JUDAISM, A WELL WRITTEN SONNET

by Mim Senft

Learning Jewish law can be a little intimidating for a beginner; it certainly seemed so to me. How was I going to learn the ins and outs of *Halachah*? Torah, Gemara, Pirkei Avot... so many things to study! But after taking a number of beginner classes, something that I had read came to mind: the concept of comparing a good life to a sonnet. In other words, a good life has form and structure, balance, an identifiable rhythm, just like a sonnet, and is filled with positive actions, which are like words of great beauty. And it occurred to me that that's what Jewish law is all about, a way to teach us how to turn our lives into sonnets.

My own spiritual journey -- learning Jewish law, learning how to daven, studying Torah -- seems very much like the experience of learning how to write. Before anyone can write, they have to learn the basics. Each of us started out learning the alphabet. Then we learned how to put those letters together to form words and sentences. With each level in school, our vocabulary grew and our writing skills increased. And, slowly, after a few years, we were able to write. What had seemed overwhelming was now second nature. However, knowing how to write doesn't make you an exceptional writer. You can learn the rules and the structure, but in order to become more than just passable, you need to practice; and, to write a good sonnet, you have to practice a lot and be able to make it your own, to infuse it with your own spirit. I'm sure that Shakespeare wasn't writing brilliant sonnets when he first started; and I would also venture to guess that even when he became a skilled writer, he continued to throw away a lot of drafts before he produced his beautiful poetry.

Because I'm a beginner when it comes to Judaism, it's good for me to remember that even those people that are true artisans of their chosen path in life had to work hard to get there and were beginners once too. I find it interesting that when I'm learning Jewish law or learning the proper way to *daven*, I feel very much like I did when I was a child just starting school. It's exciting, frustrating, confusing, wonderful and mysterious all at the same time. But just like when I was small, I can look to those who are learned and who are, in a sense, older than I am because of their knowledge, and know that I can become proficient too. It's also inspiring to know that Rabbi Akiba didn't start studying until he was 40. That means there's hope for all of us!

Much of Jewish law is very dense conceptually, and it's not easy to grasp what's being said the first or even the fifth time studying a particular law. But I believe the Torah and Talmud are patient teachers. Like any good teacher, they know we're going to make mistakes. We may misinterpret or even have no comprehension as to why a law exists when we first read it, but with much study and good teachers comes understanding and a structure on which to build our lives. The pieces start to fit together, and we can see the possibility of what good moral and ethical behavior is and what it can bring to our lives.

I suppose some people might view the law as restrictive. Why should I keep kosher? Why shouldn't I use my car on Shabbat or carry things outside my home or use the phone? And yet, if people were writing any way they pleased, made up their own rules of grammar for example, or used their own symbols for punctuation, it would create chaos. People wouldn't be able to communicate. In the same way that written language needs structure and rules, we need structure and rules within ourselves and in our community so that is has shape and balance.

Certainly the law is not always easy to understand, but when we do start to grasp what it has to give us, it provides a permanent foundation and structure for our lives; and that is worth struggling for, working to make the proverbial light go on. By making Torah study a priority, we can start to choose the words, or actions, we put in our life sonnets appropriately, avoiding the ones that are jarring or harmful, that break the rhythm of the "life lines" we are trying to create.

With great love, G-d gave the Jewish people the Torah, and we celebrate that incomparable gift during Shavuot. Yes, Torah asks a lot of people as individuals and as part of the Jewish community, and we have to study it and work to understand it in order to incorporate it into our lives. But if we make the effort to learn, it means each of us can live a richer, more fulfilling life, a Jewish life, a life blessed by G-d. It gives us the opportunity to turn our lives and our communities into something exquisite, balanced, and precious, just like a well-written sonnet.

Mim Senft is an executive assistant at National Financial Partners.

CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Lisa Bernstein and Artie Pearl
Pamela Title and David Andelman

MARRIAGES

Hadassah Bruria (Elizabeth) Kirk and Jerry Blitzer
Nika Erastov and David Klinghoffer
Mazal Tov to mother Nina Perlin Erastov
Lauren Fleishman and Jeremy Safran
Dr. Fabienne Rottenberg and Eli Jacobson
Esther Dubin and Greg Shlionsky

BIRTHS

Elene and Dr. Steven Brodsky, on the birth of a girl, Esther Miriam
Donna and Bernard Broome, on the birth of a girl, Gabriella Shira
Valerie and Daniel Feder, on the birth of a girl, Sophia Pauline
Federbush and Rodney Greenwald, on the birth of a girl, Ariel Rose
Rebecca and Jesse Lentchner, on the birth of a girl, Anna Abigail
Mazal Tov to grandparents Judge Enid Langbert and Simon Aconsky
Jolienne and Scott Rutter, on the birth of a boy, Seth
Mazal Tov to grandparents Beverly and Gerald Pivawer
Jill and Dov Schwartzben, on the birth of a girl, Debra Lea
Gail and Doug Schiller, on the birth of twins
Pam and Benjamin Sherr, on the birth of a boy, Avraham Simcha
Marsha and Jonathan Weisman, on the birth of a boy, Yehoshua Pinchas (6/99)
Laurie and Richard Wolf, on the birth of a girl, Aliza

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Rebecca Weiner
Mazal Tov to parents Sandy and Marc Weiner

CONDOLENCES

Jeff Solomon, on the loss of his father, Marvin Solomon

REFUAH SH'LEIMAH (SPEEDY RECOVERY)

Barry Diller
Les Nelkin

THANK YOU

Arthur Rogers for donating the new comfortable chairs to the shul and the Beginners Service

CONGRATULATIONS

Dr. Lynn Davidman on the publication of her newest book "Motherloss," published by University of California Press

Lisa (Castleman) and Paul Glazer for being honored at the West Side Kollel Dinner

Roberta and Robert Hadi for being honored by the Manhattan Jewish Experience

Neal Shapiro for being honored by Congregation B'nei David-Judea in Los Angeles

SAVE THE DATE

All Night Shavuot Learn-in
Thurs, June 8, 11:30 p.m. - 6:45 a.m.

Last and First Beginners Shabbat Luncheons of the Seasons
June 3, Sept 2

Rosh Hashana
Fri - Sun, Sept 29 - Oct 1

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Fri June 16, 2000 - 13th of Sivan
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:54 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 8:11 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Sat June 17, 2000 - 14th of Sivan Nasso
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible Class ..... 7:05 PM
Mincha ..... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 9:11 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:20 PM

Fri June 23, 2000 - 20th of Sivan
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:56 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 8:13 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:20 PM

Sat June 24, 2000 - 21st of Sivan Beha'alotcha
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible Class ..... 7:10 PM
Mincha ..... 8:10 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 9:13 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:20 PM

Fri June 30, 2000 - 27th of Sivan
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:56 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 8:13 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:20 PM

Sat July 1, 2000 - 28th of Sivan Sh'lach
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:40 PM
Bible Class ..... 7:10 PM
Perek Class ..... 7:25 PM
Mincha ..... 8:10 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 9:13 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:20 PM

Mon July 3, 2000 - 30th of Sivan ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ..... 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Tue July 4, 2000 - 1st of Tamuz ROSH CHODESH INDEPENDENCE DAY
Morning Services ..... 7:00 & 8:30 AM

Fri July 7, 2000 - 4th of Tamuz
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:55 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 8:12 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Sat July 8, 2000 - 5th of Tamuz Korach
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:35 PM
Bible Class ..... 7:05 PM
Perek Class ..... 7:20 PM
Mincha ..... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 9:12 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:15 PM

Fri July 14, 2000 - 11th of Tamuz
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:52 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 8:09 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Sat July 15, 2000 - 12th of Tamuz Chukat-Balak
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:35 PM
Bible Class ..... 7:05 PM
Perek Class ..... 7:20 PM
Mincha ..... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 9:09 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:10 PM

Thu July 20, 2000 - 17th of Tamuz SHI'VA ASSAR B'TAMUZ
Fast Begins ..... 4:29 AM
Morning Services ..... 7:00 & 7:30 AM
Mincha ..... 7:55 PM
Fast Ends ..... 8:54 PM

Fri July 21, 2000 - 18th of Tamuz
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:52 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 8:04 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:10 PM

Sat July 22, 2000 - 19th of Tamuz Pinchas
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:30 PM
Bible Class ..... 7:00 PM
Perek Class ..... 7:15 PM
Mincha ..... 8:00 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 9:04 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:05 PM

Fri July 28, 2000 - 25th of Tamuz
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:46 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 7:58 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 8:05 PM

Sat July 29, 2000 - 26th of Tamuz Matot-Masei
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:25 PM
Bible Class ..... 6:55 PM
Perek Class ..... 7:10 PM
Mincha ..... 7:55 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 8:58 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 8:00 PM

Wed August 2, 2000 - 1st of Av ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ..... 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Fri August 4, 2000 - 3rd of Av
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:38 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 7:50 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 7:55 PM

Sat August 5, 2000 - 4th of Av Devarim CHAZON
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:15 PM
Bible Class ..... 6:45 PM
Perek Class ..... 7:00 PM
Mincha ..... 7:45 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 8:50 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 7:50 PM

Wed August 9, 2000 - 8th of Av EREV TISH'A B'AV
Mincha ..... 7:50 PM
Fast Begins ..... 8:02 PM
Maariv & Kinnot ..... 8:33 PM

Thu August 10, 2000 - 9th of Av TISH'A B'AV
Morning Services ..... 6:30 & 8:30 AM
Early Mincha ..... 1:31 PM
Mincha ..... 7:30 PM
Fast Ends ..... 8:32 PM

Fri August 11, 2000 - 10th of Av
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ..... 6:30 PM
Candle Lighting ..... 7:42 PM
Mincha ..... 6:45 & 7:45 PM

Sat August 12, 2000 - 11th of Av Va'etchanan NACHAMU
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 6:05 PM
Bible Class ..... 6:35 PM
Perek Class ..... 6:50 PM
Mincha ..... 7:35 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 8:42 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 7:40 PM

Fri August 18, 2000 - 17th of Av
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting ..... 7:32 PM
Mincha ..... 7:35 PM

Sat August 19, 2000 - 18th of Av Eikev
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 5:55 PM
Bible Class ..... 6:25 PM
Perek Class ..... 6:40 PM
Mincha ..... 7:25 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 8:32 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 7:30 PM

Fri August 25, 2000 - 24th of Av
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting ..... PM
Mincha ..... PM

Sat August 26, 2000 - 25th of Av Re'eh
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Daf Yomi ..... 5:45 PM
Bible Class ..... 6:15 PM
Perek Class ..... 6:30 PM
Mincha ..... 7:15 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 8:22 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 7:20 PM

Thu August 31, 2000 - 30th of Av ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ..... 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Fri September 1, 2000 - 1st of Elul ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ..... 7:00 & 7:40 AM
Candle Lighting ..... 7:11 PM
Mincha ..... 7:15 PM

Sat September 2, 2000 - 2nd of Elul Shoftim
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible Class ..... 6:05 PM
Mincha ..... 7:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 8:11 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 7:05 PM

Mon September 4, 2000 - 4th of Elul LABOR DAY
Morning Services ..... 7:05 & 8:30 AM

Fri September 8, 2000 - 8th of Elul
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting ..... 6:59 PM
Mincha ..... 7:05 PM

Sat September 9, 2000 - 9th of Elul Ki Teitzei
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible Class ..... 5:55 PM
Mincha ..... 6:55 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 7:59 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... PM

Fri September 15, 2000 - 15th of Elul
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting ..... 6:47 PM
Mincha ..... 6:50 PM

Sat September 16, 2000 - 16th of Elul Ki Tavo
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible Class ..... 5:40 PM
Mincha ..... 6:40 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 7:47 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 6:45 PM

Fri September 22, 2000 - 22nd of Elul
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting ..... 6:36 PM
Mincha ..... 6:40 PM

Sat September 23, 2000 - 23rd of Elul Nitzavim-Vayeilech
Morning Services ..... 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible Class ..... 5:30 PM
Mincha ..... 6:30 PM
Shabbat Ends ..... 7:36 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ..... 6:30 PM
Early Selichot ..... 10:00 PM
Late Selichot ..... 12:48 AM

Sun September 24, 2000 - 24th of Elul
Morning Services ..... 7:10 & 8:30 AM

Mon September 25, 2000 - 25th of Elul
Selichot & Morning Services ..... 6:40 & 7:30 AM

Tue September 26, 2000 - 26th of Elul
Selichot & Morning Services ..... 6:40 & 7:30 AM

Wed September 27, 2000 - 27th of Elul
Selichot & Morning Services ..... 6:40 & 7:30 AM

Thu September 28, 2000 - 28th of Elul
Selichot & Morning Services ..... 6:40 & 7