we were both being tested.

But my dominant emotion was anger.

Why must righteous conduct be such a wrenching struggle? I knew what I was ready to do was wrong, black and white. And yet, I craved this intimacy, and not merely for physical reasons. In fact, it was primarily psychic. It had been a long time since I had communed this way with another soul, since I had been confronted with such overpowering chemistry.

Let's face it, Torah living has great philosophic appeal, even therapeutic appeal, but almost no sex appeal. Maybe I'm out of line, but is it wrong to expect an occasional thrill rivaling that of seducing a pug-nosed wunderbod from Presbyteria?

Anyway, if you've read this far, you're probably wondering what happened. G-d intervened.

After being graced with just under an hour-and-a-half of slumber, and having awakened fully convinced I'd been exercising in my sleep, I figured I'd go to work. It was 6:30, so I left a meticulously rehearsed off-the-cuff message on my machine and left. When I returned several hours later, there was no message. Stunned, I spent the rest of the day waiting. It was just before Shabbos when I suddenly realized, the painter had disconnected my machine.



She never called back. That Saturday night, alone in a movie house, I stood before G-d unsullied, blameless, free of guilt...and utterly frustrated.

Mark Ellman is a Newberry Award-winning author and screenwriter. A collection of his short stories, *Clowns on Velvet*, will be published this fall by Random House and has already been selected as a Book of the Month.

Nothing in the preceding paragraph is true. I just wanted to see how it looks in print--M.E.

This piece was written several months ago, the episode having occurred sometime earlier. On rereading it today, certain of the sentiments expressed, which I genuinely felt at the time, seem faintly repugnant and, consequently, embarrassing. I suppose this attests to the psyche shaping power of spiritual development, and, in particular, the Baal Teshuvah odyssey.--M.E.