

ROMANCE, CHANGE AND GRATITUDE

Mark Ellman

Maybe it's because I have a beard and kipah - or maybe it is just that my personality puts people on the defensive - but it seems that half the people I meet, given half a chance, insist upon insisting that while devoutly non-religious, they are deeply spiritual.

Of course the meaning of that word, "spiritual," is beyond subjective. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, surely spiritual is in the soul of the beatific. (I once met a transcendentalist-slash-telepathist-slash-receptionist who claimed that photos of her aura established her beyond dispute as certifiably spiritual. I won't dispute the certifiable part.)

Judaism, however, teaches that only one thing produces spirituality -- Change. I could have used the word Growth, which somehow feels less threatening. Regardless of the term, however, the point is that the minute you stop improving, spirituality begins to drop. Change is the only way to stay spiritually alive.

This presents a hideous dilemma to those of us who occasionally have to look in a mirror. In order to feel good about ourselves, we actually have to do something. Something different. And different is usually harder.

Which brings us to Passover and the seder. What is the change we are going for here? Common Jewish wisdom makes the goal clear enough: To liberate ourselves from being enslaved by Pharaoh (ie: our whims and desires) in order to pursue that which God wants from us. In other words: to choose to work for God instead of our own impulses. And the payoff of our freedom? Unlike a slave, we walk away with something at the end of the day — we are given a life that has ultimate value. (Admittedly, that value cannot be proven. Torah must earn credibility through that which can be known in order for a premise like this to be accepted by thoughtful cynics.)

This leads to a pragmatic quandary: Given the natural human preference for freedom, in its fullest sense, how does one find one's way to a sincere desire to serve God? The key, we are taught, is appreciation. Knowing that God has done good things for us and that He will continue to do them throughout this life and beyond is the only pathway to willing servitude. How might this be actualized? How might a person come to recognize all that God does for him or her? One way is to start by remembering that God took us out of Egypt. With a little focus, it is not

difficult to feel gratitude for this singular act, to recognize that being taken out of Egypt changes us and makes us grow.

Connecting to that feeling of appreciation does require a bit of effort, but isn't that what makes the game interesting? When you get right down to it, isn't prevailing over the challenges to growth, the romance of religion? And speaking of romance, change and gratitude...

The last article I wrote for this publication was 12 years ago. At the end of it, flush with satisfaction, I appended my email address in anticipation of an accolade or two, or at least some soulful feedback. Sad to report, I got neither from no one, so was forced to write the thing off as something that if read at all, produced little to no effect for anyone. It was certainly no life-changer.

How wrong I was.

Several years later, an offer for a shidduch (arranged date) introduction prompted a disinterested beshert (soul-mate) to reluctantly Google my name. There was but one entry, the unheralded article that never made a noise. And, thank God, it spoke to her. We met only as a result.

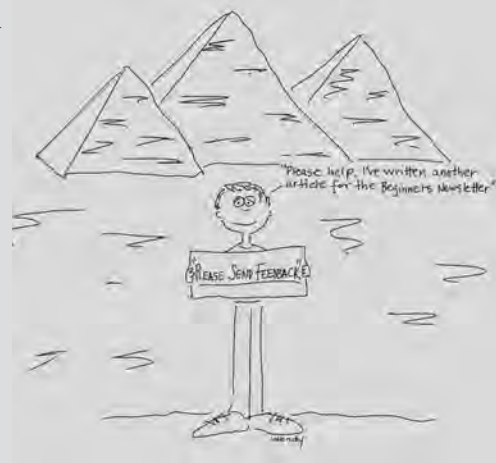
That article from long ago turned out to be a life changer for me, and so, when asked for a follow up, gratitude overcame my dread of the blank page. I promptly said yes.

But the biggest life-changer of all of course has been my wife herself. I won't count for you the ways, but if in the interests of sweetening our marriage she says, like sugar, I'm being progressively refined, even though I feel relentlessly granulated, I remain ever grateful for the changes -- to her, and to Torah Judaism.

Happy Passover.

Mark Ellman is a financial consultant living in California. He can be reached just like last time at

markellman1@gmail.com.



MAZAL TOVS CONTINUED

TODAH RABBAH

Shabbat Across America committee: Deborah Bendheim and Tova and Assaf Alster

Chaviva Warner for the beautiful Shabbat Across America flowers

Angelo Verga for writing and directing the Beginners Purim Shpiel

Angelo Verga, Allison Bassoff, Yaakov Landy, Bruce Snell, Ira Weinstock, Sasha Vasina, Naydalis Peralta and Masako Otani for acting in the Beginners Purim Shpiel

REGINA ULLENDORF

Regina (95 years), a musician of note, played the violin beautifully and was a woman of many cultural interests. She took her Judaism seriously and was an inspiration to her late husband, Uli, z"l, and her four children. A generous philanthropist, who lived in both Munich, Germany, and New York, she made sure that Jewish living was her number one priority. We will miss her.

PETEZIE SACK

When Petezie Sack walked into a room, everybody took notice. This attractive woman, with blond curly hair, never walked into any room quietly. She was dynamic, vivacious, loquacious, and always spoke her mind, whether others wanted to hear what she had to say, or not. She added so much to our discussions on Torah and on life. Taken before her time, her vitality and wisdom will be truly missed.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Fri April 7, 2017 - 11th of Nissan
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Candle Lighting 7:09 PM
 Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:15 PM

Sat April 8, 2017 - 12th of Nissan
SHABBAT HAGADOL Tzav
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 AM
 Mincha 6:40 PM
 Shabbat HaGadol Drasha 7:05 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:11 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 7:20 PM

Sun April 9, 2017 - 13th of Nissan
 Morning Services 7:10 & 8:30 AM
 Bedikat Chametz after 8:11 PM

Mon April 10, 2017 - 14th of Nissan
EREV PESACH - Taanit Bechorot
 Morning Services with Siyum 6:30 & 7:30 AM
 Latest time to eat Chametz 10:25 AM
 Latest time to burn Chametz 11:25 AM
 Candle Lighting 7:12 PM
 Mincha/Maariv 7:20 PM
 Begin Seder after 8:02 PM

Tue April 11, 2017 - 15th of Nissan
PESACH
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Mincha 7:20 PM
 Candle Lighting 8:13 PM
 Start Seder after 8:14 PM

Wed April 12, 2017 - 16th of Nissan
2nd DAY PESACH
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Mincha 7:20 PM
 Ma'ariv/Yom Tov ends 8:15 PM

Thu April 13, 2017 - 17th of Nissan
CHOL HAMOED PESACH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Fri April 14, 2017 - 18th of Nissan
CHOL HAMOED PESACH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
 Candle Lighting 7:16 PM
 Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:20 PM

Sat April 15, 2017 - 19th of Nissan
CHOL HAMOED PESACH
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Mincha 6:50 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:18 PM

Sun April 16, 2017 - 20th of Nissan
CHOL HAMOED PESACH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM
 Candle Lighting 7:19 PM
 Mincha/Maariv 7:25 PM

Mon April 17, 2017 - 21st of Nissan
7th DAY PESACH
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Mincha/Maariv 7:25 PM
 Light Candles After 8:19 PM

Tue April 18, 2017 - 22nd of Nissan
8th DAY PESACH - Yizkor
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Mincha 7:25 PM
 Ma'ariv/Yom Tov ends 8:21 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:25 PM

Fri April 21, 2017 - 25th of Nissan
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Earliest Candle Lighting 6:17 PM
 Regular Candle Lighting 7:24 PM
 Mincha 6:45 & 7:30 PM

Sat April 22, 2017 - 26th of Nissan
Shmini
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 PM
 Beginners Mishnayot 5:40 PM
 Talmud/Pirkei Avot Class 6:10 PM
 Bible Class 6:10 PM
 Mincha 7:10 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:25 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:35 PM

Wed April 26, 2017 - 30th of Nissan
ROSH CHODESH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Thu April 27, 2017 - 1st of Iyar
ROSH CHODESH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Fri April 28, 2017 - 2nd of Iyar
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Earliest Candle Lighting 6:22 PM
 Regular Candle Lighting 7:31 PM
 Mincha 6:45 & 7:35 PM

Sat April 29, 2017 - 3rd of Iyar
Tazria-Metzora
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 PM
 Beginners Mishnayot 5:50 PM
 Talmud/Pirkei Avot Class 6:20 PM
 Bible Class 6:20 PM
 Mincha 7:20 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:33 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:40 PM

Tue May 2, 2017 - 6th of Iyar
YOM HA'ATZMA'UT
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:50 AM

Fri May 5, 2017 - 9th of Iyar
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Earliest Candle Lighting 6:28 PM
 Regular Candle Lighting 7:38 PM
 Mincha 6:45 & 7:40 PM

Sat May 6, 2017 - 10th of Iyar
Achrei Mot-Kedoshim
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 AM
 Beginners Luncheon 12:30 PM
 Beginners Mishnayot 5:55 PM
 Talmud/Pirkei Avot Class 6:25 PM
 Bible Class 6:25 PM
 Mincha 7:25 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:40 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:50 PM

Fri May 12, 2017 - 16th of Iyar
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Earliest Candle Lighting 6:33 PM
 Regular Candle Lighting 7:46 PM
 Mincha 6:45 & 7:50 PM

Sat May 13, 2017 - 17th of Iyar Emor
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 PM
 Beginners Mishnayot 6:05 PM
 Talmud/Pirkei Avot Class 6:35 PM
 Bible Class 6:35 PM
 Mincha 7:35 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:47 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:55 PM

Sun May 14, 2017 - 18th of Iyar
LAG B'OMER
 Morning Services 7:10 & 8:30 AM

Fri May 19, 2017 - 23rd of Iyar
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Earliest Candle Lighting 6:39 PM
 Regular Candle Lighting 7:52 PM
 Mincha 6:45 & 7:55 PM

Sat May 20, 2017 - 24th of Iyar
Behar-Bechukotai
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 PM
 Beginners Mishnayot 6:10 PM
 Talmud/Pirkei Avot Class 6:40 PM
 Bible Class 6:40 PM
 Mincha 7:40 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:54 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 8:00 PM

Wed May 24, 2017 - 28th of Iyar
YOM YERUSHALAYIM
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:50 AM

Fri May 26, 2017 - 1st of Sivan
ROSH CHODESH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
 Earliest Candle Lighting 6:44 PM
 Regular Candle Lighting 7:59 PM
 Mincha 6:45 & 8:05 PM

Sat May 27, 2017 - 2nd of Sivan
Bamidbar
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Service 9:15 PM
 Beginners Mishnayot 6:15 PM
 Talmud/Pirkei Avot Class 6:45 PM
 Bible Class 6:45 PM
 Mincha 7:45 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 9:00 PM
 Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 8:05 PM

Mon May 29, 2017 - 4th of Sivan
MEMORIAL DAY
 Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM

Tue May 30, 2017 - 5th of Sivan
EREV SHAVUOT
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Candle Lighting 8:02 PM
 Mincha 8:10 PM
 Beginners Shavuot Learn-In 12:00 AM

Wed May 31, 2017 - 6th of Sivan
1st DAY SHAVUOT
 Morning Services 5:01 & 9:00 AM
 Book of Ruth 7:05 PM
 Mincha 8:10 PM
 Light Candles after 9:02 PM
 Maariv 9:03 PM

Thu June 1, 2017 - 7th of Sivan
2nd DAY SHAVUOT Yizkor
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Book of Ruth 7:05 PM
 Mincha 8:10 PM
 Ma'ariv/Yom Tov ends 9:04 PM

SAVE THE DATE

Beginners Shabbat Luncheons
 Sat, 12:30 PM - \$25
 May 6, June 3, Sept 9

Beginners Shmooze - Free
 Mon, May 8, 8:15 PM

All Night Shavuot Learn-a-thon
 Tue, May 30, 12:00 AM - 7:00 AM

CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Emily Belfer and Dr. Raphy Rosen
 Mazal Tov to parents,
 Dr. Michelle Friedman and Ben Belfer
 Yelena Bogunova and Adi Nahmani
 Elijor Garfinkel and Elie Weiss
 Mazal Tov to parents, Georganne and James Garfinkel
 Daniella Gasner and Mark Wigler
 Mazal Tov to parents, Freya and Richard Wigler
 Chana Lebovic and Shalom Yitzchak Goodman
 Mazal Tov to parents,
 Sharone D'vora and Shmuel Goodman
 Monica Mayoral and Michael Ibraimov



Aliza and Shmuel O'Connor on the birth of a son,
 Menachem Sinai
 Mazal Tov to grandparents,
 Hadassa and Bill Greenbaum
 Dr. Victoria (Eliana) Perez and Amir Ron,
 on the birth of a daughter, Alona Lior

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

William Haberman,
 Mazal Tov to parents, Regina and Brook Haberman
 Mazal Tov to grandparents,
 Ricki and Jacob Haberman

CONDOLENCES

Sara Bleier, on the loss of her mother, Fay Grajower
 Basha Botnick, on the loss of her brother,
 Jonathan Kenneth Oka
 Sheryl Elias, on the loss of her father, William Katz
 Dina Rachel Fisher, on the loss of her father,
 John Fisher
 Mildred (Mitzi) Witkin, on the loss of her husband,
 Harold (Hal) Witkin
 Coby Zekry, on the loss of his father, Amram Zekry
 The family of Monica Singer Gordon
 The family of Petezie Sack
 The family of Regina Ullendorff

SPEEDY RECOVERY/REFUAH SH'LAIMA

Richard Bennett, Reuvan Mordechai ben Malka
 Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Reich,
 Mordechai Menashe ben Henia Ruchama

TZETCHEM L'SHALOM (TO LIVE OR STUDY IN ISRAEL)

Gloria Liriano, going to Israel to study at Neve

CONGRATULATIONS

Happy 90th Birthday to Irving Center
 Dina Rachel Fisher on being honored at the
 Jewish Renaissance Center's Annual Dinner
 Elena and Jonathan Rieu on being honored at
 Congregation Machane Chodesh's Annual
 Gala Banquet
 Happy 90th Birthday to Captain Lou Stock
 Yoel Epstein upon receiving S'micha from Yeshiva
 University
 Mazal Tov to parents, Judith Weil and Lloyd Epstein
 Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald who was honored with the
 Rabbinic Leadership Award at the 2017 MJE Annual
 Dinner

(CONTINUED ON REVERSE)