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Passover feature

Traveling light: Freedom's song

Israelites showed incomparable courage beginning a journey with no end in sight

By **ROBERTA ISRAELOFF**
Jewz.com Media Network

Bible stories are like Tin Pan Alley standards off of which the jazz masters improvise their way to musical immortality. That is, these ancient stories of gardens, floods, and redemption from bondage provide the basic melody, the essential notes, which we absorb and around which we compose our own songs. What is midrash, after all, but a compendium of theological riffs? And so when I think of Passover this year I focus on a different part of the story than I did last year or the year before.

For though the story is the same - is in fact, immutable - what I bring to it varies according to my own personal journey. Now, I find myself thinking about the moment the Jews left Egypt. What incomparable courage, to leave everything they knew as familiar to begin a journey with no end in sight. I can't help but compare their exodus to a more recent one - the flight of Jews from Nazi Germany before the Second World War. Many of those who survive today left as children - as 6, 10, 12 year olds - sent away by their desperate families toward the promise of a safe harbor.

I try to imagine Jake, my 13-year-old son, left on his own to navigate his way through war-ravaged Europe, and I find that I literally have to flee from the image. I can't stay with it. It's too awful. Yet the courage to embrace the new differs from the courage required to flee the old. It requires a different set of skills, a different slant on life.

Our ancestors knew this. That's why it was decreed that those Jews born into bondage were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. They intuited that the shadow chains of bondage remain, like a phantom limb, long after the actual chains are loosened. To appreciate the wisdom of this, I think in microscopic terms; I think of my own family.

My sons, one at each end of adolescence, are caught up in their own personal exodus, away from the family, out of their childhood, and they move with the swift determination of a people forced to flee. But they're not sure toward what goal they are moving. In fact, precisely because the future seems so hazy, they often focus on where they've been.

Just the other morning, as I was driving Jake to middle school, he said, "When I have kids I'm going to make sure they appreciate it when they're in elementary school." He was referring, I knew, to the increased pressure and stress he was feeling now that he had to pass Regents and be responsible for science labs. He longed for the days when all he had to do at school was show up, draw a picture, watch some seeds grow. "We all want to be younger again," I tried to reassure him. "But think of it this way: when you were in elementary school, it's true that you had fewer responsibilities, but you also had fewer privileges. And fewer choices."

"I don't care about choices so much," he said.



The Israelites Gather Manna: Writer Roberta Israeloff brings aspects of her own personal journey to the Passover table. Illustration from a woodcut by Hans Holbein the Younger.

His emotional honesty caught me short. It reminded me of a psychological study I'd just read, indicating that we become stressed when faced with too many choices. Presented with 20 different types of soap or breakfast cereal, we first panic, however subtly, and then rebel against the array of choices by feeling less than satisfied with what we ultimately choose. This was news to me.

We've long acknowledged our need for some degree of autonomy: without any choice, we become depressed and helpless. But apparently, having too much autonomy can result in the same feelings. That's why, when my older son complained that he was too old to have a curfew, and we agreed, he was startled. Though he stayed out till three in the morning for a couple of nights, soon he was returning home around midnight - which was, of course, the time of his old curfew.

When we read the Haggadah this year, I'll thank our ancestral mothers and fathers for helping me discern between two kinds of courage, and for reminding me that one of life's daily challenges is divining how much choice is right for us. Freedom, it turns out, isn't instantly bestowed, but painstakingly accommodated, claimed and reclaimed.

Roberta Israeloff is the author of *Kindling the Flame: Reflections on Ritual, Faith and Family*. Her monthly column, *Traveling Light*, is published by JBooks.com, a member of Jewz.com Media Network.

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THE JEWISH POST & NEWS

Vol. 14 No. 35 WINNIPEG, WEDNESDAY, April 11, 2001 18 Days in Nissan, 5761

Candle lighting time Friday is 8:01 p.m.
Shabbat ends at 9:02 p.m.

Winnipeg Jewish Film Festival a hit

Co-artistic director 'blown away' by 'diversity' of audience

By **MATT BELLAN**

The first Jewish Festival at the Asper Jewish Community Campus drew much bigger crowds than organizers expected.

"Saturday night, we were oversold," Kayla Gordon, co-artistic director of the Saturday, March 31-Thursday, April 5 event, said the night before it ended. "We budgeted for half-full houses, and were full every night."

The festival, which took place in the 210-seat Berney Theatre, was the idea of a committee representing the Asper Foundation, the Rady Jewish Community Centre and the Winnipeg Jewish Theatre, of which Gordon is artistic director.

It's part of the Asper Foundation Performances: Cultural Art Series. "We had the idea of creating more cultural events on campus," Gordon explained. "We already had the jazz festival, and were talking about having more musical culture and a film festival."

Gordon was "blown away" by the "diversity" of the audiences at the film festival.

"There was a wide range of ages, and a lot of people who hadn't come out before to any cultural events on campus."

She feels that's partly because movies are "in", right now, especially foreign films. "I think the community has a craving for cultural events."

Gordon watched a "whole bunch" of potential films for the festival a few months ago, and also spoke to organizers of Jewish film festivals in Toronto and Montreal.

The festival committee was looking for "variety" in storylines, and "different points of view".

So the six films shown had themes ranging from the more serious Solomon and Gaenor and Kadosh to more lighthearted material, like *Passover Fever*, a comedy about three generations of a modern Israeli family coming together to celebrate Passover.

This writer saw Solomon and Gaenor and Kadosh. Solomon and Gaenor was in the news last month, because it was one of the nominees for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards.

Dubbed: a "Jewish Romeo and Juliet", the movie is set in a Welsh coalmining town in the early



MIJIE LAMPE sells tickets for the Jewish Film Festival outside the Berney Theatre March 31. There were so many customers, organizers had to set up an extra row of seats in the theatre.



Jewish Film Festival posters near entrance to the Berney Theatre.

1900s. It's about Solomon, son of Jewish immigrants from Russia, and Gaenor, daughter of a strictly Christian coalmining family.

Hollywood-handsome Ioan Gruffudd plays the deceitful Solomon, who secretly seduces and wins over Gaenor, by pretending he's Christian. Nia Roberts offers a dazzling performance as the complicated Gaenor, who first resists, and then falls deeply in love with Solomon.

The movie, which features characters speaking English, Welsh and Yiddish, also offers examines the deeply entrenched anti-Semitism that Jews faced in that era, and the fierce resistance to intermarriage among Jews and non-Jews.

Released in 1999, Kadosh is set in present-day Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim quarter; it focuses on Rivka, and her younger sister, Malka.

(Cont. on page 7. See "Winnipeg Jewish Film Festival".)



Jerusalem car-bomb

Israeli investigators examine the wreckage of a car bomb that exploded in Jerusalem early in the morning of March 27, causing several light injuries. The car bombing is one of a rash of terrorist attacks that have hit Israel since Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister February 6. Photo credit: Brian Henderler/JTA.

News analysis

Israelis find rare common ground standing firm against Arab violence

By **DAVID LANDAU**

JERUSALEM (JTA) - Six months into the Palestinian uprising, Israeli doves and hawks are no longer arguing about the nation's settlement policy. In fact, they are displaying a rare unity in the face of repeated Palestinian onslaughts.

Palestinian attacks in recent days on two settlement enclaves left two Israeli babies among the victims - one, a 10-month-old girl, dead; the other, a 15-month-old boy, gravely wounded - but the attacks did not produce the once-familiar calls from the Israeli left to dismantle the settlements.

The first attack took place March 26, when a Palestinian sniper killed Shalhevet Pass, picking her off as her father wheeled her in a stroller by a Jewish playground in the West Bank city of Hebron.

On April 3, in the Atzmona community in the Gaza Strip, a 15-month-old boy was seriously injured after being hit by shrapnel in a Palestinian mortar attack on the settlement. The mother also was hurt, though less seriously than her child. On April 4, Israeli doctors reported an "impressive" improvement following surgery in the condition of Ariel Yered, who had arrived at a local hospital without a discernible pulse.

The Pass family at first refused to bury Shalhevet until the Israel Defence Force seized the Palestinian neighborhood of Abu Sneh from which the sniper fired. On April 1, following appeals from public figures including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the family laid Shalhevet to rest.

The initial refusal to bury Shalhevet triggered some controversy in Israel, but it was overshadowed by a deafening silence - the marked absence of debate that such attacks on the settlements once would have generated. In times gone by, the attacks would have left Israeli doves demanding the dismantlement of isolated settlements - to avoid "provoking" Palestinian anger - and hawks urging that they be strengthened to show Palestinians that violence is futile.

Such debate now seems anachronistic. Only a few doves still argue for withdrawing from any settlements, even the most isolated ones.

(Cont. on page 15. See "Israelis united".)

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