

DOT-TO-DOT JUDAISM



CONNECTING
TO
JEWISH HISTORY
ISRAEL
AND
TORAH

ANDREW GOLD

DOT-TO-DOT JUDAISM

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Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

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The text of this book is composed in Gill Sans, with the title set in Acubet.

Book design by Avraham Ben David.

ISBN 0—9662865—0—3

This book is printed on recycled paper
to save trees and lessen waste.

For all the Jews who have
come before us to make
our journies and our lives
more meaningful.

“If you will it, it is no dream.”
—Theodore Herzl

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Preface

Who am I to write a book about Judaism? I am not a Rabbi, scholar, historian nor academic, and I have spent more than half of my twenty-nine years being only partially interested in the culture, religion, and history of Judaism. No, I'm just a regular American Jew who is in the process right now of becoming much more connected with the Jewish people and the Jewish homeland and wanted to pass along some of the neat things that I've discovered so far. I realized that there are a lot of people out there in my shoes who would like to know more about Judaism and take steps to get more involved, but do not exactly know the best place to start. Sure, one can go to Shabbat services, stop by the Jewish Community Center, or read a book, but it's hard to know if these are the best options or the ones right for us. That's the purpose of this concise guide: to let you know about your options while having fun and learning a little bit along the way.

This guide is not just for young Jewish adults like myself, but rather for those who are young at heart and feel that it is never too late to begin one of life's greatest journeys. Even though Judaism's journey spans 4,000 years, five continents, the world's greatest fallen empires and

world's current rising ones, Judaism lives day to day in the actions, hearts and spirits of people like you and me.

Hebrew is living today in a similar fashion. Hebrew was the first modern written language and the Hebrew alphabet (a word derived from the first two letters in the Hebrew language: Aleph Bet) stands as the foundation of the Greek and Roman alphabets. Hebrew is also the only ancient language that ceased to be spoken by a nation but was revived from the dead into a modern language spoken in Israel today. Israel is the only country in the world where a nation of people were expelled from their homeland, but later returned—2000 years later—to reform the nation. I forgot all my Hebrew right after my Bar Mitzvah. From my three months of intensive Hebrew Ulpan courses in Israel and speaking with Israelis I can now converse as well as read and write in Hebrew, although at a basic level. Hebrew is a much more logical and simple language than English; it just looks scary on the outside. I find a lot of things in Judaism that way. Jewish history defies rhyme and reason, and that is what makes Jews such a unique people.

For those of you who have come from non-observant homes, there is always hope. My mother's parents, though both Jewish, did not belong to a synagogue and did not attend services. My mother on her own volition attended Shabbat and High Holy Day services with her Jewish friends and continually read books with Jewish themes. She knew that one day she would marry a Jewish husband, have a Jewish household, and raise her kids Jewish. Translation: my mom makes the world's best matzah ball soup!

I grew up in a Jewish household in Greensburg, a small Western Pennsylvania city, whose unimposing Temple Emanuel Israel confidently stood right next to the Cathedral, a huge, ever-expanding Catholic Church. Our congregation of around one hundred and fifty families sent its children first to Sunday school and then Hebrew school classes to prepare for their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. After my Bar Mitzvah, I quickly forgot all things Jewish and boarding school did not ignite any hidden curiosities. What good was religion? At around that time I began declar-

ing myself an atheist and my parents recommended that I use the term “agnostic”. Ok, I was agnostic. The majority of my friends were non-Jews and certainly none was religious. Even though Penn is known for its large Jewish student body, as a college student I felt no special urge to attend Hillel events and only occasionally fasted or went to synagogue with friends on Yom Kippur.

I graduated in 1994, moved out to San Francisco, rolled up my sleeves and joined the Internet revolution that was just beginning to brew. With maturity of thought and consideration of my life's experiences, I began thinking more about Judaism. I was always drawn to the humanity and culture of Judaism while ignoring the dry religious parts. Judaism for me was an inclusive religion, one that embraced rather than distanced, one that looked at the world realistically. On my 25th birthday I decided to take bolder steps to understand Judaism and asked my family for advice on what I should do. That was the beginning of my eye-opening journey. Sometimes I felt intimidated by my Jewish ignorance, but I figured many were in my exact same shoes and those more knowledgeable would understand. They did.

Little by little I connected. I was tasting pieces of fruit from a tree that had many branches and deep roots. The present opened doors to the past—an amazing history of tradition, culture, people, countries. My journey into the world of what being Jewish means to me as an American and a Jew has brought me closer to who I am, what I value, and what I do as a result. Judaism has richly rewarded my curiosity.

I'd like to share with you what I've learned along the way so far. There are particularly amazing Jewish resources—movies, books, organizations, and more—and I want to pass along to you the most helpful and pertinent that I have had the pleasure of discovering. In the Summer of 2000 I visited Israel for the first time that started with a UJC Mission and ended with me uniting with all of my Israeli relatives, many of whom I had never met until then. I had no intention of returning to Israel six months later, but sometimes life takes unexpected pathways. Judaism, like life, is a journey, not a destination.

Note: The author commenced researching and writing this guide in America upon return from his first trip to Israel in the summer of 2000 (5760) with the United Jewish Community Summer Missions programs. What started as a casual research project about Jewish history and the Jewish people soon developed into a profound passion and intimate personal connection. In the course of writing, the author returned to Israel in February of 2001 (5761) for four and a half months to learn Hebrew, connect with the Jewish people from all over the world in Eretz Israel, see more of the Promised Land and show solidarity with the Jewish people during the present Intifada terrorism aimed at distancing Diaspora Jews from the Jewish homeland and demoralizing the State of Israel.

In December of 2002 (the month of Tevet, 5763), the author returned to Israel for 11 months to learn Torah in various yeshivot throughout the country in Tsefat, Jerusalem, Arad and Efrat. This experience deepened his understanding of the many facets of Jewish life and helped him see the current conflict and struggle through a new light. Chapter 10: A Word about Torah and the Jewish Calendar was added two years after the rest of the guide was completed.

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A Warm Welcome

Shalom and welcome. Welcome to a quick guide to Judaism from my personal perspective. I am smart enough to know that there is nothing new that I can say that has not been said better about Judaism. My goal is to point out some wonderful resources to you, and give you my down-to-Earth context for these books, videos, people, organizations, and tremendous resources. If you are new to Judaism, rekindling your Jewish spirit, or looking for a nice approach that matches your style, I think you will be pleasantly surprised and rewarded. Judaism can sometimes be very intimidating and it should not be. I'd like to help bridge the gap to the vibrant, amazing world of Jewish history, culture, philosophy and religion.

Wow, that sounded lofty. Ok, let me revise, I just want to talk with you about Judaism. There, much better. Here we are at the dawn of the new secular millennium, and as Jews, the world has never looked better for the most part. The US Census 2000 has reported the official United States population: 283,530,229 Americans. 283 million Americans! From looking at the contributions that Jews have made to this great country of ours, one would think that the Jewish population was larger than a mere 2%. There are only around five and a half million Jews in America (no, not

all of them live in New York and L.A.!), yet Jews have touched almost every aspect of American life, from the arts to politics, from business to philosophy, from science to literature. Across the colorful spectrum of modern day life, Jews have shone in all colors. America has been good to her Jews and the Jews have been great to America. But this is nothing new. If you look at Jewish history in countries all over the world, Jews have been making great strides to advance both humanity and civilization. I could go on to list the names of the prominent Jews, but you already know their names and so do most Americans. Well, I'll list one of my favorites just for the sake of it: Carl Sagan.

To learn about the amazing accomplishments of the Jews throughout history, I recommend Max I. Dimont's spirited *Jews, God and History*. Max Dimont looks at the history of the Jews through a detailed walk through of the history of the world. He thoroughly brings to life all the amazing accomplishments of the Jews that have revolutionized history. He starts with the chapter *It Happened Only Once in History* which gives a brief overview of Jewish history. He stresses that all other great nations of people are gone. Chinese, Hindu and Egyptian peoples are the only ones living today who are as old as the Jewish people. They only had one main cultural period that had a minor impact on succeeding civilizations. And, unlike the Jews, they were not driven out of their homeland and forced to face the challenge of survival in alien lands. The Greeks and Romans are the only other nations who influenced Western man in a manner similar to the Jews, yet the ancient peoples of Hella and Rome are not the people of Greece and Italy today. Dimont sees three unique elements that distinguishes Jewish survival: the Jews have a continuous living history of 4000 years, the Jews have survived for 2000 years without a country of their own, and the Jews have expressed ideas in practically all major languages of the world. I did not previously know that our current United States government and legal system is based on Jewish law and principles and that several of our forefathers read the Bible in actual Hebrew.

That's how I am going to suggest a resource to you. I'll give you the



title and its background, and point out why I think it's a good resource. I'll also try to paint a picture of the resource so that you are not surprised. In the case of *Jews, God and History*, the book is highly detailed which can make it a bit overwhelming. Max Dimont, like a fine watercolor painter, adds layer upon layer to paint a complete picture. He analyzes Jewish and world history from several angles including geography, politics, economics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, life cycles of civilizations and more. Like I said, it can be intense. In short, it's not one of those two hour reads like this guide. Jewish history and culture are a giant buffet. There is no way that we can eat it all. We have to go one mouthful at a time, and choose carefully what we put on our plate.

Judaism is much more than a religion. Religion is a loaded word that carries a lot of baggage. This can be the case with Judaism for some, but does not have to be. There are many like myself who are struggling to understand the Jewish God of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) but this does not mean that I am any less of a Jew than a Hassidic Rabbi who can recite the Torah backwards and forwards from memory. It seems to me that Judaism has always tried to align itself with human nature and the cycles of life, to stand as a support mechanism and to give a push in the right direction. Judaism presents us with a path and we have to make decisions—each and every one of us has choices to make, constantly. We live in confusing times and as Jews we are all searching for a comfortable relationship with our Creator: When I say the Shema, I feel "God is One."

The US Census 2000 also lists the world population: 6,125,126,166. Six billion human beings all living and breathing and dreaming on the third stone from the sun in our own tiny corner of our tiny spiral galaxy. How many Jews are there in the world today? Thirteen and a half million. Is that it? For a religion that's had a living history for 4,000 years, that's certainly nothing to brag about if numbers are important. Christianity, which stemmed from the life and teachings of a Jewish Rabbi, Jesus, has more than 1.5 billion followers in the world today. Jewish religion influenced Muslim faith, and its over 1 billion practitioners comprise the

second largest religious movement. Judaism has never been a religion of quantity and size, but rather quality of ideas and actions. Actions speak much louder than words.

The largest Jewish population lives right here in America. We are around 5.6 million in America, 5.2 million in Israel, 600,000 in France, 400,000 in Russia, 360,000 in Canada, 280,000 in both Great Britain and the Ukraine, 220,000 in Argentina, 70,000 in Germany and there are handfuls of hundreds and thousands of Jews in over sixty countries on all continents, speaking just about every major language in the world. Who would think that such a tiny group of people of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, and colors, united under the umbrella of Judaism, would do so much to shape the world as we know it today? 1% of 6 billion is 60 million. If you take this figure of 60 million and slice it into four equal parts, you get 15 million. So, less than 1/4 of 1% of the Earth's population is Jewish. Now you can see why all of the Jewish mothers out there want Jewish babies.

We American Jews are becoming victims of our own success. Because America has opened every door to us, we have gratefully entered. America's warm, embracing arms ultimately have led to prosperity that is uniquely American: richer and greater than anything that has ever existed at any time in the history of the world. Unfortunately, on the pathway to a beautiful American life, America is losing Jews. Sociologists point to two main causes: low Jewish birth rate and the big A word, assimilation. "Right now assimilation is something that worries Jewish communities around the world, and the concept of Jewish continuity is the motto of many of them," says Dr. Avi Becker, Director of the Institute of the World Jewish Congress which released a recent study. He summed up the current situation concisely: it's "good for Jews but bad for Judaism."

I'm not here to implore you to come running back to Judaism. Rather, I'd like to share with you some simple thoughts and excellent resources. At its core, Judaism is a simple religion. Sometimes all the details and confusions mask the clarity of what being Jewish is. When

asked to quickly sum up the teachings of the Jewish texts, the wise Rabbi Hillel responded, "What is hateful unto you, do not do unto others. The rest is commentary, now go and study." When it comes to being a human being, restraint is the key word. People throughout all of history have been doing much too much "doing" and less "not doing." If you are not familiar with the giants of Jewish ideology, you will be relieved to learn that many of Judaism's greatest teachers have had clear, easy and simple messages—Messages that harmonize with human nature, not senseless, greedy, hypocritical messages that sound great, but in truth, appear more like political propaganda than real spiritual guidance.

In August of 1999, Turkey experienced a devastating earthquake that killed nearly 20,000 people. Can you imagine in this day and age if an earthquake hit a US city and killed 20,000 people? Faulty construction was the cause of the collapse of many buildings which crumbled on top of thousands of Turkish citizens. Close inspection revealed that Turkey had the exact same building codes as the United States. This situation highlights the great schism between words and actions. In the lawbooks, the words were the same, but in Turkey, no one followed them. The general contractors skimmed and the government inspectors looked the other way. What good are laws and words if they fall on deaf ears and heedless hands? Judaism long ago recognized the importance of actions. Faith, love and belief are all great, but you have to look at what people do, not what they say. This is something that we Americans understand quite well: when was the last time anyone got promoted by doing nothing but reassuring the boss? Results, results, results are why we work, and actions, actions, actions bring these results. The Rush song *SHOW ME, DON'T TELL ME* sums up Judaism's view about human nature.

For me the essence of Judaism is to love ourselves first, then to love the people around us by restraining ourselves. That is respect. We should think nice thoughts, but much more importantly, we should do good. Judaism asks each of us to look at our lives and actions, to look at what we put into our heads, mouths, ears, and hearts. What are our motives, values, beliefs? Judaism stresses education because ignorance is an igno-



rant excuse. That's practical in my mind. Judaism is always evolving and changing as the Jews grow and change too. Judaism was the first major religion to organize universal education and charitable actions, and fight for civil rights for all people. Judaism has always understood that there are two sides to a coin, and that making decisions without understanding the interconnection of the forces ultimately leads to destruction. Sure, one can get by with short term gains, but just because someone does not believe in earthquakes does not prevent the earth from shaking. Castles built of ignorance and hatred fall down.

Faith will not hold up a building, sound construction will. Judaism has a solid foundation and a built-in improvement mechanism. Where one form of Judaism has proved rigid and alienating, another fresher, newer form popped up. Like everything with Jews, there is usually more disagreement than agreement on any change, but that does not stop Jews from changing. Judaism has watched great civilizations like the Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Babylonian Empires collapse while the Jewish ideas and people continue to live on. Those who have built the tallest buildings, most elegant churches, and enormous statues could not stop time from taking its course.

This past summer (2000) I visited gorgeous, vibrant Israel for the first time. I am so glad that I ended my contracting job and intense high-tech routine with a well funded start up in San Francisco, to replace the world of my liquid crystal computer screen with the ancient and modern sights of Israel. Israel is bustling with a vibrancy that is distinctly Jewish. Israel is the Jewish homeland. And Israel is safe. This past December, amidst the current conflict with the Palestinians, Birthright Israel sent thousands of young American Jews to Israel for free and would not have done so if anyone believed that the lives of American youth were at risk. If you have not gone to Israel, go. I'll tell you about some wonderful ways. It's amazing to think that there have been Jews in that location from the time that Abraham came down from the north of current day Israel around 4000 years ago.

Here in America where everything is relatively new, especially the

Wild West, most of us have no real sense of history, unless you can make a case for bad cowboy and Indian movies and failed dot-coms. In addition, we are cushioned by calm oceans to our east and west, friendly Canada to our north, and anxious Mexico to our south. The combined effect is little interest in things that do not directly impact our immediate surroundings. This is good and bad. On the one hand, America is open to improvement and eager to accept new technology, new ideas, and new ways of doing things because we are not held down by centuries of dead weight like Europe. When Europe yelled, "Get out!" to the religious minorities, America said, "Come in." Europe, an endless story of struggle and historical friction between compacted neighbors, made very short-sighted decisions when expelling, ejecting, and allowing the murder of its vilified Jews. Many highly educated, competent and skilled Jews poured into America and Israel. I do not think it is surprising that the US economy and technology has dominated the world's landscape over the last several decades, just as the United States military remains the world's only military superpower: Europe ripped out its heart and is feeling the pain.

After my two week United Jewish Communities Mingles Mission to Israel with seventy-eight young Jewish adults from the San Francisco Bay Area, my friend David and I flew to Athens from Tel Aviv then hydro-foiled over to the hopping Greek islands—as if we had not had enough wild nights in Israel with our animated group! I highly recommend the UJC Missions to Israel, and I'll tell you all about my experience in a later chapter. After a week of sun, beach, laughter, and late nights in the Greek islands of Mykanos, Santorini and Ios, David and I arrived back in Jerusalem on Friday afternoon (the airport closes on Shabbat) exhausted and almost declined the invitation to dine with a Jewish family in Jerusalem on Shabbat. I presented the case as such: "David, we are in Israel, in the holy city of Jerusalem, on Shabbat, and we have been invited to dinner by a local family. How can we turn this down?" (A friendly tourist advisory note: A massive volcanic eruption with the force of a

thousand nuclear weapons blew the island of Santorini apart around 3500 years ago creating beautiful volcanic ash beaches.)

We had a lovely Shabbat dinner at the home of Itzhak and Stella Neumann in Jerusalem along with their son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Itzhak and Stella's family had been living in Jerusalem for five and ten generations respectively. While recounting his life and career as an accomplished real estate developer, Itzhak mentioned a conference that he attended in America where he overheard a bunch of architects bragging about the feats of their fathers. One said, "My dad built the Empire State building." Another rebuffed, "My father built the Golden Gate Bridge." Itzhak continued, "I broke into their group and proudly stated, 'My dad killed the Dead Sea.'" His wife seemed little amused, but Itzhak had us smiling with one casual joke after another all night long. The Neumanns made us feel a part of their family in their home and that is how Israel felt to us: the Jewish people were welcoming us to the Jewish homeland with open arms and silly jokes.

Sometimes a smile, warmth and laughter can persuade where dryness fail. Albert Einstein cautioned, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." My favorite teachers have always stimulated my imagination rather than stifled it. Binders full of tedious raw facts are as digestible as cardboard. With this in mind, I'm going to skip many details. I am omitting lots of important names and facts in the hopes of making this a starting point of what could be an enriching journey if you so desire. Let's start by jumping back 4000 years into the past...

*Many of the videos that I recommend in this book can be found in the **Jewish Heritage Video Collection**. The Collection is located throughout America in over 100 different locations and growing. To find the location of the collection nearest you, try calling your local Jewish Community Center, synagogue, College Hillel or Jewish Federation. Some of the films are popular movies which you can find in your local video store while many of the best can only be found in this special collection. For a small fee you gain unlimited access to hundreds of the best and hard to find Jewish films in existence. See the **Internet Movie DataBase**—www.imdb.com—for info about films.*



Brief Ancient History of the Jews

Ancient Jewish history can overwhelm with hard to pronounce names and places. To top it off, Bible scholars, historians, Rabbis, archeologists and countless academics argue over minute details and intimidate us from having fun with Jewish history. I am going to attempt to silence any critics with a preemptive literary strike in a similar fashion to that of the Israeli Defense Forces in 1967 who in two hours destroyed the entire Egyptian Air Force. *Don't get lost in the small details and use your imagination.* Will it work? It's a good thing I'm only writing and not flying a fighter jet. In the process of covering Jewish history from the time of Abraham some 4000 years ago to the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E., I am going to pull out what I find to be the most important milestones and developments .

Who was the first Jew? Was Moses really a Jew? How many Hebrews left Egypt with Moses? Who wrote the Torah? Who lived in the land of Palestine (modern day Israel) before the Jews? Did people back then ever take a break from battling with one another? Did the Jews really kill Jesus? Why did the Romans destroy the Second Temple in the year 70 C.E. and exile the Jews from their homeland? Do you really think you can justly reduce the ancient history of the Jews to twelve pages? To

all these questions I have no definitive answers besides “absolutely not!” to the last one.

Until recently, everything that was pre-16th century was equally “ancient” to me. Culture, food, the weapons of war, the structure of society, and the laws by which different people lived and perished were greeted by me with equal disinterest. As a kid I thought that the majority of the Bible was fictional because of a few crazy miracles. Mentally, the confusion of the real and unreal aspects of the Bible had a singular effect on my interest: None. This past summer while traveling in Israel a burning bush of curiosity for history arose. Before living a year in Brazil in 1990 as a foreign exchange student, I would casually glance over a map of South America with North American apathetic eyes. Today the country of Brazil is for me alive with rhythm, samba, futebol, cachaça, factories, cities, beaches, mountains, islands, tangible problems and also friends. When “there” becomes “here,” a big change happens.

The land of Israel is no different. To fully grasp the history without seeing the land is difficult, because Israel and America are extremely different. While you can watch videos, read books, and listen to CDs, the essence of Israel and the proportions do not translate. For example, you can drive from the west coast of Israel to the east coast in no more than three hours and from the north to the south in about eight hours. It takes almost a week of 8 hour days to drive from sea to shining sea in America. We Americans are blessed with a huge, gorgeous country. Israel is blessed because it is the Jewish Homeland.

To get a good overview of Jewish history, I recommend a readable and nicely flowing book: *Jewish History in 100 Nutshells* by Naomi Pasachoff and Robert J. Littman. *Jewish History in 100 Nutshells* is perfect for taking in chronological slices of Jewish history one at a time. I also suggest having good maps of the Middle East and the world in front of you when following the routes of the Jews. Without a map, it's too hard to put the pieces together. If even I can make headway with Jewish history, there is hope for all.



If you have your world map handy, take a look at Egypt and Iraq, where around 6500 years ago in 4500 B.C.E. two separate civilizations started to develop. Two groups sprang up at the same time, yet did not know of each other: One was situated to the northeast of Palestine (present day Israel) and one to the southwest. Why there? Simple: big rivers and fertile growing lands. They respectively became known as Mesopotamia, which is the area around present day Iraq, and Egypt, which is, well, in present day Egypt. The first signs of civilization—cities, agriculture, the calendar, refinement of weapons, armies and taxes—forever changed the landscape of the wandering tribes of nomads. What could have stimulated such a dramatic, revolutionary change? My theory is quite simple: beer. Agriculture was the planting of barley and hops, cities were the areas for massive consumption and smokey beer halls, the calendar became necessary to coordinate the weekly festivals, and weapons and armies were organized to protect the sober from the nasty drunks. The one who could chug a beer the fastest became king and could tax everyone so that he would never have to work again and could drink his beer in peace. Back then there were no Jews yet, so people rarely complained about the poor quality of service.

Over the next twenty five hundred years, the civilization of Mesopotamia split into two factions: the Assyrian light beer drinkers in the north and the Babylonian dark beer drinkers to the south of once again, present day Iraq. The east-west flowing Euphrates River made a perfect natural division between the two rising empires. Around the year 2,000 B.C.E.—that's four thousand years ago—a small family got fed up with the high rents, pollution and bad camel drivers of Ur in Babylonia and decided to walk six hundred miles to the northwest of Ur to the southern part of what is today Turkey. It's a good thing that Abraham and his wife Sarah were a part of the family or else Jewish parents would not know what to name their sons and daughters. Along the way they had to cross the Euphrates River (do you have your map handy?) and that's

how they became known as the *Ivriim* or “Hebrews” which are “people who crossed the river.”

Everything was hunky dory with our friends, the *Ivriim*, and their new living situation with a great desert view. Now this may seem crazy to you, but I'm going to tell you what is written in the Torah or otherwise know as the Five Books of Moses or otherwise known as the Pentateuch. At the age of ninety-nine, Abraham had a conversation with God. I personally have never had a conversation with God and might not know what to say, but Abraham did and God told Abraham something beautiful or painful depending upon your knowledge of human anatomy. God told Abraham that the descendants of Abraham were going to be God's Chosen People, that Abraham was to circumcise himself at the age of ninety-nine, and that all male children were to be circumcised on the eighth day as a sign of the covenant. Clearly such an act could only have been divinely inspired. Who could come up with a crazy idea like that on his own? This story raises several questions but quickly dispels any doubts about Avraham's commitment.

I recently returned from backpacking around Israel and Europe and can see how the nomadic life agreed with the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Abraham and his family applied for their passports and headed south into the land of Canaan which became known throughout the ages as Palestine, Judah, Judea, Israel, and a handful of other names. That's what gives the Jews in Israel the four thousand year old claim on the land. They should have passed an international one-name-only law to make history easy for us, but they did not and so we learn names and more names of the exact same place.

All this walking and a healthy diet was good for Abraham and his family's circulation and they lived to be well over one hundred years old in the land of Canaan where they lived and died. The land of Canaan was rich and fertile, bustling with trees and life. The fresh air and warm evening breezes got the juices flowing and then the begetting got started. Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat twelve sons and one daughter. Does the number twelve sound familiar? That's

right, these are the twelve tribes of the Beni-Yisrael, or Children of Israel. Of course, the guys needed a little help from their wives with the begetting and Sarah helped Abraham, Rebecca helped Isaac and Jacob got lucky with two wives, Leah and Rachel and a couple of maidservants. Actually, Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah (poor Jacob!). Women still don't get the spotlight yet, but I guarantee you the Jewish women were telling their husbands what to do.

Jacob's favorite son was Joseph—you know, the guy with the fancy coat and the ability to interpret dreams. The Patriarchs and Matriarchs lived to be well over one hundred years old (I'm telling you, it's the walking and a good diet) and if you were doing the math, this puts us at around 1600 B.C.E. Now, if this history of the Hebrews is going to be the best selling book of all time, we are going to have to add a little more spice. Who is gonna read this if the twelve brothers and their progeny all live in peace side by side in the fresh fertile fields of Canaan? These events are described in book one, Genesis, of the Hebrew Bible. We must remember the Five Books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—are considered true by half of the world's population. Christians and Muslims believe in the Bible and the ideas in the Bible have greatly impacted both. Now, since Jews are much more complicated, we believe the Torah is true, the Torah isn't true, some parts of the Torah are true, some parts of the Torah aren't true, the Torah is the word of God, the Torah is not the word of God, etc. And people wonder why Jews are so crazy! While certain parts of the Bible read like pure fiction, the core of what I am recounting may be historically true. Then again, it may not. Then again it may—Don't listen to me, use your imagination!

Oh, back to Jacob and his sons. If you have a brother or sister, perhaps you can empathize with the brothers of Joseph selling him into slavery. His father Jacob spoiled Joseph and that's just not fair. We have spent all this time talking about Canaan and Babylon, but we have forgotten about our Egyptian friends to the southwest of Canaan. The Bible tells us the story in great detail about Joseph, now a slave, interpreting

the Pharaoh's dreams of seven fat cows and seven skinny cows—seven years of rain followed by seven years of drought. This enables the Pharaoh to avoid a barley and hops production problem and save up enough grain to produce fine beer that keeps Egyptians frothy during the seven dry years. Imagine the rebellion that could have ensued had not such a disaster been adeptly avoided. Joseph and the Pharaoh become good drinking buddies and all is well in Egypt, but not Canaan.

The famine swept the lands to the northeast of Egypt and several tribes of the wandering nomads set out to find a place to plant their crops. The Hebrews joined the many peoples from many lands who set out from Canaan to Egypt to raise their crops along the fertile Nile River. One such man and woman of the many peoples were having troubles with their relationship. They knew it was no use, but could not end it anyway. They were standing along the lush banks of denial which ain't just a river in Egypt. Ha, ha, ha. To make a long story short, Joseph and his brothers reunite in Egypt and the Hebrew tribes make their home in Egypt.

Something mysteriously ominous happens next. The Hebrews are enslaved in Egypt, the place where they once partied with the Pharaoh like it was 1599 (B.C.E.). There have been conjectures that an invading force may have wrestled control of the Hebrews in the northern Egyptian area. Or, that Ramses enslaved them for his massive building campaign. What we do know is if they were not slaves, then there might not have been a Moses to deliver them from bondage. The Torah compresses the next four hundred years in Egypt, from 1600 B.C.E. to 1200 B.C.E., to a few lines...must not have been happy times.



Around 1200 B.C.E. a charismatic leader comes on the world scene and with the singular force of his personality, sets the foundation for the Jewish people and the Law. Who was Moses really? Let's take a step back and look at the raw facts dismissing the theological perspective. Was

Moses the child of a Hebrew slave or was he an Egyptian prince? Were the Hebrews of Abraham the same Hebrew people as the Israelites that Joseph brought into Egypt and that Moses led out of bondage. In short, there are many more questions than answers. The beautifully animated movie *The Prince of Egypt* gives much historical detail about the Exodus from Egypt. Several Rabbis were consulted in the making of the film.

One thing is clear, Moses helped lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and then he delivered the Law. Never before in history had the written law set the foundation for a people and their relationships both with God and with each other. The Mosaic code focused on what not to do, exposing all the malignant and harmful actions of mankind. Rather than demanding “do this” and “do that,” it’s filled overwhelmingly with negative admonitions—“don’t do this” and “don’t do that.” So while the Ten Commandments command that we shall have only One God, shall “Honor thy father and mother,” and “Honor the Sabbath,” we are also commanded not to carry God’s name in vain, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, and not to covet.

How many Israelites left with Moses out of Egypt? The Torah in the Book of Exodus says 600,000 men which was deduced to be 3 million people total. What did they eat according to the Torah? Manna from heaven. If all Jews believed the Torah were true, this would be much too easy. So, some Jews believe that the actual number was closer to 500 or 600 people that came out of Egypt. Religious Jews see the whole world as miracles happening one after the other, all the time. So, when you say that God hit Egypt with the Ten Plagues, split the Red Sea, gave Moses the Torah, and supported all the Israelites in the desert for 40 years, religious Jews see no problem with this. However, there are a lot of Jews that don’t believe that it was all that simple. “If God controls the world, why did He punish His Jewish people so much?” many ask. If you look around the world today, there are as many shades of Jewish belief as flavors of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream. There is a fear deep inside the Jewish psyche that perhaps if Jews did agree, the whole world would fall apart. Perhaps furious disagreement is the key to Jewish survival!



Now Moses has a big job ahead. The easiest part of his journey was getting the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert. Then the whining, moaning, and complaining started and this drove him up to Mt. Sinai. Can you blame him? In that desert there were more opinions than people. If you had a choice, with whom would you rather talk, God or 600,000 opinionated Jewish men? There is a joke in Israel that there are more Presidents of Israel than people. God calls the Jews in the Torah a stiff-necked people. He threatens to kill everyone and make a great nation out of Moses. Moses pleaded with God not to harm His people, and thank God that God reconsidered. The tribe of Judah stood at the center of the population and with a little twisting of the pronunciation you go from Judah or Yehuda in Hebrew to Jews.

Why did God or Moses or Moses inspired by God, depending on your belief, have to pick one of the most heavily trafficked slivers of land in the region, a highway for warring armies in the northeast and southwest? In Israel, our UJC (United Jewish Communities) tour guide Menachem told us, "My father said to me, 'Menachem, what can I tell you? Moses walked for forty years in the desert and ended up here. If he would have walked for forty more years, we would be Swiss.'" The first 5 books of the Torah end with the Jews on the edge of the Jordan getting ready to come into Eretz Yisrael led by Joshua. The account of the battles and struggles are recounted in the Book of Joshua.

To this day Jews do not confuse the man Moses with the message of God that he carried—a message of law, justice, morality and compassion. Jews have no statues, portraits, graven images, or little plastic Moses figures that light up during Passover. The Torah says that God taught Moses the Torah and then Moses taught the Torah to the people. Moses gave what Jews to this day prize the most, a code of ethics, justice and the law, and a message of love and respect. Even his place of burial is unknown although we know that he never passed into the Promised Land. Meanwhile, while many great civilizations leave deserted ruins of stone and brick, the words of the Five Books of Moses are still living and breathing on the lips of Jews all over the world today, uniting all in a

common brotherhood and sisterhood of justice and love and a few million arguments over the validity of the Torah.



Now we are going to glance across the next three or four hundred years of the history of the Egyptian Israelites taken out by Moses. The Hebrews were desert people, clans and tribes. They lived off the land, planted crops, and were shepherds and herdsmen. The land was rich with fruit trees, crops, and plant life.

We are in the land of Canaan—now the Jewish homeland—and the year is around 1100 to 1000 before the common era. Then, as today, new weapons dramatically shifted the military advantage. While today we have stealth bombers, satellites, laser guided missiles and nuclear weapons, back then the revolutionary horse and chariot and swords gave the Beni-Yisrael the strength to defeat the Canaanites who lived in fortified cities throughout Canaan. Little by little, the Israelites wrestle control of the land of Canaan. The Book of Joshua is filled with miracle after miracle, performed by God to help the Israelites take over the land.

For this next part, I am going to pull out just the main highlights because by now the record keepers are thoroughly documenting most of the history of this people—a lot more information than either of us want to digest. The individual tribes of the Jews were well on their way to laying the legal foundation for a modern society. They elect wise judges, try to follow the ten commandments and other mitzvoat somewhat, try to stop worshipping their pagan gods in favor of the one God (old habits die hard!) and build up their military strength. Their hardest task was resisting the temptation of the religion of Ashtorah where the congregants slept with the temple priestesses. “Honey, I’m going to go to services again tonight.” “But you’ve been there every night this week!” “I’m just trying to be holy!”

In the 11th century B.C.E. the prophet Samuel welds together loose-knit groups of tribes now occupying the cities that belonged to the Canaanites and friends into a monarchy under the leadership of Saul to



ward off the hostile and warring Philistine neighbors. The name Palestine comes from Philistine. This sets in motion the reign of only three kings under the united kingdom: Saul, David and Solomon. Saul becomes the first King of the Jews. The Jews had never had a King before. It gave all the Jewish mothers hope that their daughters were going to marry a nice wealthy Jewish boy with a good profession. Saul leads his troops to fight off enemies with forgettable names such as Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites and the most well known, the Philistines.

From wandering Abraham and family, to Jacob's twelve sons, to slavery in Egypt, to Moses and the Law, to the conquering of the Land of Israel by the Israelites, to living by the Torah, and now a Jewish kingdom, the Jews had come a long way in 1000 years. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither was Jerusalem. The Land of Israel is filled with places mentioned in the Torah and the Books of the Prophets and the Writings. There are 24 books in all, so if you make it through the 5 Books of Moses (the Torah) and are looking for something more, dig in. Start with Psalms which are truly inspirational especially in tough times.

King David, the most beloved of the kings, succeeds Saul. We all know of his handiwork with a slingshot and slaying of the pituitary giant Goliath. David represents the good and bad inside all of us. He was a mighty leader and greatly expanded the territories and wealth of the Israelites. It was David who established Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish people—the Holy City. The name of the city Jerusalem goes back 4000 years, and is derived from two ancient Semitic words, *yarah*, “rock” and *Shalem*, the name of a Semite god. It was sung, “Saul has slain his thousands, David, his tens of thousands.” On the other hand, David had a weakness for a gorgeous naked woman bathing on the rooftop, namely Bathsheba, the wife of one of his officers. That's a whole story in and of itself but you've probably heard it before. While the wars and bloodshed back then seem horrific, we have to remember that man was not as civilized as we are today. Back then people died in the tens of thousands, unlike let's say, World War II, in which 50 million people died quite brutally too.

David ruled for forty years until the year 967 B.C.E. and then chose his son Solomon as his successor. During a time of great prosperity, Solomon the Wise built and completed the First Temple upon the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the same Temple Mount upon which the Muslim Dome of the Rock now stands, on the other side of the Western Wall. The next four hundred years of Jewish ancient history, from about 960 B.C.E. until 600 B.C.E., can be summed up in two main diametrically opposed forces: the kings of the divided kingdom and the prophets. Unfortunately for us, maybe Solomon was not so wise and left his unskillful son with a bunch of alienated and angry tribal leaders and with the death of Solomon, the kingdom of Judah and Israel split apart, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Well, at least we Jews had a couple of good years of unity.

Israel, the Jewish kingdom in the north, composed of Ten Tribes, was relatively short lived, as we shall see. The Jewish kings in the north and the south had power and that power corrupted. In the face of corruption, power, and rejection of the mighty One God the prophets arose to speak messages that shaped the relationship between God and humanity. In the northern kingdom, Elijah, Amos, and Hosea, to name a few, preached justice and love as the basis of all societies. It was the wisdom of the Prophets of Israel that would fundamentally shape Judaism and a more righteous way of living. Several people, including David Ben Gurion and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, recommend reading the book of Prophets, as they have as much validity today as they did back then. Even if you doubt the origins of the Torah and have trouble swallowing all the miracles, the messages of Prophets touch all humanity. Now, these prophets came in all flavors and one should not paint too pretty of a picture when it comes to their messages. Amos preached, "Let justice well up like water; righteousness like a mighty stream." Of course, if the Jews did not listen, Amos prophesied they would all go to hell in bucket.

Unfortunately for our friends of Israel in the north, Assyria comes in after only around 100 years and smashes the northern kingdom, scattering the Jews of the northern kingdom to who knows where. These are

the Ten Lost Tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This leaves just the southern kingdom of Judah for the Jews. If you have your map handy, Assyria is in the northern half of Iraq while underneath Assyria on the southern side of the Euphrates River lived the Babylonian Empire. You may remember that Abraham left Babylon and crossed the Euphrates river around 2000 B.C.E.

The Kingdom of Judah was composed essentially of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. This small southern kingdom centered around Jerusalem and had its long list of paranoid and avaricious kings who maintained power for three hundred years longer than the short-lived northern Israel. The southern prophets there elevated the concept of monotheism. Isaiah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah were deeply concerned with the will of God and the universal relationship with God. Isaiah preached beautiful messages. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." "Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Devote yourself to justice. Aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow." These are the messages that Moses first taught the Israelites.

The wise prophet Micah predicted that Judah would be destroyed and he implored the Jews to live ethically which is the core relationship with God: "To do justice and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God." As early as the second half of the eighth century B.C.E., Jewish prophets spoke wisely about the relationship between Jewish rituals vs. Jewish ethics, a conflict that still exists today. I side with ethics because in the pursuit of rituals, the branches of the tree can become easily detached from the roots—the source of growth. On the other hand, ritual is important to keep us connected to tradition. (See, even we argue with ourselves!) So while today little of the Jewish kingdom and the kings remains with us, the messages of the prophets continue to touch our hearts and our heads.



Now it's time to compress the next 600 years to two pages. In 597 B.C.E. our friends from up north, the Babylonians, conquer the kingdom of Judah and capture Jerusalem. The Babylonians deport the kings and leading citizens to Babylon, totalling about 35,000 deportees in all. Then, Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. There is a transition of the Jewish people from the areas of Israel and Judah to Babylon. Two major changes for the Jews take place: the transition from God tied to the Temple (the one that David's son Solomon built) to being accessible everywhere and the transition of the Jews from farmers of the rich and fertile land to merchants, traders and bankers in Babylon. This is the beginning of the Diaspora, the Greek word meaning "scatter about."

The Diaspora created a major challenge for the worshippers of God. Trade routes took them to far off places on boats and over land. They needed a core foundation that would bind Jews all over the world together. In Babylon, a group of brilliant Rabbis formed an editorial committee that brought together the full library from Jerusalem—old manuscripts, clay tablets, scrolls of the Books of Moses, laws, myths, historical accounts of battles, in short, the works—and fused these into the *Tanach*, or Hebrew Bible, which consists of the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.

You close your eyes for five minutes and the next thing you know, the Persians conquer Babylon and Persian ruler Cyrus extends religious tolerance to the Jews and permits the Babylonian Jews to return to Jerusalem after their brief, yet highly productive, 27 year exile. The Temple gets rebuilt in the 520's B.C.E., 70 years after the destruction of the First Temple by the bully Babylonians. This puts us in the Second Temple period of Jewish history. Isn't this fun?

Within the next couple of hundred years, the conquerors become conquered and our friends the Greeks appear on the world scene as the mightiest of the mighty. Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, conquered the Persian Empire and with it Palestine and Jerusalem. In 336 B.C.E. he assumed the throne in Macedon in northern Greece and ruled




until his untimely death by fever at the age of 33 in 323 B.C.E. It's too bad for Alexander that they did not have aspirin back then.

Everything the Hellas touched turned Greek including their conquering Romans hundreds of years later. The conquest of Judah, now called Judea in its Greek spelling, and the influence of Greek culture combined with the free flow exchange of Greek and Jewish ideas greatly universalized the religious concepts of the Jews. Greek culture and language, Hellenism, spread throughout the region. Jewish language shifted from Hebrew to Aramaic. Greeks learned Aramaic and Jews learned Greek as well as Greek science, philosophy and literature. Synagogues were built in almost every corner of the Greek world. The Jews overcame their first big hurdles, destruction by the pagan warring tribes, then the Diaspora, only to meet their greatest challenge: assimilation into Greek society and culture. More than two millennia later, we Americans Jews are in a similar position. More so than any army, women, wine and song may prove to be the biggest threat to the preservation of Jewish values in America.

Let's jump ahead around 200 years. With time the relationship with the Greeks deteriorated and in 167 B.C.E., a false rumor of the death of Antiochus in Egypt set off a revolt in Galilee that quite upset the living Antiochus who struck against the Jewish population. He passed a bunch of massive restrictions to punish the Jews and prevent them from worshipping any aspect of their religion. This ignited the rather short-lived revolt and kingdom of the Maccabees. The Maccabees were successful in rededicating the Temple and establishing in Judea an independent kingdom which became known as the Hasmonean State. That's why we celebrate Chanukah. This lasted a little over 100 years until about 37 B.C.E. when the mighty Romans from Rome came on the scene and declared themselves the new kings of the hill.

I was hoping to get up to the Destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 C.E. in this chapter, but I'll stuff it into the next one. We've covered nearly 2000 years of Jewish history. I am just drawing a few lines that maybe you'll fill with brilliant colors.





Brief History of the Jews Part II

Isn't it fun bringing the past to life? Several months before last Summer I could not have cared less about Jewish history and then something terrible happened—I became interested. Connecting the dots and seeing trends in history gives perspective. Those who care little about history are bound to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Grab your map and let's take a quick snapshot of world Jewry. By the end of the 1st century C.E., Jews were settled in almost every corner of the Roman Empire and as many as 10% of the Roman Empire, or 7 million people, were Jews. About 2.5 million could be found in Palestine. In Babylon, perhaps there were 1 million Jews. They could be found in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, North Africa, Greece, Greek islands, Italy, Gaul, Spain, Persia and throughout the Middle East. Dispersion of people was common in those days, just as it is today. The Jewish dispersal was unique due to the preservation of culture and religion. This separated the Jews from their neighbors and promoted continuation of the distinct Jewish identity. Jews lived in Rome from the 2nd century B.C.E. The number of Jews grew rapidly because Julius Caesar and Augustus treated them well, as did the general Roman population. From Rome, the Jews spread south into Sicily and into northern Italy. Jewish settlers following

the Roman trading routes moved into other Roman provinces including our European friends Gaul, Spain and Germany. The retention of the unique Jewish heritage and culture is the amazing story in the scattering about. The universal God and laws of Moses, not tied to a physical location, but rather packaged for export from first Torah written by Moses to scrolls and then books enabled the Jewish people to maintain their identity in far off lands.

Different flavors of Judaism have always existed. Back in Palestine at the time of the Roman occupation, two main groups were at odds with each other, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, not unlike the situation today with the Orthodox and secular Jews in Israel. Jews should always be united in our common beliefs, history and tradition, while respecting our God-given differences. No one group should claim to speak for all of Judaism due to a closer proximity to God's intentions.

These two competing forms of Jewish practice came about in the 2nd century B.C.E. and lasted until the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. The Sadducees, self-serving Temple-centric priests and aristocrats, controlled both the Temple and the religious texts. They were fundamentalists who practiced Temple sacrifice, literal interpretation of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" and selfishly pursued their own self-interests. They represented the establishment that had both power and hundreds of years of wealth stored in the Temple and were certainly not in any hurry to give up either. The Pharisees stemmed from the Diaspora concept of an omnipresent and just God, who could be worshiped in synagogues in any location versus the one Temple in Jerusalem. Pharisees spread learning and reading to the masses which posed a threat to the Sadducean priests who wanted all the control. We can see a similar struggle in the history of the Church that was intent on keeping the masses ignorant and illiterate for selfish reasons. The southern slave owners in America needed to prevent the slaves from reading the widespread Bible because right after Genesis comes Exodus. The problem with inflexibility is that you break, not bend,

and the corrupt Sadducees faded with the destruction of the second Temple. Maybe this was a blessing in disguise.

At this point I have to mention the wise Rabbi Hillel who was born in Babylon but came to Galilee at the age of 40. Rabbi Hillel was a Pharisee as were most rabbis. He was active from about 10 B.C.E. to 10 C.E. during the reign of Herod. Hillel taught, "Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." Once again, we see a negative injunction, a call for restraint when interacting with our fellow man and woman. His legacy is his ethical concepts and his ethical interpretation of Judaism. While the Sadducees were needlessly sacrificing animals, Hillel saw no place in Judaism for meaningless ritual or worthless formalism. Hillel taught the sacredness and sanctity of life. As the prophets had done several hundred years before, Hillel simplified life to a core set of sacred ethics in the face of useless Jewish rituals that had long ago lost touch with reality. He wrote, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

King Herod seized the throne of Judea from the Hasmoneans (remember the Maccabee revolt and the creation of the Hasmonean State?) in 37 B.C.E. with the help of Roman troops. He was a vicious and cruel tyrant—he made Saddam Hussein look like a kindergarden student. He had a uniquely Roman craving for building and under his reign he greatly expanded the Second Temple. While Hillel was praising the sanctity of life, Herod was murdering his family members, Jewish rabbis, priests, and suspected enemies and suspected loved ones. Besides King Herod's one little personality flaw of being despotic and murderous, overall he was good to the Jews of the Diaspora and provided the cash for the building of synagogues, libraries, baths and welfare needs. In addition, he set up the fund for the murdered family members of Herod, and killed anyone who made a donation. I'm kidding about that last part. Two years before his death in 4 B.C.E. Judea became a Roman province. Herod built the Western Wall which is the supporting wall of the Temple Mount. Herod also rebuilt Masada, his fortress on the hill near the Dead Sea where around 960 radical Jews called Zealots committed suicide a

few years after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 C.E. rather than submit to the Romans. I've hinted at it enough, now let's get to one of the worst periods in Jewish history, the Jewish War and the events that led up to this tragic event.



Two of the worst events in Jewish history are the Jewish War from 66–70 C.E. and the Bar Kokhba rebellion of 132–135 C.E. which was the most devastating blow to Jewry until the Holocaust. To understand the root of the conflict, we need a little perspective.

There were lots of Roman procurators in Judea of which we only know the name Pontius Pilate, who was the procurator at the time Jesus was crucified. The procurators were avaricious men who hated Jews and had the power of life and death over non-Roman citizens. In their greedy haste, they stripped the Jews of their land and rights and provoked hatred which sowed the seeds of rebellion. While Judaism preached Hillel's pacifism, Romans only understood abuse and warfare. Greedy procurators dispossessed Jewish farmers of their land, the gem of the Mediterranean—land of olive trees, fruit trees, vineyards, wheat fields, vegetable gardens—and sold the farmers into slavery. These angry Jewish farmers formed a revolutionary force called the Zealots who were prepared to fight and die for their freedom in the “Live free or die” spirit of New Hampshire.

The Zealots quickly grew from a few hundred to thousands. They became assassins and fanatics and their impulsiveness and lack of planning caused the destruction of Jewish Palestine which was at that time richer and more populous than Rome. Zealot rebellions popped up all over the land and the Romans responded harshly, quelling all attempts. By the year 70 C.E., over five decades of Roman abuse and cruelties swayed many sensible Jews to support the Zealots and make war with the Romans. The pacifistic House of Hillel opposed the rebellion but it was too late. The entire rebellion was doomed to failure from the start.



General Vespian led the Roman forces at first but handed control over to his son Titus when he had to return to Rome because of the death of the Emperor. Titus knew that Jerusalem was falling apart with internal factions of Jews killing one another. The Zealots set fire to the storehouses of food which left nothing to eat and nothing but starvation, despair, death and murder. We have a first hand account of the Roman siege on Jerusalem and the sacking of the Second Temple written by the Jew Flavius Josephus who is known as one of the greatest traitors in the history of the world. Titus was patient and built a wooden wall around Jerusalem by cutting down every tree within twenty miles of Jerusalem, reducing the jewel of the Mediterranean to a wasteland. Jerusalem fell, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple, and the war was lost. A group of Zealots fled Jerusalem and occupied Masada where I already spoke of their suicidal fate. "Masada shall not fall again," is the oath sworn by the Israeli military at their ceremony at Masada.

Unfortunately, the worst for the Jews was yet to come. A series of smaller rebellions followed the one in 70 C.E. culminating in the third and final Jewish rebellion in the year 132–135 C.E. Rabbi Akiva was the religious head of the revolt and Bar Kokhba was the adept military general. According to a Roman historian, 580,000 Jews died fighting and several thousand others were casualties of sword, fire and starvation. Many more Jews died in this revolt than in the Jewish War according to several sources. There is a well known story of the Romans lacerating and flaying the body of Rabbi Akiva during which he said his prayers and just before he died whispered the first verse of the Shema, "God is One." Now the center of Jewish life shifted from Jerusalem to an area in the northern part of Palestine called Galilee. Despite the complete devastation in Judea, more than half of the world's Jewish population was living outside Judea and continued to thrive under the Roman Empire as did the Jews of Babylon. The Jews of Babylon had been in Babylon since their exile in 597 B.C.E. when almost 700 years earlier the Babylonians had captured Judah.

We can see how history draws our eye to the big wars and devas-



tations rather than the prosperous years in between. Tragic headlines sell. We've already covered nearly two thousand years of Jewish history and besides a few low points, the Jews have fared amazingly well. I am going to cover Jesus, Paul of Tarsus, and the rise of Christianity in Chapter 8. Suffice it to say that Paul of Tarsus was one of the world's best salesmen and he sells Christianity which Emperor Constantine makes the official Roman religion in the 4th century of this era. Christianity spreads all over Europe and then the rest of the world.



Of the three main bodies of Jewish texts, we have covered two and have one left to complete the triumvirate. First came the Torah which was compiled in Babylon in 6th century B.C.E. Next came the Mishna, compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince in Galilee around 200 C.E. And finally, we have the Talmud. The Talmud is a collection of oral discussions on the Mishna and Jewish laws, which took place in the Jewish academies in Palestine and Babylon from the 3rd to 5th centuries of the Common Era.

The highly paid lobbyists in Babylon won out over Palestine and the Babylonian Talmud emerged as the dominant work and was studied by Jewish scholars and rabbis from the Middle Ages to the 18th century. The Babylonian Talmud is written in Eastern Aramaic and borrows several Persian words. With their long history of having late night Torah, Mishna and Talmud parties, the Babylonian Jewish community became the intellectual center for all the Diaspora and was home to Jewish scholars from the world over. The wisdom of the Jewish rabbis shines across the ages. In the face of ever crumbling brick and marble, Jewish ideas live on in these written works—the Torah, the Mishna and the Talmud. If you think that keeping track of the names of these Jewish texts is difficult, be glad that you do not have to read them in Hebrew and Aramaic!

The Jews officially lost their homeland after the Roman destruction



of the Second Temple and would not have one again until May 14, 1948 when the State of Israel was reborn. With Jews scattered about all over the known world, the Jewish community became a distinct way of living for Jews without either a homeland or a common language. The community was ruled by the consent of the members by a governing board. The board collected and distributed funds for charity, imposed taxes according to Jewish custom, and supervised all commercial and social functions. All criminal cases, political or religious disputes and contractual disputes were tried before a court of usually three rabbis. At the social heart of every Diaspora community stood the synagogue which ranged from the modest to the substantial depending on the wealth of the community. Many Yiddish speakers referred to the synagogue as the *shule*, the Yiddish word for school. As you might guess, education stood at the core of a Jewish community. The schools were filled with eager students and respected teachers. We would expect nothing less from the "People of the Book." Throughout two thousand years of the Diaspora, the estimated literacy of the Jews was above 90%, a record matched by no other country or people. In case I'm painting too pretty a picture of Jewish life, not every community had a white picket fence, happy students, thrilled teachers, and pearly white smiles. But, for the most part, charity, learning, the synagogue and the law stood at the core of Jewish life and the communities grew and prospered.

How did Jews make a living you may ask? Jews were butchers, shoemakers, tailors, weavers, coopers, coppersmiths, goldsmiths, jewelers, physicians, Internet moguls and more. Jews were highly regarded physicians to the Christian and Muslim worlds. Their skill, knowledge and scientific method stemmed from a long tradition of medical insights and medical knowledge. One of the main sources of the medical knowledge came from the rabbinic examination of animals for the laws of *kashrut*, that kosher thing. The Talmud contains thorough medical studies of the animal body and its inner workings. One indispensable service of the Jews was to keep open the routes of trade—the bloodstream of civilization. By the middle of the 9th century C.E., Jewish merchants and traders

had almost monopolized the trade between Europe and Asia. Over their extensive land and sea network flowed wool, spice, jewels, the essence of perfume, and whatever goods made the world go round.

And there was also the profession of money lending. Much has been said about the subject of Jewish usury, but little thought has been placed on looking at the situation with open eyes. One question begs asking: If the Jews were such usurers, why did the Christians come to them? The answer is simple—the Christian money lenders asked several times more interest than the Jews. Even though money lending was forbidden by the Church, Christians did it anyway. From the 4th to the 19th centuries the Christians kept coming to the Jews for the same reason: the Jewish money lenders were ethical and the Christian money lenders were not. Through their network of mutual trust, Jews were able to revolutionize international banking and finance. Today we Americans are giddy about globalization. We have to remember that the Jews were globalizing thousands of years ago and while today we salivate over the Internet, computer networks, and internationalization, Jews had an intricate worldwide communication network when most the world at that time was barely learning to read.



To talk about Judaism in Europe, we have to talk about Christian anti-Judaism, which transforms itself with time into a much more virulent anti-Semitism in the 19th century. We already know that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi and Paul of Tarsus, who never met Jesus, laid the foundation for the Catholic Church. Paul, himself a Jew, was frustrated that the Jews would not accept his modified form of religion and from the beginning he instilled a hatred of the Jews into his new religion that he taught to the pagans. In order to have the Roman Empire accept Christianity, Paul could not blame the killing of Jesus on the Romans who would have killed him faster than he could say "Pontius Pilate." The Romans were still furious about the Jewish revolts in Palestine and Paul capitalized on this

sentiment by adeptly shifting the blame of killing Jesus on the Jews. In the same fashion, the Christian world easily found a way to blame the Jews for all their problems.

How can we be absolutely sure that Jesus was Jewish? There are three scientific proofs. He had the same profession as his father Joseph—Joseph was a carpenter and so was Jesus—he did not leave home before he was thirty and his mother thought that he was a god.

The fact that Jesus, Mary, Paul and all the disciples were Jewish never stimulated much reflection or curiosity amongst many. In the place of thought came the seething anti-Judaism of a Church that was hellbent on converting the “devil-worshipping, evil, plotting” Jews to Christianity. It is unfortunate that Christianity did not grow out of this juvenile hatred of Jews which still exists even today. Each time the words “Christ killers” are spoken, the well of humanity is poisoned with blind hatred. Judaism has always been a religion that celebrates life, justice and love. When someone calls the Jews “Christ killers,” it is he or she who is killing a nation and a people with shameful and disgusting slander:

Jews find an ok to not-so-good home in Muslim lands depending on one’s point of view. The prophet Mohammed who lived from 572–632 C.E. had revelations in the hills outside of Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) which soon became prophetic revelations. He attracted a small group to study his teachings and revelations documented in the Koran. His knowledge of God came from Judaism which also influenced Islamic rituals. Mohammed’s affection for the Jews quickly turned to fury when he could not win them over into his new religion. Unfortunately, his hatred of the Jews is captured in the Koran for all generations to see and study. The Muslim calendar begins with Mohammed’s flight to Medina from Mecca on July 16, 622 C.E. where a group there accepts him as the prophet and is prepared to fight for the new religion. Within a few years after Mohammed’s death, Islam conquered most of the Middle East, including Persia, Babylonia, and Egypt and by 750 C.E., North Africa, Spain, and Afghanistan become Islamic. In 762, Baghdad became the capital of the Islamic world for the next 500 years.

By the 8th century, most of the Jewish world was under domination by Islam. In the 1st century of the Common Era, 80 to 90% of the Jewish population lived under the Roman Empire. With the Arab conquest, the coin flips, and now they live in 90% Islamic lands. Although in Muslim lands the Jews are second class citizens, some enjoyed great prosperity and freedom. Jews absorbed the Islamic culture, Arabic became their primary language, and some Jews found great success in economics, religion and philosophy. Beginning in the 13th century, Jews tended to migrate toward Christian lands. I think that by our American standards of today, the Jews in both Christian and Arab lands lived a precarious existence.

The biggest difference between Christianity and Islam, two religions that the Jews refused to accept, was simply this: Christianity lost to the Jews in the beginning but Islam won. Christianity's hatred of the "powerful" Jew and very strong stance against Jews sowed the seeds of hatred and distrust of the Jews and resulted in the persecution and slaughter of Jews by Christians within the last 900 years throughout all of Europe, finally escalating in the Holocaust. Islam has traditionally described Jews as weak and inferior; which is why many of the Islamic countries today are living in denial of Israel's powerful military force that has consistently beaten back the Arab attacks.

The documentary film *Routes of Exile: A Moroccan Jewish Odyssey* shows the two thousand year history of the Moroccan Jews and paints an excellent picture of their journey from antiquity to modern times. It traces their path from sailing out of Palestine with the Phoenicians across the Mediterranean two thousand years ago to the establishment of trading posts along the Moroccan coasts. Maps, older film clips, interviews with a diverse population of Moroccan Jews, and insightful questions intimately expose a different way of life, but a Jewish way of life nonetheless. In the 7th and 8th centuries, the Muslims conquer Morocco and pass some minor restrictions, but on the whole Jews lived peaceful lives. In 1492, Spain expelled her brilliant Arabs and Jews, and many Arabic and Jewish astronomers, philosophers, writers and thinkers fled to northern Morocco giving it a distinctly Spanish flavor. Only within the last hundred

years did the French occupation, Nazi Germany and finally the creation of the state of Israel create the turmoil which inspired more than 215,000, nearly 90% all of the Moroccan Jews, to make *Aliya* to Israel in the decades that followed Israel's statehood. But the journey is not over as the film *Routes of Exile: A Moroccan Jewish Odyssey* takes us all over Israel and to France and then Canada. While the film can be a little slow at times and dated, it succeeds in telling an important story.

In the 12th century Maimonides, the great rabbi, physician, linguist, and philosopher made his home in Egypt. He and his family were driven from their homeland of Muslim Spain by the fanatical Muslims seeking conversion. They went to Palestine but the Crusaders crushed any hopes of settling in the Promised Land so down they went to Egypt. I just had to mention his name or you would only know about the first Moses and not the second. He wrote, "Ever since the day when we abandoned our homeland to go into exile, the persecution has never ceased; from our youth it has reared us as a father; and from our mother's womb has guided us."

I noticed that when writing about Jewish history, men get most of the attention, as with most of history for that matter. We must remember that beside every good man there was a woman, and Judaism in particular has always had the utmost respect for women. We have the Book of Esther and the Book of Ruth and we hold our Matriarchs in the highest esteem. In 1951, Israel passed the Equal Rights for Women Law making Israel one of the first countries in the world to acknowledge the equality of women and men in all spheres.

Over the period of almost a thousand years the Jews spread across Europe and into Poland, Lithuania and Russia. The Yiddish language embodies the spirit of their journey. Yiddish had a German base, included early forms of French and Italian bits, had the soul of Hebrew and was written in Hebrew letters. My paternal grandparents would talk in front of their grandchildren in English and argue in Yiddish. We could not understand a single word that they were saying which was the point. Yiddish has twice as many vitamins and minerals as English. Thank good-

ness we have words like *shlepp* (drag), *yenta* (someone who talks too much), *shlemiel* and *shlemazal* (ne'er-do-wells), *meshugga* (crazy), *bagel*, *pastrami*, *shtetl* (poor little village), *mensch* (a fine person), *Yid* (Jew) of course, *schmuck* which in Yiddish means jewel.

Jews under czarist Russia from 1791 to 1917 were forced to live in the giant ghetto on the western border of Russia that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea called the Pale of Settlement. Church-taught cruel Mother Russia had expelled her Jews in the 15th century, but due to the annexing of new lands, Russia suddenly found herself home to a large Jewish population. The lovely and tragic ***Fiddler on the Roof*** brings the Russian shtetl to life. Sholem Aleichem's Tevye embodies the unbreakable Jewish spirit. In the middle of an argument, someone asks Tevye, "He's right and he's right, they can't both be right." Tevye pensively replies, "You know, you are right too." How nice if the pogroms and Czar-ordered expulsion of the Jews were only fictitious. Why should you watch the movie? Tradition!

The ***Museum of the Diaspora*** in Tel Aviv carefully details all aspects of the Jewish scattering about. You can see beautiful models of synagogues from all over the world, exhibits, charts, maps, films and more. I saw the beautiful model of the Mazel Synagogue in Prague and a few months later was in the real thing. At the ***Museum of the Diaspora*** they can trace the roots of your last name as well.

The fervor of the Crusades fueled the Inquisition which produced explosions of violence that forced the Jews to flee from various countries in Europe to save their lives. They had to leave England, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Austria and were pushed East over into the Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland. Poland became home to the largest Jewish population in the world and at its peak more than 3.5 million Jews called Poland home. Even in the face of all the obstacles—persecutions, restrictions, heavy taxation—Jews became prosperous and amassed wealth in many countries. ***Image Before My Eyes*** recreates Jewish life in Poland from the late 19th century through the 1930's. Isaac Bashevis Singer has a nice description of the film: "A great document, a remnant of

something which has been almost completely destroyed and what is left is a real treasure. 'Image Before My Eyes' should be seen by not only every Jew but by every human being."

As you can see, where do you stop when it comes to Jewish history? Jewish history is world history, and a reflection of the progress of the human race and unfortunately, the treachery of the human race as well. I'd like to end this chapter with mentioning an individual who had a great impact on the Judaism that most of us practice (or don't practice!) in America today.

Baruch Spinoza, the son of a former Marrano who settled in Amsterdam, lived from 1632–1677. Spinoza had been a star pupil, but due to his radical views and questioning the holiness of the Torah, he was excommunicated (believe it or not Jews excommunicate too) by the nervous Jewish religious establishment. He denied that the Bible was a God-given document, but rather a document that was authored by Moses and a handful of others. He stated that Biblical law was only of value to the ancient Israelites and that the Biblical stories were written for the uneducated masses to inspire devotion. The purpose of religion, he held, was for but one objective, to make people follow the law. In fact, in what he saw as silly stories, impossible miracles, prophecies and threats of redemption, Baruch Spinoza challenged that enlightened individuals had no need for such forms in organized religion. The thinking of Baruch Spinoza changed Judaism in several ways. Reform Judaism follows many of his beliefs.

While many Jews today in America and around the world praise a reforming approach to Judaism, many other Jews—those who believe in the divinity of Torah—see this ideology as against the path of Torah, the mitzvot, and the core mission of the Jews. We come back to the conflict between ritual practice and ethical practice of Judaism. One only needs to visit our tiny little Jewish State to see the tension between the Jews who say that the Torah is the word of God and needs to be followed to a tee, to those Jews who disagree. I could not believe that many Jews are thankful for the Intifada for bringing the Jews in Israel together because if

it was not for all the Arab attacks, many feel that Jews would be killing Jews.

No matter what your thoughts on Judaism, there is a good chance that a Jew before you has already travelled the same course and written it down. I just think it's great to fly across the history of the human civilization and see how much of a profound and wonderful impact this special group of people have had on the advancement of humankind. In looking back over 4000 years of Jewish history which we covered in these two chapters, the philosophy and spirit of Judaism transcends the difficult to remember names and places. Little by little we bring Jewish history to life, and become a part of it in the process.

I have left out some of the greatest and most tragic yet intermingled events in world Judaism—Jews coming to America, Nazi Germany's and Europe's massacre of its Jews, and the creation of the State of Israel. I will cover these in following chapters. Now, let's go to this place called America that has religious toleration and room for millions of poor immigrants. Perhaps the Jews who have been kicked out of their homeland, relentlessly persecuted in Christian lands, and made second class citizens in Islamic lands can find a place where they can live like everyone else with religious and professional equality—America!

4

Judaism in America

I'd like to share with you my thoughts about some nice and simple ways to get connected to Judaism in America. If you are a little or a lot out of touch with Judaism, that's quite alright. I was in your shoes not too long ago and found the journey into the past and future of Judaism to be wonderfully rewarding each step of the way.

America is a blessing to her nearly 6 million Jews but she can also be a threat to Judaism. I think that there is going to be a huge resurgence of the interest in, practice of, and involvement with Judaism in America. Why? Why not? When it comes to raising a family and dealing with life cycle changes, growth and the most important issues in life, Judaism is uniquely qualified to guide us, as it has our ancestors for hundreds of generations. In the Land of Capitalism, Judaism gives Jews something money can't buy: true companionship. You can call it culture, music, social services, community, rabbinic advice, whatever—Judaism is a good, true friend. Those are the hardest to find but easiest to keep.

I am going to briefly address two main subjects in this chapter: a quick history of Judaism in America and some ideas for getting involved with Jewish organizations.

We should praise the Lord that America and her Jews have such a

wonderful relationship. 2000 Vice Presidential hopeful Joseph Lieberman told a funny story to our freezing yet energized crowd at Latrobe, Pennsylvania's small airport runway: A boy is pulling his wagon along and the four wheels pop off and roll in all directions. "I'll be damned!" yells the boy and goes and gets the wheels and puts them on again. He rolls a little further and the same thing happens again. "I'll be damned!" he shouts again and puts the wheels back on. A priest who was standing across the street sees the boy and comes over to him and says, "Young man, we must never forget to give our thanks to the Lord even in times of trouble." So, the little boy puts the wheels back on and continues along a little further and the wheels pop off again. The little boy looks at the sky and yells, "Praise the Lord!" Suddenly, the four little wheels mysteriously roll across the ground, and insert themselves onto the wagon. The priest watching the whole thing happen says, "I'll be damned!"



When Christopher Columbus sailed to America in 1492 at the start of the Spanish Inquisition, his boat was filled with both Jewish cartographers and *Marranos*. The *Marranos* were secretly practicing Jews who had converted to Christianity during the Spanish Inquisition to escape persecution. That's when Jews first hit America. But let's skip ahead a couple hundred years.

Who would have imagined that the place where my parents and I partied for four days and nights of Carnival in Recife, Brazil was the departure point for a group of *Marrano* Jews who sailed to America. In 1631 the Dutch conquered the Brazilian state of Pernambuco and the *Marrano* Jews, freed from Portugal's Christian wrath, openly returned to Judaism in Recife. (Interesting fact: Brazil's language is Portuguese and over 180 million Brazilians speak Brazilian Portuguese.) Dutch rule was short-lived and now in trouble, the group of Jews was determined to find a new home, a safe home where they could be Jews. They set sail for America.



Asser Levy van Swellen took his small boatload of Recife Jews to the Dutch colony New Amsterdam, a place where Jews did not have to choose between Catholicism and death. Levy was determined to have full rights in this new country. The Dutch Governor, Peter Stuyvesant, repeatedly tried to strip the Jews of their equal rights. Levy fought him to the bone and gained wide fame in the process. Tenacious and unrelenting, his name appears all over Dutch court records as a litigant in case after case to keep Jewish rights intact. He was the first Jewish landowner in New York City, the English name for New Amsterdam. Asser Levy van Swellen became a symbol of the relentless fight of the Jews for freedom in America.

Jews first appeared in the English colonies in 1621. There were enough Jews for a *minyan*—a service with ten male Jews—in Connecticut by 1659, the Carolinas by 1665, Rhode Island by 1677, just to name a few. Newport built a synagogue in 1668, Savannah, Georgia in 1734, Philadelphia in 1745, and Charleston, South Carolina in 1750. The majority of the first Jewish settlers were *Sephardic* which are those Jews who originated from Spain and Portugal. By the time of the American Revolution, almost half of the synagogues were *Ashkenazic*. *Ashkenazi* are Jews from eastern Europe.

Around 3,000 Jews, give or take a few hundred, were on American soil at the time we ousted the English in 1776. The United States of America is the first country that granted the Jews equal rights. George Washington, in his 1790 letter to the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island writes, "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid." Unfortunately, "everyone" did not include black slaves or American Indians.

The Ashkenazi Jews (eastern European) headed West as fur traders with the American Indians, whom they treated fairly. The wealthy Sephardic Jews begin to intermarry and have excellent relationships with

the Quakers, Protestants, and Presbyterians. All Jews in America were treated with a decency never before known amongst Christians.

1848 brought a large influx of Germans fleeing troubled Germany, and amongst them German Jews by the thousands. By the time of the Civil War, Jews could be found in every state and US territory. In the Civil War, Jews served as officers and soldiers in both armies.

The extraordinary philanthropy of the educated, informed and caring German Jews brought charities, clinics, hospitals and shelters to cities all across America. They founded Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, the first rabbinical seminary in America, established newspapers and magazines, and built social infrastructure. In the 1840's, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise became the lead rabbi in Albany, NY where the long, cold winters inspired him to begin the Reform movement, for which Reform Jews are particularly grateful. By the 1880's, there were thriving Jewish communities in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Cincinnati, Portland and San Francisco.

The Aryan nonsense and anti-Semitism of our foolish European friends drove millions of eastern European Jews to grab their families and what they could carry with them, leave their homes, trek across Europe and find a boat that could take them to America. Wealthy German, Dutch and British Jews came to their rescue and chartered ships to bring them here. The boat and the ride were particularly hellish, but the flood of boats got the flood of Jewish immigrants into the Port of New York and into Ellis Island, day after day, night after night. Hope of a place to be free as people and Jews overcame all the horrible conditions that the penniless and homeless Jewish immigrants endured. The Immigration officers worked around the clock processing countless documents for countless men, women and children. Actually, they did in fact count them all.

The established German Jews provided shelter for the hundreds of thousands of new arrivals in the lower East Side of New York. Their charity and compassion bought beds, food, and shelter for the poor Jewish immigrants that came from a different world far away. Between 1881

and 1924, over 2.5 million Jewish immigrants came to America. 2.5 million! There is a good chance that one of your grandparents or great-grandparents, like mine, was a part of that amazing influx of Jews into America. By 1950 there were 4.5 million Jews in the United States and almost 4 million were Ashkenazic by birth or descent. That means that there is a good chance that you, like myself, are of Ashkenazic descent. My father's parents were from Slovakia and my mother's side comes from Russia. Life was very hard for Jews in these palaces.

The Yiddish speaking Jews worked hard in manual labor, filled up factories by the thousands and began to form unions that changed the face of the American labor movement as Jews united with the other masses of American workers in solidarity. An explosion of Yiddish writers, poets, newspapers, playwrights and Yiddish everything came to America as well. While older pictures capture their poverty, filth, degradation and suffering, these Jews had unwavering hope that fueled their struggle out of the New York ghettos and factories, and into the schools, free American libraries and higher learning institutions.

Soon the Jews became educated and rose to the tops of their classes. American universities and medical schools imposed a quota system to limit Jewish applicants in response to the baseless fear that their institutions will become Jewish institutions. There are still remnants of the quota system today. In his book *Chutzpah*, Harvard Law Professor and civil libertarian Alan Dershowitz presents the case that American Jews have to stop acting like second class citizens. He makes several valid arguments. My father recently reread the book and then mailed my brother, sister and me a copy. Dershowitz gives tremendous insight into Jewish America. Dershowitz unnecessarily self-aggrandizes, but on the whole it's a book partially worthy of its title.

Anti-Semitism in America kept Jews out of elitist social and country clubs, certain neighborhoods, business firms, and elitist hotels. In the 1920's, Henry Ford published a newspaper sharing his foolish obsession with an endless plot of the Jews to take over the world. He should have stuck to building cars. But American anti-Semitism was nothing like the

virulent deadly strain in Christian Europe. The fundamental difference between America and Europe was that Europe was home of the Christian nation, while America was a nation in which the majority of the people were Christians. The Founding Fathers of America built separation of Church and State into our constitution for a good reason.

By the 1920's, Jews became physicians, lawyers, businessmen, artists, writers, scientists, musicians, and filled the entire professional spectrum. The film by Barry Levinson, *Avalon*, depicts three generations of the five Krichinsky brothers and their journey as a family. It starts with Sam telling the story to his grandchildren, "I came to America in 1914 by way of Philadelphia. That's where I got off the boat. And then I came to Baltimore—it was the most beautiful place you ever saw in your life. Sam was in America, Sam was in America!" *Avalon* captures the historic feeling, triumphs and tribulations of a family that struggles to keep itself together in the face of American success. It is beautifully filmed and layered and most importantly, it tells a touching Jewish immigrant story.

With the doors wide open to just about every opportunity today in America, we almost forget that there were some roadblocks along the way. The older film, *A Gentleman's Agreement* starring Gregory Peck and Dorothy McGuire, shows how in the 1950's and 1960's Jews were restricted from clubs, hotels, neighborhoods, and "off-limits" areas by the insidious "gentleman's agreement" of all the gentiles. It was an unwritten law that Jews were not welcome. Thankfully that stupid barrier has come down, mostly. For some reason, it seems that America is still having trouble with a Jewish President of the United States. Jewish people have successfully served as the CEO's and Presidents of America's most important and prestigious companies and in politics have served America faithfully and honorably. Jews have held the highest political office in France and England and America should be no different.

Over the last 40 years, Jewish humor and mentality has weaved itself throughout American life. One film in particular that captures the neurotic, paranoid, self-analytical, crazy American Jew stuck in an irrational, crazy and absurd America is *Annie Hall* starring Woody Allen and Diane

Keaton. You have to love a movie that starts with— “Life is full of loneliness, suffering, unhappiness, and it’s all over much too quickly.”

So here we are at the beginning of the secular third millennium. It’s kind of amazing how we got here. It was not easy and the journey is by no means complete. We’ve come a long way but still have further to go.



What I’d like to do in this section is share with you my personal experiences with a few wonderful Jewish organizations that I’ve come across over the years. Rather than just list these organizations, I thought the context of how I came to know them might be helpful to you.

In 1996 I joined the **AJC** (American Jewish Committee)—www.ajc.org—following my parent’s recommendations. My mother serves on the boards of several Jewish councils including the AJC Pittsburgh Chapter and my father has been a member of the AJC for over 30 years and serves on their National Executive Committee. I had completely lost touch with anything Jewish and wanted to find a nice place to start. I did not feel like going to services, but I did want to get involved with Jewish people doing all kinds of good things. In San Francisco, the AJC has a young leadership group called Open Circle that consistently attracts around 50 people for interesting programs once every couple of weeks. The programs ranged from Jewish topics like Jewish ethics in the workplace, rabbis discussing the various forms of Judaism, Judaism and the Internet, Israel and Egypt’s peace agreement, and so on. What made the events so nice was both the quality of the speakers and their presentations and the involvement with a great group of people that would come. The Open Circle was smart and started the programs at 7:30 P.M. and the events lasted a little over one hour which left time for socializing at the end. The events were held at the Jewish Federation building near the Embarcadero in San Francisco which is an easily accessible location from all parts of town, especially for those coming home across the Bay Bridge or from the financial district.



The AJC has a special membership fee of \$35 for those younger than 35. For the price of a nice dinner, a young Jewish person can belong to one of America's most exciting organizations. For those over 35, the price is still reasonable. The AJC sends out a few page, concise and relevant newsletter about once a month. I always enjoy receiving mailings from the AJC. I throw out every bit of non-critical mail, and the AJC never abused the relationship. The AJC once a year sends out a Jewish questionnaire which takes 15 minutes to fill out and compiles the results to give a report about Jewish life in America. The AJC has offices in all major US cities and sponsors national leadership conferences as well. Every couple of years, the American Jewish Committee sends out its comprehensive yet readable Antisemitism World Report to AJC members that looks at over 60 countries individually and describes the current state of anti-Semitism in the country from the press, political parties, incidents, and past history.

The AJC was established in 1906 in response to the hundreds of pogroms against the Jews in Russia sponsored by the twisted czarist dictatorship. Besides fighting anti-Semitism and focusing on international Jewish affairs, the committee also focuses on Christian-Jewish and African American-Jewish relationships. It was a great place for me to get started and for years my AJC events enabled me to connect with the Jewish community, meet lots of motivated Jewish professionals, and to expand my horizons. In short, it was a great start.

In 1997 I helped organize one of the AJC Open Circle events called Beyond Borders: Judaism and the Internet. The editor of the San Francisco Jewish Chronicle, founder of the site www.jewish.com, and the Jewish site on AOL, Marc Klein, showed the group how the Web was connecting Jewish people from all over the world. He had a live connection to the Web which we projected onto a large screen. For the second half of the program, one of the directors of the San Francisco chapter of the *Anti-Defamation League*, Ira Kaufman, brought up websites that promoted hatred and anti-Semitism. Many were shocked to see this little known side of the web.

The *Anti-Defamation League*—www.adl.org—is devoted to combating anti-Semitism and hatred. The ADL, as it is commonly known, is the leading such organization in the United States and throughout the world heading the fight against racists and hate groups. They are constantly monitoring the airwaves, television, newspapers, political messages, and national and international events for any signs of anti-Semitism or racism. The ADL rapidly exposes the perpetrators and calls for immediate action through its sophisticated worldwide communication network. If you want to know of recent Jew bashing in one of Louis Farrakhan's speeches or want to check on the status of the 10 Iranian Jewish doctors who are being held in jail for crimes that they did not commit, you can visit the ADL's website for this and other relevant information.

Whenever there is a major incident, like the gunman shooting at children in the Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles or the Temple burnings in Sacramento, the ADL is on the scene right away. The ADL knows that the best weapon against anti-Semitism is constant vigilance and exposure. Sick politicians and individuals who try to advance their cause by slandering Jews have to know that in America they won't be able to utter their racism with impunity, but will be held accountable to the American public for who they are and what they do.

The Anti-Defamation League was established by *B'nai B'rith*. B'nai B'rith is one of America's oldest Jewish organizations which was started in 1843 by German Jews as a "League of Brothers" to support their families in times of illness and death and to support intellectual growth of the Jewish community. Today it is the largest Jewish fraternal organization, although its membership is aging and declining in size. If you have attended a Hillel on a college campus, you can thank B'nai B'rith for starting Hillel and continuing to support the needs of Jewish college students all over the world. I regret not having been more involved with Hillel at Penn which now hosts one of the nicest Hillel facilities in the country.

I know that many out-of-touch Jews do not frequent Shabbat services, but I am going to bring up a few nice ideas. Within the last three years, every couple of weeks I would try out a different Shabbat service

at one of the many synagogues on the San Francisco Peninsula. I found that each service was different and the exposure helped me decide what I liked the most. In the end I determined that it was a service that was warm and open, not tense or stiff, and one which had a lot of singing. The Bay Area is blessed with many wonderful rabbis and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting the rabbis and talking with them. There is no fee to go to services and temple hopping is a great way to end a long work week. It's nice to sing Hine Ma Tov, Shalom Aleichem, V'shamru, Shalom Rav, Oseh Shalom, and lots of beautiful Hebrew songs. It's ok if you do not know the words because they print them in English as well.

It's amazing how we can simply get in the habit of not going to services for a myriad of reasons. If you put in a little effort, there is a great chance that you can find a service that is not only right for you, but for your friends as well. Soon you can have a nice time on Friday evenings with very little effort. San Francisco has a nice program where the singles group will pick a different synagogue and have a special service. Try going to a Reform, Conservative, or even Orthodox service to see what's right for you. I am in the habit of making the Shabbat holy by enjoying myself from sundown on Friday to sunset on Saturday. I try not to work but rather go outside and hike, play, mountain bike, read a book, talk with friends, and especially not worry about anything.

At a Shabbat service in San Francisco, a nice young man representing **AIPAC** came to speak to us about what we can do to help support Israel. AIPAC, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, stands to support Israel and lobby on behalf of Israel. If you visit the AIPAC website—www.aipac.org—you can read updates on the progress of the Israel/Palestinian peace talks and the status of the conflict in Israel. AIPAC's mission is to stand up for Israel and to bring the major issues to the foreground. AIPAC is a critical link between American government policy and America's relationship with Israel. The young man who spoke to our group asked us to take just few minutes and write our Congresspersons and Senators to let them know how important Israel

is to us. Each of us can make a difference, one small letter and conversation at a time.

If you are looking to meet other Jewish people, there are all kinds of events and programs at the local **Jewish Community Center**. From classes to programs to a health club, the JCC is nice place to visit. Some have amazing facilities while others have a distance to go. San Francisco is going to completely rebuild their dated center. My friend in Austin, Texas told me that their new one is amazing thanks to the generous donation of Michael Dell. Charlotte, North Carolina has a 45-acre Shalom Park that is home to two synagogues, Conservative and Reform, as well as a Jewish Community Center and Jewish Day Camp that is currently being built.

Jewish singles groups are a nice way to meet people as well. At one such event in San Francisco a speaker announced the United Jewish Communities' Mission trips to Israel. The **United Jewish Communities**—www.ujc.org—is commonly known as the UJC. I had never been to Israel before and a few people who had gone on the trip lit up when they talked about their experience. Everyone with whom I spoke was ecstatic about the UJC Mission to Israel. They use the word mission instead of trip because the UJC takes you into the heart of Israel, much closer than you could get on your own. I'll tell you all about my mission in Chapter 6.

The United Jewish Communities is a combination of the United Jewish Appeal known as the UJA, the Council of Jewish Federations, and United Israel Appeal. So, whether you type in www.ujc.org or www.uja.org or www.jcf.org, it all comes to the same website because now it's the same organization. The UJA is the largest of all Jewish charitable organizations. It was founded in 1938 as a result of the Kristallnacht pogrom in Nazi Germany to help Jews. After World War II, the UJA funds helped resettle survivors of concentration camps. The programs, funds, and grants of the UJC reach Jews all over the world and strengthen the bonds between Jewry in the United States and Israel. It's a wonderful organization.

While I was in Israel, after our UJC Mission, my friend David and I hopped over to the Greek Islands and came back to Jerusalem where he volunteered for the Dental Volunteers for Israel at Hadassah Hospital. Hadassah Hospital is the leading hospital in Israel and the entire Middle East. **Hadassah Women**—www.hadassah.org—has a membership of around 350,000 women, making it the largest Jewish organization in the United States. The founder, Henrietta Szold, devoted her life to helping Jews, rescued some 22,000 Jewish children from the Nazi concentration camps by her efforts, and helped strengthen the bonds of Zionism.

So, there you have it, a few of the brightest stars in a sky filled with tremendous Jewish organizations that are doing so much for Jews all over the world. I tried to relate to you how I found these organizations, and as you can see it was one at a time over several years. Go out there and give it a shot. Try going to Shabbat services or an evening meeting, a Jewish singles event or an AIPAC solidarity rally. It's never too late and you will be greeted with open arms.

One other thing to think about in this virtual, high-tech, fast-paced, no time, gotta-go, gotta-hurry, more work, stock options, start-up, crash and burn, buy buy buy, eat-work-worry-sleep world of ours, is that we need more humanity and less technology. I work with the computers and the Internet for a living and certainly have an appreciation for the benefits of the amazing new channels of communication, but I also see firsthand how people quickly displace community gatherings, friendships, and personal values with aimless Web surfing, isolated computer screens, and twisted priorities. We know what we will do for our careers and money, the question is what we will not do? What is going to prevent America from becoming one giant cheesy stripmall or prefab restaurant chain? Where do we take a stand for what is most important to us? As Rabbi Hillel said, "If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" We all can make Judaism thrive here in America.





Eretz Israel: The Jewish Homeland

Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel, the Jewish homeland. It's almost something that we take for granted unless we stop and remember how many Jews sacrificed their lives to bring about a homeland for the Jews after roaming the Earth for nearly two thousand years without nationhood.

Israel is an amazing country with an equally amazing history. I have been chipping away at Israel's history for a lot of years now and am continually seeing new aspects of the rich vibrant country. I find the media of film particularly effective for bringing Israel's past to life. It's nice to watch a movie or documentary about Israel and then follow up with reading a few books. I just happen to have some excellent recommendations and I'll tell you about these in this chapter.

With sheer determination, love and human sweat, Israel defeated her enemies and the best efforts of the world to deny her any easy pathway to existence. If not for the courage, persistence, and vision of redemption of the early pioneers followed by the ingathering of the exiles, Israel the nation would not be alive today. Israel is a wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles. The creation of the state of Israel reminds me of the quote by Thomas Paine arguing for the colonies to break away from England and determine their own fate. He wrote, "Tyranny, like hell,

is not easily conquered, yet the harder the challenge, the more glorious the triumph." Israel is a glorious triumph of the Jewish will to live and return home. Of course it would have been nice as our tour guide in Israel mentioned if Moses would have walked another forty years and ended up in Switzerland, but he did not. For some reason, God plopped us down in the most hostile area of the world. Hence the little strip of land, the once jewel of the Mediterranean, that was situated right in the crossroads of new, mighty and fallen empires is now, once again, home to the Jews just as it was back in the times of the united and divided Jewish kingdoms from around 1000 B.C.E. till around 600 B.C.E. and the Second Temple period which ended in 70 B.C.E. It's important to remember that Jews have always been living in the land of Palestine and there has never been a point in history where the Jewish presence was absent from the land, contrary general ignorance and anti-Zionist propaganda.

Lest I paint too holy, ancient and slightly intimidating a picture of Israel, I should balance everything by telling you about all the late night dancing and partying on the beaches in Tel Aviv, in the dance clubs in Jerusalem, the outdoor concerts, and snorkeling in the Red Sea in the Negev desert resort town of Eilat. Blended with the ancient are new stores, wonderful shopping, delicious restaurants and an atmosphere of excitement and fun. Dance clubs in Jerusalem you ask? You bet. It's a good thing Judaism does not have the concept of guilt and sinning by living life to its fullest especially when it's all good fun. Israel is bursting with the arts, music, sculpture, and culture. Would you expect anything less from 5 million Jews?

As I write this chapter I am in Charlotte, North Carolina and a gentleman with whom I spoke came up with a perfect description of Charlotte. "It's the Olive Garden." The town believes that it is the real deal, when really it's prefab to the core, from mentality to architecture. Israel is bursting at the seams with vitality and culture, much like San Francisco or New York. The artwork, like the country, is colorful, vibrant, warm and inviting. It's playful sometimes, serious at others, but always human, always in touch with humanity. The artwork in Charlotte, hailed

as an art Mecca, is cold and distancing, removed—there is a disconnect between creation and experience. In Israel, the stone, metal, glass, paintings and colors of Israeli art capture in a more intimate manner the depth of life's cycles and celebrate the diversity of Israel. This is not so say that all artwork in Israel is good and all artwork in Charlotte is bad, but the essence and spirit of the two are totally different. One is Jewish, the other is not.

While the ancient architecture, holy sites, wonderful restaurants, numerous shopping malls, modern stores, soft sandy beaches, and Mediterranean sea are nice, what really makes Israel special is the people. Israelis are a colorful amalgamation of the diversity of human life. Jews in Israel have come from the four corners of the planet to make a safe home with other Jews. In addition, the other tourists that you meet come from all over America and the world to visit the Jewish homeland. When you have that many nice and special people in one place, all kinds of great things happen.

The current Israel/Palestinian conflict is tied to deep roots. We are seeing symptoms of the underlying problems and tension that has always existed between Israel and the Arabs who have cried for Israel's destruction from the very day of her birth. In these times of trouble, it's especially important to know the real facts because Western media is notoriously blind when it comes to looking at Israel with double-standard, highly critical eyes. Everything for them is blurry until Israel does something "questionable" and with microscopic precision, CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC and NPR are all there to detail Israel's barbarity. In the face of so much anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, an "accepted" modern form of anti-Semitism, it's important for us to stand in solidarity with Israel.

Have you ever wondered why the major news organizations have rarely reported a story about the systematic violation of human rights committed in Egypt (population of 61.5 million people), Saudi Arabia (population 18.5 million people), Iran (population 60 million people), Iraq (population 21 million), Jordan (population 4.1 million), Lebanon (population 3.6 million), Libya (population 5.2 million) or the Palestinian

Authority (population 2 million)? Isn't it nice that all the 3rd world Arab dictatorships with 100% censorship of the press can do whatever they like without being held responsible or accountable for extensive human rights abuses? Most Americans can't point out on a map the location of Israel's neighbors let alone tell you anything at all about the governments or rights of the people in those countries. Yet those same Americans can quickly proclaim how wrong Israel is in her treatment of the Palestinians. Selective knowledge and selective ignorance are clear forms of anti-Semitism. It's a modern day dangerous double standard.

When I close my eyes and think of Israel, I see such beautiful people, so many loving families: Israel is such a vibrant, thriving nation. It is hard to believe that Israel could grow so quickly out of the ashes of the Nazi death camps. It was the early pioneers and settlers that created the foundation and momentum that even the Holocaust could not stop. Like every modern country, Israel is not a perfect oasis, but Israel has a special feeling, unique in and of itself. The future holds several challenges for Jews around the world but with Israel as our body, heart and soul, together we will continue to help heal the world and strengthen the bonds of Judaism with the bonds of humanity.

I'd like to share with you some of the highlights of Israel's creation and history and point out some wonderful resources that can help you get to know Israel. Of course, the best way is to simply go there. It is a safe country contrary to what you may hear in the news. With the current intensification of terrorist activities aimed at preventing world Jewry from visiting Israel, many groups are modifying their itineraries to ensure the safety of all participants. I personally do not think it is fair to Israel for American Jews to be fair weather friends of the Jewish homeland and turn their backs on Israel during times of trouble—when Israel needs America the most. Ask any of your friends, family and rabbis who have been there recently if Israel is safe—they will be honest with you. In the next chapter I'll tell you about my trip to Israel with the UJC (United Jewish Communities) on the West Coast Mingles Mission. The only thing I regret about going to Israel is having waited so long to go. When think-

ing of vacation spots, we are drawn to resorts which are nothing but fun and that's why it's so much easier to go to Hawaii or Mexico rather than Israel. Don't hold off your trip to Israel thinking that you have to get emotionally and spiritually prepared. Sometimes it's best just to go when you have the chance.



From the time that I started writing this guide, I was waiting for the opportunity to recommend to you a special book about Judaism. It is a book that captures the true Jewish spirit of love of life and applying one's life to building a good home for one's family. It tells a story of the challenges faced to create a homeland for the Jews. The book is an autobiography by a person who more so than any other, represents what Israel is to American Jews. The name of the book is *My Life* and it is the autobiography of Golda Meir (1898–1978), a woman who dedicated her life to making a homeland for the Jews. Golda became the first woman Prime Minister of Israel, the pinnacle of her lifelong devotion to the Jewish people and the Jewish homeland filled with challenge after challenge which she overcame by the strength of her convictions, the incisiveness of her mind, the intensity of her dedication to the Jewish people, and the love in her heart. Golda Meir was like a mother to her children of Israel.

Please read *My Life*. I can not admonish you enough to do so. If you read but just one of the books that I have recommended, this is the one. It may be hard to find because it has been out of print for decades, but I bought my copy at a used book store and I am sure that your local Jewish library will have a copy. I am indebted to my brother for recommending it to me.

When Golda Meir was a child, her family left Russia due to the anti-Semitic pogroms and fear for their lives as Jews there. They came to America and Golda grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She details her childhood in America, her schooling and her pathway that led her to



decide to leave comfortable America and to go to Palestine and become a settler. With her family she arrived in the land of Palestine in 1921. Back then, the land was mostly rocks and life was difficult to say the least. We learn firsthand about what it was like to be a settler; to live on a kibbutz and to lay the social, economic and political structure of a country that was just a hope, a dream in the minds of thousands, yet millions of man hours away from reality.

At each crucial stage of Israel's development as a country, Golda is there to tell us what was happening and why. We get to know David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel and the Minister of Defense at the time of creation of the State of Israel and the War of Independence that immediately followed the declaration of the State, and other giants as well, such as Moshe Dayan, Yitzak Rabin, Abba Eban, Shimon Peres and more. She brings these people to life in a personal way, and like life, not only tells the good but shares with us the bad.

Because of her upbringing in America, Golda with her story touches both the minds and hearts of American Jews in a way that none other can. What's particularly amazing is that she never kept a journal of her life and the book is thoroughly detailed. Golda has a penetrating and insightful mind that breaks down seemingly impossible situations to their logical core. With Golda, we walk the journey of the creation of the State of Israel and meet the people who gave every ounce of themselves to fight against all the forces of nature and man to bring about a Jewish homeland. When you are sitting comfortably in Jerusalem on a rooftop restaurant, sipping a cold beer and eating a delicious falafel sandwich with fresh tahini sauce dripping everywhere, the thought just may cross your mind about how special Israel is and at that point, you may realize that you are living in Golda Meir's dream.

She writes in the last two paragraphs:

My vision for the future? A Jewish state in which masses of Jews from all over the world will continue to settle and to build; an Israel bound in a collaborative effort with its neighbors on behalf of all the people of

this region; an Israel that remains a flourishing democracy and a society resting firmly on social justice and equality.

And now I have only one desire left: never to lose the feeling that it is I who am indebted for what has been given to me from the time that I first learned about Zionism in a small room in czarist Russia all the way through my half century here, where I have seen my five grandchildren grow up as free Jews in a country that is their own. Let no one anywhere have any doubts about this: Our children and our children's children will never settle for anything less.

The *Jewish Heritage Video Collection* that I mentioned at the beginning of this book has a 30 minute Walter Cronkite Special Report about the life of Golda Meir aired the evening of her death in 1978. She died on Shabbat in Jerusalem at the age of 80 years. It is called *Golda Meir*. There are clips throughout of important times in her life and interviews with those who lived and worked with Golda. There are clips from an interview with her where she says, "My people have never known peace, we've always had war." Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel, pensively spoke: "She has stood as one of the pillars of strength, belief, courage and humanity to the struggle of the Jewish people to rebuild themselves as a people and as a nation." We see clips from the arrival of Anwar Saddat, the President of Egypt who came to Israel to offer peace, four years after the tragic Yom Kippur war of 1973. Walter Cronkite ends the Special with the following: "She lived a life under pressures that we in this country find impossible to understand. She fought to see her country born, she led it in a fight to see it survive in the world amidst neighbors who had sworn its extinction. That the small land in an inhospitable desert can one day live in peace, this will be the greatest memorial to her."



I have sitting in front of me on my desk a wonderful little book called



The Jewish State (Judenstaat) written by Theodore Herzl (1860–1904), an assimilated Austrian Jew whose efforts directly led to the creation of the Jewish State of Israel and earned him the title “Father of Zionism!” The version of the book that I have, published by the American Zionist Emergency Council, has a nice introduction, a 45 page biography of Herzl and the less than 80 page plan of Herzl to create the Jewish State. In other words, in less than two hours you can read the thoughts of Herzl that provided the seed that crystallized in the minds of Jews all over the world and coalesced the international Zionism movement and inspired their efforts to turn a thought into a reality. Here are some of his words in the preface:

The Idea which I have developed in this pamphlet is a very old one: it is the restoration of the Jewish State...

Everything depends on our propelling force. And what is that force? The misery of the Jews....

I ask the cultivated men whom I am addressing to set many preconceived ideas entirely aside. I shall even go so far as to ask those Jews who have most earnestly tried to solve the Jewish Question to look upon their previous attempts as mistaken and futile...

Am I stating what is not yet the case? Am I before my time? Are the sufferings of the Jews not yet grave enough? We shall see.

It depends on the Jews themselves whether this political pamphlet remains for the present a political romance. If the present generation is too dull to understand it rightly, a future, finer and a better generation will arise to understand it. The Jews who wish for a State shall have it, and they will deserve to have it.

The 1894 trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a captain in the French Army, who was set up by the French government for spying on Germany because he was Jewish, made the plight of the Jews in Europe crystal clear to the journalist Theodore Herzl covering the trial. Herzl attended the ceremony that publicly humiliated Dreyfus where an angry mob yelled repeatedly, “Down with the Jews! Down with the Jews!” If France, home

of “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood” and the most progressive place in Europe, could frame a Jew and scream, “Down with the Jews!” then the situation of the Jew was dire. Herzl saw what the Holocaust clarified—anti-Semitism had poisoned all of Europe and the Jews in Europe desperately needed a homeland of their own lest they continually suffer at the mercy of the Christians. To this day the poison is still in the water wells of Europe in many places.

Herzl's *The Jewish State* set the course for the 1897 First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland that attracted 204 delegates from 19 countries. Herzl confided in his diary after the First Zionist Congress that he had founded the Jewish State. “If I were to say this today, I would be greeted with laughter. In five years, perhaps, and certainly in fifty, everyone will see it.” The Second Zionist Congress brought 394 delegates and the movement was well on its way. They got into a snag with a temporary Uganda plan. Due to the urgency brought about by the pogroms in Russia, The Uganda Plan proposed making a temporary Jewish homeland in Uganda. The terrible tension of the conflict ultimately killed Theodore Herzl, but his dream for a Jewish homeland was still alive.

Settlers from all over the world started pouring into Palestine. Many left comfortable surroundings to make this *Aliya* or rising up. The Eastern European Jews were the first pioneers. The kibbutzim sprung forth from the socialistic and Zionistic ideology and was exactly what Israel needed in her early years to till the land, create basic factories and set the infrastructure for the country. One such settler was a driven man named Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922) who revived Hebrew as a spoken, modern language. He and his wife were the first family to speak only Hebrew in their home and teach it to their children as their primary language. If Israel was going to have a homeland, the language was going to be Hebrew and Ben-Yehuda fought for this goal with rare and intense dedication over the course of his life. He published a modern dictionary of the Hebrew language and in the process of doing so had to invent hundreds of new words for modern times. One of the most popular streets for shopping, eating and hanging out in Jerusalem is Ben Yehuda

street. Just around the corner from the end of Ben Yehuda street are a couple of bars, restaurants and all night danceclubs.

Soon settlers came from America and Golda Meir was one of them. On November 2, 1917, the British released the Balfour Declaration and in the attempt of capturing the land of Palestine from Turkey and the broken Ottoman Empire, Lord Balfour declared support for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine as a way to win support from America. The joy of this document was shattered by the British White Papers and the devastating British White Paper of May 17, 1939 that completely eliminated any support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. We can see in England's relationship with Palestine her vacillations and lack of courage to stand for justice. In England, Arab oil triumphed over humanity.

In the face of evil Nazi Europe and the knowledge of what awaited Jews on the horizon, the British White Papers limited immigration into Palestine *before, during* and *after* World War II. It was a cruel policy that turned down hundreds of thousands of fleeing Jews from Europe with no where else to go at the start of the war and then death camp survivors with no where else to go from entering Palestine at the end of the war. Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952), the first President of Israel, cynically observed, "There are two sorts of countries in the world, those that want to expel the Jews and those that don't want to admit them." Israel does not hold grudges against countries like England, Russia, Germany and the Arab nations but rather always extends to them the hand of friendship and peace. On the other hand, Israel never forgets the past either.

On November 29, 1947 the United Nations voted 33 to 10 with 10 abstentions to partition Palestine into a Jewish State and a Palestinian State. Shortly after Israel's creation, the U.N. showed its impotence and one-sidedness against Israel, doing little to deter the Arabs from rejecting the Partition or launching their attacks against the State of Israel. Having proved its impotence to help Israel and its one sidedness, in the 1970's the U.N. blossomed into an outright anti-Israel entity. The entry of twenty Arab states, the USSR and Soviet block, and Third World dictator-

ships led the UN to pass a resolution labeling Zionsim as racism. The United States immediately denounced the UN for this crazy act. How can a country that is filled with people from all over the world of almost as many races as exist on the planet Earth be racist?

To talk about the formation of Israel, we have to honor the captain of the ship, the intense, powerful, intelligent, commanding David Ben Gurion (1886–1973). Ben Gurion dedicated his life to the cause of the Jewish homeland and will be remembered as one of the greatest Jewish leaders throughout all Jewish history. On May 14, 1948, David Ben Gurion held the gavel in the Tel Aviv Museum and declared the creation of the State of Israel to all the people of Israel and the world that were listening to the broadcast. When you finally make it to Israel, your plane will touch down at Ben Gurion airport and you will be greeted by a huge sign, "Welcome to Israel." At the end of this chapter I discuss in more detail his incredible accomplishments.

You can experience the hope and anxiety, joy and frustration, and the struggle against the British and their DP camps and the violent Arabs by watching the movie *Exodus* starring Paul Newman and reading the book *Exodus* by Leon Uris, on which the film was based. While the book *Exodus* is a fictional account of what happened to a real life ship named the Exodus, the book touched the hearts of Jews all over the world and inspired them to come to Israel. *Exodus* was the first major picture filmed in Israel and it takes us through the journey of Israel's creation, from the Displaced Person (DP) camps on the island of Cyprus to the bombing of the King David Hotel by the Irgun, the UN vote to partition Israel and the conflict between the angered Arabs and the fighting Israelis. Both the book and the movie are extremely popular and if you have not already experienced them, you are in for an eye opening journey into the heart and soul of the struggle of Israel to become a nation.



Immediately after Ben Gurion declared the State of Israel on May



14, 1948, six Arab, Jew-hating countries invaded Israel—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The spiritual leader of Palestinian Muslims, Haj Amin al Husseini declared, "I declare a Holy War, my Muslim brothers! Murder the Jews! Murder them all!" That was not exactly a nice way of welcoming their new neighbor. Israel's War of Independence lasted from 1948 through 1949. How could the Jews fight back concurrent invasions from all sides by countries with several times more soldiers, more and better military equipment and almost every conceivable advantage? Qualitative superiority, the righteousness of their cause, the dedicated Israeli Defense Forces and brilliant commanders enabled Israel to fight off attacks on all fronts and protect the newly formed nation from imminent destruction. The battle was not over land or control—it was about murdering all the Jews. The Jewish nation was not going to let the Arabs repeat what Nazi Europe accomplished.

The film *Cast a Giant Shadow* starring Kirk Douglas shows the amazing real life story of Mickey Marcus, a highly recognized West Point graduate and American Colonel, who was invited to Israel by the Israeli Intelligence to lead a battalion of the Israeli Defense Forces in the War of Independence. It defies belief that Mickey Marcus was able to lead an underequipped and poorly trained battalion to victory, or that Israel was smart enough to find Mickey, but they did and he accepted and he directed the troops and the efforts, just as the military genius Bar Kokhba had done in the rebellion against the Romans almost 18 centuries earlier. *Cast a Giant Shadow* was also filmed in Israel.

Someone once asked David Ben Gurion when the fighting in Israel was going to stop. He replied, "When Israel loses the last war." The reality of the situation is that there is nothing but hatred fueling the Arab war against Israel. The Israel Defense Force, or IDF, has had to grow into one of the world's best armies—if not the best, person for person—due to the never-ending hatred of the Arab neighbors that are still convinced that they can beat the Jews and kill them all. Israel has always known war—the War of Independence of 1948–1949, the Suez War of 1956, the Six-Day War of 1967, the War of Attrition with Egypt in 1968–1970,

the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the Lebanese War of 1982, the current Intifada—but has never known peace. Israel has always defended herself against Arab attacks and terrorism. Israel was never once the aggressor—never.

The most stunning victory for Israel came in the Six-Day War of 1967 that lasted from June 5–10. Egypt, Syria and Jordan made a pact to attack Israel. Abdul Nasser, Egypt's president, in a move to establish himself as the leader of all the Arab nations, targeted Israel. Nasser announced on Radio Cairo, "Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel." Iraq was clear as well, as their President announced to the Arab nations, "Our goal is clear—to wipe Israel off the map." Threatened with attacks and 80,000 Egyptian troops in the Sinai beginning to launch an offensive, Israel coordinated a brilliant air strike that wiped out the Egyptian Air Force in under three hours on the morning of June 5th. Later that day, Israel shot down the majority of Syria's planes too. Israeli troops occupied the Sinai desert, Jordan's West Bank, regained the Old City of Jerusalem and the holy Western Wall of the Second Temple and the Golan Heights. Out of fear of destruction came victory and what Israel hoped would be peace. But wounded Arab pride had other plans.

The Yom Kippur War of 1973 took Israel by surprise and cost the lives of 2,700 soldiers, four times as many as Israeli loses in the Six-Day War. Why did Egypt and Syria attack Israel? Like little kids in a playground, they couldn't believe that they lost in a fist fight to the "wimp" Israel, so they picked another fight again and Israel beat them again. Each war is caused for this very same reason. Golda Meir hit the nail on the head when she said that there will be peace when the Arabs value the lives of their children as much as Israel does her children. The second that Israel becomes weak, Israel will be destroyed by her neighbors. Israel knows this and continues to pour huge amounts of her gross domestic product and energy of her citizens into advanced and strategic defense. Peace for Israel costs billions of dollars for fighter jets, tanks, nuclear missiles, nuclear fall out shelters, gas masks, machine guns, military uniforms, satellites, intelligence, constant surveillance, a well prepared military, spe-

cial units forces, anti-terrorist forces, Apache helicopters, gunships, rocket launchers, and the world's most advanced weapons of war. All this for Israel's defense, all this military might to bring about Peace. It seems that war and terror is the only language the Arabs understand.

On the positive side, at least Israel can see where her enemies stood, stand today and will stand tomorrow. Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization stated their mission as the elimination of the Jewish State. They do not recognize the State of Israel. The Yasser Arafat of today is the same person who devised the terrorist mission to kidnap and murder 11 Israeli athletes in the 1972 Munich Olympics. If 11 American athletes were murdered, do you think they would have delayed the games? Well, they did not delay for Israel and the games continued without a hitch, besides of course 11 murdered athletes and the dead terrorists that were killed by Israel's hit squad.

When you talk to Israelis about the current conflict, the feeling of most is that of a broken trust. Israeli men, women, and children desperately want peace with the Palestinians. Israel hoped with all her heart to live in harmony with the Palestinians. The events of recent intifada have gone to show that the Palestinians and their leadership deep down inside do not want peace, but would prefer to kill Israelis and force Israel's hand in protecting the Israeli people. The Palestinian people started as pawns in the War of Independence and continue as such to this day. The end result is that the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who work in Israeli towns can't get to work, Israelis don't buy anything from Palestinian shops, and because of the troubles, fewer tourists come to pour money into both the hands of Jews and Arabs. It's a poorly thought out move for the Palestinians leaders because Israel's economy is much stronger and can make it through these times, continuing to grow and expand.

What are the Palestinians hoping to accomplish, perhaps incite the Arab world in a war against Israel? To get a more even handed story, check out the **AIPAC** (American Israel Public Affairs Council) website—www.aipac.org—for daily updates concerning the conflict in Israel. If you

join AIPAC, they will email you the updates. The updates are concise, carefully worded, and not exceedingly detailed which enables you to know the important facts and developments with as little effort as possible. I quickly scan the headlines of the Jerusalem Post Online Edition—www.jpost.com—every day to stay on top of the intricate issues developing before our very eyes.

War is destructive, peace constructive. When will the day come when Israel's neighbors accept Israel as a country and stand beside her as neighbors so that all can work on building a prosperous Middle East.



The current conflict in Israel may paint pictures of a sad and scared country. This is not the case. Israelis are heartbroken because they feel the trust with the Palestinians is shattered, but Israelis go about their lives—they go to school, work, play sports, tell jokes, shop, watch movies, have parties, celebrate holidays, and live life as they should. All the Americans with whom I spoke who have travelled to Israel recently, whether through a UJC Solidarity Mission (www.ujc.org) or with Birthright Israel (www.birthrightisrael.org) have had wonderful, safe trips. Shortly I am returning to Israel to make business alliances with the talented Israeli Internet and high-tech startups, learn Hebrew and enjoy the thriving Israeli people and Jewish culture. I'd like to end this chapter about Israel with a message of hope: *Hatikva*, the Israeli national anthem (you will hear and see 50,000 Israelis singing it if you watch the movie *Exodus*). *Hatikva* means, The Hope.

*Our hope is not yet lost
The hope of two thousand years
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem*

For me, Israel was a long way away just a few years ago. I said the



name with pride, felt good when I saw the flag, and was happy that I had relatives living there, but Israel was always “there” and not “here.” Making the connection to Israel, whether physical, spiritual, or even political, is special. As the country comes more into focus, we begin to see the faces of so many Jews whose lives are intertwined in the mesh and fabric of the State of Israel. Maybe your life too will weave itself like a colorful strand into the tapestry of the Jewish homeland.



As a final addition to this guide, I am going to recommend to you a tremendous book that I recently discovered in Israel. The author is David Ben Gurion and title of the book is *Israel: A Personal History*. It is an 850 page history of Israel from 1870 until 1972 through the eyes of the foremost visionary and strongest leader in Israel's history. David Ben Gurion wrote the book at his kibbutz in the Negev desert, Sde Boker (Field of Morning) where I purchased my copy after visiting his grave and that of his wife Paula, their desert home and the University of the Negev which he founded at Sde Boker.

I had heard and read much about Ben Gurion, but never really knew him until I read *Israel: A Personal History*. He died just a year after finishing the book and it is clearly his will for the future of Israel. Someone had said about David Ben Gurion that he saw reality not for what it was but for what it would be. He came to Palestine in 1906, stood at the forefront of bringing Jews to Palestine, laid the foundation for Israel's defense and created the IDF, wrote Israel's Declaration of Independence, declared the State, served as the first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, arranged a billion dollar loan for Israel early in her history, lead the efforts for German war reparations, and so much more throughout his long life of unwavering dedication to Israel and Jews worldwide.

The Negev desert is 60% of Israel's land and perhaps one day soon David Ben Gurion's final vision will be a reality and the Negev will be populated by 4 million Jews.



Go to Israel: UJC Missions & Birthright Israel

The hardest part about writing this chapter was simply finding the time to get started. I have been preparing for my trip back to Israel and it has diverted my time, energy and focus away from telling you about two excellent programs that will make your trip to Israel rich with excitement and places. The best part about the **UJC** (United Jewish Communities) **Missions**—www.ujc.org—and **Birthright Israel's**—www.birthrightisrael.org—free trips (yes, that's right, free vacations to Israel) are that you have a great chance to meet lots of neat people from America so your trip to Israel will not simply end when your flight touches down on US soil. In addition, with the power of the Internet, you can read stories, share pictures, have chats and schedule post-Israel get togethers to talk about the good old times and plan the new ones with friends with whom you climbed Masada, floated in the Dead Sea and prayed at the Kotel. Israel stays alive and fresh in your mind long after you unpack your bags and go back to work and American life.

My biggest regret in going to Israel was having waited so long. I really, really, really wish that I would have just gone sooner. Not to scare you away, tomorrow I return to Israel to embark on a wonderful journey with WUJS (World Union of Jewish Students) that has a 7 month pro-

gram in the small town of Arad that sits near the Dead Sea in the Judean Hills of the Negev desert. I talked with several friends about my decision and the crux of the discussions was simply this: "When are you too old to follow your gut and your sense of doing something a little out of the ordinary but something that you feel means a lot to who you are as a person?" Why would I leave my comfortable life and work in America to go to Israel, learn Hebrew, and make a connection with the Jewish people and culture on a much more intimate level? Not everything in life is rational and sometimes we have to follow the voice of our ancestors. To be honest, there is a bit of entrepreneurial spirit driving my decision being that Israel has some of the brightest and sharpest high tech minds in the entire world.

But this chapter isn't about me, rather it's about me telling you of some great ways to get to Israel. This chapter as the others that follow are going to be much shorter than the previous ones because I will be pointing you to the right resources that offer infinitely more details and information than I could or would hope to repeat. In all honesty, I want this guide to be less than 100 pages and while sitting in the bedroom where I wrote countless papers as a boy, I am hoping that you will understand my excitement in finishing this guide and getting to Israel.

As I mentioned before, both programs are sending thousands of Americans to Israel now and they would not endanger the lives of Americans. Don't believe the hype that the US media uses to scare away tourists from Israel and sell more papers. Several Arab countries use their oil to puppet the State Department and world press to hurt Israel. If you are unfamiliar with the root of the conflict in the Middle East, your journey into the cause may start with disbelief at the reasons the Arab countries do what they do, but then, you will slowly come to understand that those countries are third world dictatorships and their leaders rarely act out of the best interests of their citizens. It's something that we take for granted, but imagine if all the Arab nations succeeded and Israel's Defense Forces could not defend against the tanks, missiles, fighter jets, ground troops, terrorist bombings and whatever else the

Arab nations have tried to use to eliminate Israel. Eliminate and annihilate are words that Israelis and world Jewry do not take lightly. Hitler and Nazi Germany expressed with the loudest voice and ablest hands sentiments that have grown like weeds across the centuries and millennia, uniting the poisoned minds of the world in a sick effort to kill and eliminate Jews. Nazi Germany and Europe taught the Jews an important lesson: Jews can only truly rely upon Jews for their survival and the Jewish State is critical. That's why after the Six-Day War in 1967, a war that threatened Israel's existence, Jews from all over the world poured into Israel. The thought had struck their bones that Israel could cease to be a country, the Jewish homeland that is thriving today—the one you can visit whenever you want.

Why does the world love to portray Israel as the bad guy? Why do intelligent men and women from all over the world side with Palestinian terrorism and criticize Israel for unequal use of force without learning any of the real details? During the Holocaust the world looked the other way because it could not care less about Jews and now the world is obsessed with Jews, or at least the Jewish mistreatment of the Palestinians. Israel has no plan to “eliminate” the Palestinians. As a matter of fact, Israel has made huge investments in helping out the Palestinians because it is in Israel's best interest to see them do well. Israel tries her hardest to protect her citizens and only fires upon Palestinians when they are shooting guns at innocent Israeli citizens. Perhaps people try to project onto Jews and the Jewish State of Israel their insecurities and justifications for why the Jews are “bad” and have deserved all of the punishment they have received for being Jews. An old saying goes that if someone hits their chicken with a stick to kill it, either the chicken or the person is sick. The country of Israel shows the world how wonderful a country can be when a bunch of Jews from all over the world make it their home. For many, it's hard to swallow that Israel ain't a sick chicken.

Let's not concern ourselves with these deep philosophical issues, rather, let's just go to Israel because it's so easy to go and whether you are religious or not matters little. Not delaying your trip to Israel is the

most important thing. That way, you can avoid having to make more involved decisions about how and when you can return to Israel and continue your journey! Seriously, don't be intimidated by the "holiness" and "grandeur" of going to Israel. If you treat it like a really exciting vacation—a true adventure—you'll be well on your way. Even though I lived in Brazil for a year and travelled around Mexico one summer, I always felt that Israel was way "over there" and needed a special trip at a special time of my life to make it worthwhile. No way. The best time to go to Israel is whenever you can. There is no need to prepare yourself mentally, spiritually, physically or whateverly, no reason at all. You get yourself to Israel and Israel will do the rest, one beautiful, vibrant hour at a time.



I first heard of the **UJC West Coast Mingles Mission** at a gathering in a San Francisco home for the YAD (Young Adult's Division) of the Jewish Federation that sponsored this event to help young Jewish people get to know one another. In the course of announcements, someone mentioned the UJC Mission that was going to take place in a couple of months during the summer of 2000. At the event I became very interested and afterwards spoke to a few people who had gone on the trip the previous year. While their explanations were exciting, I noticed that their eyes lit up with a passion and thrill when they talked about just how great the trip was. How they spoke described more than what they said. I wrote down a few telephone numbers and contacted a few other trip alumni and asked them about their experience on the UJC Mission. The response was the same, "One of the best trips of my life."

I learned throughout the course of my conversations that the UJC organized all kinds of trips and that this "Singles" Mission which San Francisco referred to as the "Mingles" Mission was a great way to meet other young singles. (Singles and Mission in the same breath sounds way too desperate.) The age group ranged from the early twenties to even the late thirties with the majority of participants being around 28 or 29

give or take a few years. The UJC is the merger of some of America's largest Jewish organizations—the Council of Jewish Federations, United Israel Appeal and United Jewish Appeal. The United Jewish Communities, or UJC for short, serves 189 Jewish federations and over 400 independent Jewish communities across North America. I did not know this until I looked the information up on their website. No, rather, as little as eight months ago I just knew that I had always wanted to go to Israel and now I know of the perfect way to get there.

The trip set off a cascading series of thoughts in my head which led to a cascading series of actions. You see, I had never been to Europe and had always wanted to travel around, backpacking from city to city. I began working as soon as I graduated college and six years later I was feeling a little burnt out from both the intensity of the work and the “exploding” dot-com revolution. I thought the bubble was going to break and decided to quit my contracting job with a well funded San Francisco start-up and use the 13 day UJC West Coast Mingles Mission Trip as a springboard to my continued trip around Israel. I wanted to visit my Israeli relatives as well as explore Israel on my own and then to hop on over to Europe with nothing more than my backpack, camera, map, guidebook, and adventurous ears and eyes.

It's kind of funny, but when I sent an email update to friends, everything that I described in Israel sounded so much more exciting and exotic than anything I did in Europe and in fact, it was. Taking a jeep ride in the Golan Heights, visiting the Lebanon-Israel border, getting a military debriefing from a top military official, hearing Shimon Peres, the ex-Prime Minister of Israel, address our UJC group in the Hilton Hotel in Tel Aviv, visiting the Tower of David in Jerusalem, planting a tree in Jerusalem, singing with our group on Mount Scopus overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem, going to the Western Wall or Kotel on Shabbat and writing my wishes on a little piece of paper that I stuck in the crevice next to thousands of other little paper balls, swimming and dancing on a kibbutz, visiting a bomb shelter, kayaking down the Jordan River, throwing a rock in the Sea of Galilee, making a giant human circle with our floating group

in the Dead Sea, running up Masada, and so much more. The UJC calls its trip a "mission" because you get a much deeper and intimate experience as you connect with Israel through a powerful bond that has been organizing these trips for lots and lots of years and has a vested interest in you getting the most out of it. We stayed in beautiful hotels, ate like kings and queens and had days that were packed with adventure. It was hot in the summer and we guzzled water. My parents remembered the extravagant Israeli breakfast and saw from my pictures that this part of Israel was still the same while the rest had grown and grown. Sure our bus broke down in what seemed like the hottest day of my life, sure some of the events were not perfectly to my liking, but overall, I saw Israel from North to South and from East to West, intimately. That's the special connection of the UJC.

Each trip is different and that's why you should check out the UJC website at www.ujc.org. There you can read all about the Family, Singles, Couples and Solidarity Missions. In addition to the factual details are personal journals from Jews who share their thoughts on their experience in the Jewish Homeland. There is a particularly special deal right now for under \$1,000 that includes round trip airfare, four nights in Israel, and all meals. Why not take advantage of these good deals brought about by the tensions that have hurt the Israeli tourist industry? When our dollars go to Israel, we not only enjoy ourselves but also end up supporting Israel's growth.

It turns out that our group from San Francisco consisted of 78 young professionals of just about equal man/woman ratios. The complete group of "singles" from the western states totalled over 500 people which set the stage for an amazing dinner party and dance on the beach in Jaffa, nightly group dinners and more dancing in magical places all over Israel and opportunities to meet nice people from all over the United States. During the day our individual city groups would go off to our destinations and then the big group would get together usually at night for dinner and festivities but also sometimes during the day like in Tel Aviv

when Shimon Peres spoke to our group about his vision for the future of Israel.

We learned that Israel has had a drought for nearly three years and saw the dangerously low water line of the Sea of Galilee and the fact that we had to pull our rafts in as little as two feet of water in some parts of the Jordan River. While you are busy praying for the safety of Israelis and peace, throw in a prayer or two for rain. The situation is so dire that Israel is considering bringing in boatloads of water from Turkey. It's too bad that Syria will not let Israel run a water pipe across its land.

There are lots of programs and ways to get to Israel. If you talk to friends or read a Jewish chronicle either in print or online, I'm sure you can find lots of interesting trips. I mention the UJC mission trip with such detail for two reasons: it's the only one I went on and it is perhaps the most popular way that tens of thousands of Americans each year see Israel for the first, second and third times.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 26 years old, have graduated high school and have not been to Israel on an organized peer-group program, you can go to Israel for free. Let me say this again, you can go to Israel for free. **Birthright Israel**—www.birthrightisrael.com—wants to send thousands of young Jewish people in North America to Israel on a free vacation with absolutely no strings attached. You might be thinking to yourself, are they crazy? Yes, they are crazy, crazy for the young Jews of America to make a connection with the Jewish homeland.

First of all, who are they? The Birthright Israel gift is provided by a partnership of private philanthropists, the State of Israel, and local Jewish Community Federations represented by the UJC, Keren Hayesod and the Jewish Agency for Israel. Out of the private philanthropists I would like to mention Lynn and Charles Schusterman. Charles recently passed away from his over twenty year battle with a deadly blood cancer. As the Army roommate of my father and lifelong friend of my parents along with his wife Lynn who continues to support Jewish causes, Charles is going to be missed by all whom he has touched with his kindness and humanity.




Birthright Israel's attitude is right up my alley for going to Israel—treat the whole thing like a fun vacation and de-emphasize the “holy” aspect of Israel. If you lower the bar, you may find that thousands of people who saw Israel as being way too religious and intimidating now suddenly have an interest in visiting the Jewish homeland with their peers. If you lower the bar even further and offer to pay for the whole thing, why, the word gets out and the youth of America start buzzing with excitement to go to Israel. Those who get back tell all their friends and they too rush to the website to fill out their online application and pick from one of the several trip options spanning the ideological, religious, educational, and cultural aspects of Israel. There are United States and Canadian based trips for non-denominational, reform, conservative and orthodox.

The colorful and upbeat www.birthrightisrael.com website will promptly grab your attention with its hip take on all things Jewish. I read an article about the bassist of Phish, Mike Gordon, who is inspired by his Jewish heritage. I didn't know that Phish played Aveenu Malkenu and other traditional Jewish songs. Alumni can stay connected at the password protected Alumni Central. To sum it up, the Birthright Israel gift trip is a no-brainer and no doubt you'll learn first hand from someone just how great of an experience going to Israel for free can be.

As far as more complete programs, let's say a summer in Israel or perhaps longer; talk to your local Jewish Federation and ask some friends. There is a website called **Kibbutz Program Center** (www.kibbutzprogramcenter.org) that lists a complete spectrum of kibbutz based programs for men, women, families, and youth for different periods of time. The **WUJS** (World Union of Jewish Students) **Arad Program**—www.wujs-arad.org— that I heard about then researched and joined, has a focus on classes and taking steps to work in Israel if one so desires. *Warning: If you are a Conservative or Reform Jew, be careful of Orthodox controlled programs that may rub you the wrong way. Be thorough in your research.*

Go to Israel first and then the other pieces will fall into place. Who knows, it may even start a lifelong love affair with a special place.



The Shoah

It's hard to write about the Holocaust because everything about it stings deep, very deep: 6 million murdered babies, children, women and men; the first systematic killing of a people; less than 60 years ago; European Jew hatred; attempted genocide. As American Jews, we have heard much about the Holocaust as it has touched us directly through relatives or through unity with Jews everywhere. For me, the Holocaust is the lowest point in the human race, the nadir of dying Judaism, and also the triumph of the human spirit—living Judaism.

I am writing this now in a little room in the Absorption Center of Arad in the Judean Hills rising out of the Negev Desert in Israel. I am in Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish homeland and it feels absolutely wonderful. Even though the room is small and humbly furnished, the air is glorious, and there is no place like Israel. I am exhausted after my one hour flight from Pittsburgh to Toronto, three hour lay-over, an eleven hour flight from Toronto to Tel Aviv and then a two hour taxi ride from Tel Aviv to Arad. I met some wonderful Jewish people along the way and a really nice Orthodox Jew installed some programs on my Macintosh PowerBook G3 so that I can now write in Hebrew. It's hard to believe that just a few weeks ago I was writing this guide in Charlotte, North Carolina, and now

I am back in Israel! I better finish this soon and will because after this there is no more English for at least three months. About 10 years ago in Brazil I learned the trick to tackling a new language—total submersion with no side door out (English).

Israel is living Judaism and Israel was born out of the ashes of the Holocaust. In Israel they call the Holocaust *Ha Shoah*—the catastrophe in Hebrew. Over the years my understanding of the cause of the Shoah has deepened as I have spoken to more people, read more books, visited Europe and returned to Israel. There is a terrible truth about the Shoah that most people do not want to admit or even consider and that's why most do not. They allow themselves the easy way out and put all the blame on one terrible, awful human being, Adolph Hitler. I do not buy that and personally believe there was nothing special about him other than the fact that he said the loudest and the clearest what everyone was afraid to say—"Hey Europe, let's annihilate the Jews. Are you going to help me?" The response was a resounding "Yes!" and 6 million Jews were stripped of their property, human rights, human dignity and then human life.

Perhaps you have read *Night* by Elie Weisel or the *Diary of Anne Frank*. Both of these stories bring to life a few of the 6 million names and faces, so many nameless and faceless, each in its own painful way. I saw Elie Weisel speak at Penn and he is the embodiment of the will of the Jews to live and to continue the tradition, to not forget what caused the Shoah and to keep its memory alive to pass along to future generations along with a clear message, "Judaism must live and never die. You have to bring Judaism to life." I visited the *Anne Frank House* in Amsterdam—that to me was dying Judaism as only a few Jews actually worked in the house and even fewer worked in the Jewish Museum located several canals away across town. Imagine that a once thriving Jewish community of 130,000 Jews of the Netherlands, Jews who saw themselves first as proud Dutch and then as Jews, were reduced to just a memory and a skeleton museum. That is dead Judaism.

What do you think was the cause of the Shoah? Is the Shoah over?



Recently in the *New York Times* I saw an article about slave labor of Nazi Germany and the list of over 300 German companies who employed Jews and other victims as slave laborers to make German products. Why are those companies finally coming forward today? Do you think it's because they are deeply sorry or because world Jewry pressed the issue? How about the Swiss bank scandal? Thousands of Jewish bank accounts were never handed over to the surviving members of the families because the Swiss bank policy required a death certificate. What a disgrace to the memory of all the Jews who were gassed and then burned in such haste that Germany had no time to take their pictures and issue murder certificates. The Germans killed the Jews and the Swiss kept their money in addition to storing the Nazi gold that was ripped out of the homes and teeth of the European Jewish community. The Swiss bankers laughed at the American Jews and told them that they would not get a penny more than 500 million dollars. Do you know how the Swiss bank scandal was resolved? Ask someone knowledgeable for the answer.

I heard a radio program on NPR about looted Jewish artwork that is hanging in Museums all over Europe. Do you think the families of the Jews who had everything taken from them should get it back? Whose property is it? If you walk into someone's house and murder everyone, do you suddenly get to keep their home, their clothes, their jewelry, their art, their bank accounts, their businesses, their life savings, their books, their patents, their copyrights, their property? France, Austria, Poland, Russia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy and others had no problem throwing their Jews to the Nazis, cancelling all the debts that they owed the Jews and taking everything that the Jews had. Only today is the issue surfacing and I believe that it's for one reason only: the Jews of the United States, the only superpower in the world today, demand it.

You can read about the progress on Jewish restitution, country by country at the website of the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*—www.ushmm.org. I believe that it is our obligation as Americans and Jews to keep this issue alive in the public consciousness

and demand that the European countries give full restitution. Any attempt to do less is an insult to the 6 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis who received help from all of Europe. Those countries have to come to grips with their past and that involves facing the hard facts that they would just as soon like to call the "forever forgotten past." I will not forget, you will not forget, the Jews will never forget.

It seems to me that the world loves seeing Jews at the other end of the beating stick, but has trouble seeing the Jews as a powerful people and Israel as a powerful nation. Why should this be? A book that counteracts all the hopelessness and futility of the Jews during the Holocaust is *If Not Now, When?* by Primo Levi. Primo Levi tells his autobiographical account in novel form of the Jewish partisans who were fighting with freedom groups against the Nazis all throughout Eastern Europe. Many do not know that rather than just being hapless victims, the Jewish ragtag soldiers were fighting, killing and beating the Nazis, blowing up train tracks, attacking German outposts and defying the Nazi terror. What makes this book so meaningful is the incisiveness of Levi's thoughts, the richness of his storytelling, and the reality that all described happened.



Right outside the Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv today I saw white Mercedes Benzes everywhere. German cars in Israel may seem strange to you unless you know the history behind David Ben Gurion's leading the young State of Israel to accept German war reparations. The issue polarized the nation but Ben Gurion needed every resource to help the young country resettle 500,000 Jews in Israel that were displaced because of Germany's war. Many Jews in America and throughout the world boycotted German products after World War II. Not too long ago a Chinese gentleman who had just met my father pulled up beside my father's Lexus in his BMW in the parking lot of the country club. They were talking about their golf games and the gentleman said to my father, "You know, I could not buy the car that you are driving after what the

Japanese did to my people." My father replied, "I couldn't buy the car that you are driving." The Chinese gentleman paused for a second to think about it and then nodded his head with understanding.

Just yesterday I was in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and at the top of a beautiful Maple lined winding road in Greensburg is a beautiful women's Catholic College called Seton Hill College. Seton Hill is home to the **National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education**. The center was started by two amazing Catholic nuns, Sister Mary Noel and Sister Jemma del Ducca, who when looking at the cause of the Holocaust found frightening amounts of anti-Semitism in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Sister Mary and Sister Jemma's goal was to help clean out all the anti-Semitism from the teachings of the Catholic Church. These incredible women are deeply devoted to their Catholic faith and making sure that Catholicism today ceases to perpetuate hatred of Jews. Sister Jemma is a good friend of my parents and I was blessed to spend an afternoon with her this past July in Jerusalem where she has lived for the last 25 years and where she works at **Yad Vashem**, the Shoah Memorial for the more than 6 million Jews, handicapped, Gypsies, gays, and other "non-Aryans" who were killed by people poisoned with blindness for the respect and value of human life.

At the 2000 National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education yearly conference held at Seton Hill, Fullbright scholar and keynote speaker Michael Phayer presented our audience consisting of educators from all over America, authors, artists, students and faculty members with images of European textbook teachings for all ages that degraded the Jew. These textbooks illustrated how the Jews were rotten, evil, devil worshippers, murderers, and sub-human people. What was and is the source of these images found extensively in textbooks in Catholic and public schools all over Europe? Teachings that are not just a terrible memory from the past that is long gone but rather a haunting reality that is alive today and taught today and needs to be eradicated today.

Professor Michael Phayer spent ten years in Europe researching the complete written documents and records of the Vatican's communica-

tion with all the Cardinals, Bishops, and priests of Europe as well as addresses and communications to the Nazis, England, the United States, Croatia, and more. The name of the book is *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965*, and it is a critical, deeply researched work that is factual in both presentation and style, yet clearly readable. Pope Pius XII, the Pope in power during all of the Nazi years, never issued a single statement either public or “private” about the killing of the Jews in Catholic Europe. Not one. Not one letter, not one announcement on the radio, not one message to the Cardinals and Bishops. Unfortunately, two years of the Vatican’s communication during the heart of the Nazi genocide are missing. One can only imagine what story those missing documents tell. Why are they missing?

One thing is clear: the Catholic Church knew everything that was happening at all times both before, during, and after the Shoah. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965* covers the events in Poland and Croatia that were precursors to the Nazi terror; all the stages of the Nazi plan as well as the aftermath of the Shoah. Pope Pius XII was referred to by many as Hitler’s Pope, but one has to look at the more than thousand year history of the Catholic Church planting seeds of Jew-hatred among the masses from the highly educated all the way down to the illiterate. Because the Church had sowed the seeds, many see Hitler as the “harvester” of the “crop” and that would make him the Pope’s Hitler rather than the other way around.

Michael makes a very strong case that while the Catholic Church’s policy toward helping the Jews was non-existent, Christian people all over Europe on their own volition risked their lives to save Jews. When you are in Israel and visit Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, you will see trees planted in the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles for all those who helped save the Jews from the Nazis and their fellow citizens who were all too quick to report their fellow citizens to the Nazis for hiding Jews.

There is a tree there for Oscar Schindler whom you may know about from Steven Spielberg’s powerful movie, *Schindler’s List*. Another movie which you may have seen or heard about is the deeply moving

Life is Beautiful by the lovable Florentian Roberto Begnini. Like everything about the Shoah, these Academy Award winning movies fall into a tough position of having to represent in isolated incidents a much larger, more complex event and respectively fall short in communicating that very few nations and gentiles helped the Jews in comparison to those who acted against the Jews and that young Jewish children in the concentration camps knew perfectly well what was happening. Because these movies make us all think about the human tragedy of the Shoah, they keep the memory alive and this is critical.

More important, however, is living, thriving Judaism in the face of Nazi terrorism. No single event captures this more justly in my mind than the trial of mass murderer Adolph Eichmann. I did not know this but my father told me that the trial of Adolph Eichmann catapulted the silent Shoah into public consciousness. The documentary *Witnesses to the Holocaust: The Trial of Adolph Eichman* was filmed inside the courtroom in Jerusalem, Israel of the trial lasting from April 11 to December 16, 1961. We learn about the actual events of the Shoah through the testimonies of 112 witnesses who gave accounts of the tragedy that would educate a new generation and not let the world forget. Eichmann was charged with 15 counts including crimes against humanity and crimes against the Jewish people. The horrors of the Shoah unfold one story at a time—the treacherous Einsatzgruppen, Kristallnacht, genocidal murder, Jewish self-defense, Nazi atrocities. The trial shows us the systematic stages of the Nazi plan of extermination, one that was thoroughly planned and expertly executed by smart, well-trained soldiers.

For all those who ask, “Why did the Jewish people not rise up?” we are answered with first hand accounts of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and profound answers to these seemingly simple questions. From this trial, we see how the Nazis are spineless, pathetic cowards—not only could they commit such heinous crimes, but they can deny any responsibility and blame their superiors all the way up to Adolph Hitler. The world’s most effective mass murderer Eichmann said, “I saw this Final Solution as something heinous, something hideous...due to my oath of

loyalty, I had to fulfill my orders." On December 15, 1961, Eichmann was found guilty on all counts and was hanged on May 31, 1965. Here is an excerpt from the Judgment:

"Eichmann's evidence was nothing but a consistent attempt to deny the truth and to conceal his real share of responsibility or at least to reduce it to a minimum. His attempt was not unskillful. It reflected the very qualities he had shown in the performance of his actions: an alert mind, the ability to adapt himself to a difficult situation, cunning...He lacked the courage to confess in truth either about the deeds or about his inner feelings committing them. In all his activities, the accused displayed indefatigable energy, verging on overzealousness to advance the Final Solution. He believed wholeheartedly in the bogus Nazi ideology that the Jews should be destroyed without mercy. In saying this we do not mean the viciousness of the accused was unusual in the regime that he served. He was a loyal disciple of a regime that was wholly evil...guilt of the others does not lessen by one iota the guilt of the accused."

Israel, the Jewish Nation, gave Eichmann a fair trial based upon evidence, the law, and justice. Eichmann headed the effort to murder millions of Jews, stripping them first of any human dignity then of their lives. While Eichmann is dead and the other Nazi cowards are hiding out in South America, Israel continues to grow and mature. The fact that I am in Israel and writing this is living Judaism practiced by living Jews everywhere. At our spiritual core radiates Israel. Let us pray that one day the human disease of hatred and racism perishes rather than the righteous and just men, women and children who want to live and thrive like the trees in Israel. Let us pray for rain in Israel as well that will fill the Kinneret, fill the reservoirs, water the fields, and bathe plants, flowers and trees flourishing all over Israel.





Jew Haters & Anti-Semitism

As I sit down to write this second to last chapter of this brief guide of my thoughts about Judaism, the reality that I am in Israel is slowly setting in. My roommate Mark is quietly sleeping in his bed just a few feet away and I am typing gently so as not to wake him. My desk faces the 6th floor window looking out over a part of the small, lovely city of Arad. On the window sill rest two clear plastic Coke bottles on their sides that have been stripped of their sticker to expose the roots of the succulent plants that are taking in the water to keep the stems growing strong out the little holes in the top.

Today is Shabbat and I know that I should not technically be doing work on Shabbat, but I am not technically all that religious so it all evens out. Last night we had an energetic Shabbat service in our cute little synagogue in the Arad Absorption Center building and after all the singing and dancing in the service, we ate a nice Shabbat meal together in the dining room and then drank Vodka and sang Shabbat songs. When someone called out a new song, we all raised our glasses and cheered, "L'chaim!" After the Oneg, the older Machsor group of about 35 students who have been here in the WUJS program since October hosted our February Machsor or "learning group" of 14 new students in various

parties in their rooms on the 5th, 6th and 7th floors of the building, our new home. We had wine, cookies, cake, snacks, dancing and all kinds of nice conversations with new friends. In addition to our WUJS students, there were some Young Judeans that were partaking in an exciting year in Israel before going off to college. The service, dinner, Oneg and hosted gatherings were a nice way to finish off a warm welcome to Israel and the WUJS program.

Two days ago on Thursday our group awoke at 4:45 a.m. to prepare for our 5 a.m. departure to the ancient Roman castle of Masada built on an isolated hill overlooking the Judean mountains and the Dead Sea. Masada is located about 30 kilometers from Arad. We climbed the Roman ramp to the top and watched the sunrise as our guide Ariel took us back two thousand years to the time of King Herod. One can not explain the feeling of Masada nor its importance to the Jewish State of Israel and the Jewish mentality. It was on Masada where 970 Jews fled from Jerusalem during the Jewish Wars from 66 to 70 c.E. and held out against the Romans for nearly three years. The Romans constructed an archway to the elevated Masada and brought up their battering ram in the year 73 to knock down a portion of the wall and break into the fortress. The group of 970 Jews decided to honorably take their lives rather than submit to the Romans and be sold into slavery. They burned all their clothing and goods and left only the storehouse of food to show the Romans that they died not for lack of supplies but rather for freedom. It's amazing to think that Masada is only about 1/2 hour away from Arad. In America, we make a big deal out of Civil War forts that are only a couple of hundred years old.

Later we had lunch and hiked through the geologically wondrous Flour cave. You have to see the amazing spectrum of desert browns, crimsons, sepia tones, powder whites, light tans, and subtle earth tones that weave across the musical striations of the Judean mountains and wind the water paths down to the Dead Sea. We then hiked in the mountain goat-filled Ein Gedi and walked along the Arugot stream area. It was there in the desert that the young and uncrowned David fled for

both his life and his purpose in life. After a refreshing hike complete with the splashing young high school students jumping in the little pools of water accumulated along the stream and sharing the refreshing mountain water with all their dry friends, we headed off to our 100,000 star hotel at our Tze'Elim camping site. We bar-b-qued then surrounded the campfire and introduced ourselves to one another. From the gorgeous deep blue sky appeared glistening stars and more stars. We sang songs, exchanged stories, cracked jokes, talked politics and got to know one another just a far stone's throw from the Dead Sea. Jews from all over America and the world including the Netherlands, Turkey, Australia, and England, of different ages, backgrounds, professions and stages of life had come to a little city in Israel to learn Hebrew and connect through the WUJS program. I stayed up almost all night long tending the fire, talking, listening, dreaming, hoping and finally watching the sun pop up over the blue mountains of Jordan just across the Dead Sea and slowly paint the violet and reddish Judean mountains tan and orange with warm morning light.

I had no idea that the Dead Sea was the lowest place on land on the planet Earth, almost 1600 feet below Sea level. Like all dramatic results, a dramatic geological event occurred where the African and European continental plates ripped apart and left a huge opening that with time filled in with crumbling land brought by running rainfall. In Hebrew it is called the Yam Hamelach or the Sea of Salt and Israelis call it the Sea of Life due to its rich abundance of rare minerals. The Arad Visitor Center has a film and large model of a section of the Negev desert that explain the formation of the Dead Sea as well as illustrate the life chain of animals and plants that thrive in the desert ecosystem. Wow, for so long I was content to know the name of the Dead Sea while unaware of the significance of its formation and the geological events that occurred over millions of years that shaped this treasure.

Anti-Semitism is the same way. What you are seeing today is connected to a long and deep rooted series of events and ideas that have sprung from a poisonous seed and have grown into a poisonous weed. I



used to just see the weed and dismiss the seed and the roots as a few demented Christians and a bunch of crazy Arabs. Today I feel that I have a more intimate understanding of the source of anti-Semitism, but this does little to appease my fear for the future of the human race in regards to Jew hatred or people hatred. As long as the world is Pink Floyd's world of "Us and Them," the world will never be whole and humanity will be divided. Prejudice, racism, sexism, xenophobia and all the other academic terms are merely dressed up words for raw hatred and cowardice. Call it what you will, it's still the same. When you judge someone before meeting them or they judge you, *pre* overcomes *judge* and the world is a little worse place for everyone. Abraham Joshua Heschel said that the world is people color blind and rather than seeing the lines and contours of people's individual faces we see only race. Stereotypes and prejudice abound in the void of human respect, compassion, and love.

I'd like to go over a quick history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism and share a few thoughts with you along the way. I really wish that I could write a book about Judaism without having to discuss the Shoah or anti-Semitism, but unfortunately, both are realities and shaping forces of modern Jewish life. I wish that the AJC (American Jewish Committee)—www.ajc.org—did not have to publish its World Report on Anti-Semitism analyzing 60 individual countries every couple of years, but it does and the reality is that Anti-Semitism is alive and well. Or that the ADL (Anti-Defamation League)—www.adl.org—did not have to track every incident of anti-Semitism because there are none, but it does with incredible thoroughness because there are many. I will be brief for tomorrow I start my Hebrew lessons and it's time to close one chapter in my life and start another.



Sometimes we come across a resource that is so strikingly clear and complete, it can singlehandedly break down a complex situation and

present ideas with lucid clarity. To learn all about the history of anti-Semitism, you could read countless books, talk with lots of people, and fly all over the world, to get little pieces of a big puzzle. Or, you could take one and one-half hours of your time and get the two part video *The Longest Hatred* from the Jewish Heritage Video Collection. This video, funded by major Jewish organizations including the Simon Wiesenthal Foundation, traverses the globe showing footage and interviews with leading scholars, academics, priests, and historians, while focusing in on the key events and ideologies that started with anti-Judaism and grew into anti-Semitism. It breaks down the cause and the development of both Christian and Muslim Jewish hatred in the last 1000 years. You can save yourself so much time and get right to the heart of the most important issues by watching *The Longest Hatred*. If you can, watch it with a friend or family member so that you can discuss it afterwards.

There are interviews with America's leading authorities on Jewish history, religion and politics in addition to film clips from all parts of the globe. One such scholar explains the portrayal of Jews: "Jews are everything that you don't want yourself to be. Everything that threatens you." We see how the Jews as outsiders, exiled from their homeland, become excluded with the politics of hatred. Christian anti-Judaism takes the form of the Jews being the murderers of God. The faith in One God set the Jews apart, a God so unlike the pagan gods of Rome. Jesus professed himself a Jew, Paul of Tarsus was a Jew, the Last Supper was the feast of Passover and everyone at the table were Jews too. At the time that the first Gospels were written, anti-Judaism in the Gospels capitalized on three major areas—shifting the blame away from the Romans, the Jewish revolt against Rome in the year 70 C.E. where two future Roman Emperors served in the army there and the fact that Christian communities were living in a Roman setting. Jesus was put to death as a political insurrectionist against the Roman power. He was one of thousands. However, Paul of Tarsus was determined and when he could not sell his

new religion to the Jews, he turned to the pagans and spread his hatred of the Jews who had rejected him and Jesus.

St. Paul of Tarsus wrote, "The Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the Prophets and drove us out; the Jews who are heedless of God's will and enemies of their fellow man hinder us from speaking to the gentiles to lead them to salvation; and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all." That's in the Gospel of St. Paul in the New Testament, the very same New Testament that has made its way all over the planet. These texts came to justify anti-Semitism and still do today.

The New Testament is a deliberate reinterpretation of Roman history, one in which the Christians win, the Christians are right and the Jews are wrong. There is no doubt about the fact that Christianity caused anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Here's a lovely reflection by St. John. "The Jews themselves are demons. They are the common disgrace and infection of the whole world." That's what was being taught inside the church and for the most part stayed separate from the everyday life of the masses. Then, in 1095, Pope Urban II initiated the Crusade against the Muslims and it included the Jews too. This was the worst catastrophe the Jews had ever known since the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kokhba revolt. The Crusaders went into Northern France, along the Rhine, into Bohemia and when they arrived in Jerusalem, they burned down the Temple with the Jews inside and slaughtered thousands along the way—a ruthless killing of Jews in the name of Jesus.

Let's jump to 1215, a couple of hundred years later when Pope Innocent III ordered that Jews must wear yellow badges. It was during this time that the nonexistent crimes of the Jews were made to fit the punishment of the Christians. Myths arose that Jews massacred Christian children and engaged in ritual murder. People's mind became poisoned with hatred and Christianity never stressed learning and questioning, only a wholehearted faith in Jesus Christ. It should not be surprising that Christians then asked no questions about the Jews and simply followed the crazy, lunatic stories with the utmost fervor and passion. All of these acts pulled Jesus away from Judaism, made Jesus' Jewish mother Mary a

Christian, and set the stage for a series of restrictions for Jews living in Christian lands that would lead to a series of compounding problems. Next the Jews are forbidden to sell goods and are restricted from all professions. They turn to money lending which sowed the seeds of contempt for all the people who pawned goods to the Jews and were mad as hell that they did not get more money for their wedding rings, gold, jewelry and valuables. Don't underestimate the power of bitter person to pass the story on for generations and generations.

By the late Middle Ages, Jews were a powerless minority in every land and they had been objects of hatred and persecution. In 1492, 100,000 Jews were expelled from Spain, Italy and Germany. They were oppressed, forced into ghettos, and had the Talmud burned. *The Longest Hatred* sequentially shows us each stage and picks out the historical documents, paintings, mosaics and places around the world which portray these events. I am simply pulling out a few major points and passing them along to you in hopes that you find the time to see the documentary. With the Inquisition comes images of the Jew as everything negative, the Jews as the Devil and a universal quality of evil worldwide against Jewish denominations. It would have been great if all the bogus ideology caved in because of its own weight and foolishness, but it did not and continued like a wave of blood to stain the brains and hands of Christian Europe.

In 1519 Martin Luther rose against the Catholic Church and Protestantism was established. At first he praised the Jews, but when they refused to convert to his new religion, he wrote:

“First their synagogues or churches should be set on fire. Their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. They should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds in which idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught. Their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach anymore. Everything that they possess they robbed and stole from us through their usury. But the young and strong Jews and Jewesses should be given the flail, the axe, the hoe, the spade, distaff

and spindle—let them earn their bread through the sweat of their noses. May we all be free of the insufferable burden—the Jews.”

It is all too common a theme for the Jews: a new religion arises and when the Jews refuse to accept it, they become the object of its wrath. Martin Luther served as a source for inspiration to the Nazis as no doubt the Shoah and Adolph Hitler will stand as a source of inspiration to Jew haters for hundreds of years to come. How I wish that all of this were just a fictional tail versus the real history of the Jews.

With the age of the European Enlightenment of the 19th Century, the Jews became assimilated. Jews went into academics and soon became members of the elite. Marx, Einstein and Freud embody the rise of the Jew and the ensuing Christian envy for their economic position and status. This envy and contempt fueled the bogus Nazi pseudo-science of race lies that leads to a scientific justification of hostility. Now anti-Judaism becomes anti-Semitism and goes from the Church and Church teachings to race. This proves to be much more subtle and much more deadly because since you can't convert a person's genes, you must simply remove the genes from the gene pool.

Hitler never hid his intentions from the Jews. *The Longest Hatred* shows striking footage of Hitler and Nazi Germany. In a twisted vile way, like the Christian cross bending into the Swastika, Hitler becomes the messianic Christ who came to purify the world of the original sin—the mixing of the races. Christianity created the depiction of the Jews as the devil, blood libel, and sons of evil, and Hitler removed the escape clause—conversion. Kill the Jews, purify the Aryan race was a stupid, crazy and absurd ideology declared and believed by the most civilized and cultured country in Europe—Germany. The leaders of the German Church became prominent members of the Nazi party. Pope Pius XII, whom I mentioned earlier, never publicly condemned Hitler's extermination of the Jews. If you follow the history, it is crystal clear why this should not be the least bit surprising.

In October of 1965, the Catholic Church issued *Nostra Hitate*, In

Our Age. It said that the crucifixion cannot be blamed on the Jews then living or the Jews of today. It did not mention the Holocaust or Christianity's legacy of hatred, persecution, and prejudice against the Jews. What caused the Vatican's change of heart and why almost twenty years after the Shoah? Who knows, but one certainly cannot discount Israel's firm establishment as the Jewish State and the trial of Adolph Eichmann that propelled the Holocaust into the worldwide spotlight. The Catholic Church had to and still has to come to terms with its past and its long list of acts and teachings aimed against the Jews.

The Longest Hatred jumps to the 1989 Berlin Wall coming down, the 80,000 present day neo-Nazis, Austria's Nazi president Kurt Waldheim, the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Poland where hardly a Jew lives, the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz, as well as Russia and the Russian pogroms, Stalin's sick campaign against the Jews, and the age-old theme of the Jews being the traditional scapegoat for all the problems of any country. It was the pogroms of 1881 that led to the first wave of immigration to America, one which brought over my great-grandfather. Russia fell prey to anti-Semitism, the disease of the modern mind, and in the process lost its greatest minds and most committed professionals. Is it any surprise that Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic and all those Eastern European countries are falling apart at the seams?

The second part of *The Longest Hatred* addresses the problems of Jews in Muslim lands. The most important point is the realization that Anti-Zionism became the modified form of Jew hatred and the binding force of Arab nations against Israel. In an interview, Rabbi Arthur Herzberg, Professor of History at Columbia University, gets to the core:

"If you de-legitimize Israel then you put Jews again on the sufferance of the non-Jewish ideologies. At that point, the left wingers can decide—or the right wingers for that matter—whether the Jews are really behaving properly in the world by their standards. And I am damned—and I want to use that word advisedly—I am damned as a Zionist and a

Jew if I will hand on the existence of the Jews to someone else's ideological preconceptions."

He goes on to describe how he lost his mother's family to the Shoah because of American immigration restrictions and points out that the most important thing in Israel is the quota shed at Ben Gurion airport. There is none for Jews and the Law of Return means that a Jew anywhere in the world will never be turned away from Israel. The most memorable part of my visit to Yad Vashem, the Shoah memorial in Jerusalem, was seeing the young group of Israeli soldiers sitting down on the stairs at the exit door with their machine guns strapped over their shoulders. If you are Jewish, isn't it nice to know that the next time some government goes to strike against the Jews, you have an army that will fight for you? It's definitely not the American army that knew what was happening in Europe during the Shoah. American intelligence is not stupid and sixty years was not that long ago. Today you have a highly trained army in Israel and before 1948 you did not.

As much as I'd like to describe the rise of modern day anti-Semitism in Arab countries, I'll leave it to your curiosity. Instead, I'd like to recommend two more wonderful resources about the same event that occurred in 1976. At a time when Americans were grooving to Jimi Hendrix, the Grateful Dead, Simon and Garfunkle, and coming out of the love revolution, Air France Flight 139 departed from Tel Aviv and touched down in Athens, Greece on its way to Paris. It was hijacked by 2 Germans and 2 Arabs and was part of a much larger scheme involving Libya and Uganda. The book **90 Minutes at Entebbe** and the movie **Operation Thunderbolt** (also called Operation Jonathan) describe in amazing detail the outplay of events that culminated in the rescue of nearly all of the 103 Jewish hostages held in the Entebbe airport in Uganda by the Israeli commandos that had only 48 hours to prepare for a mission. They accomplished the rescue, blew up 10 Russian mig fighter jets at the Entebbe airport, killed the terrorists and Ugandan soldiers, stole Russian military secrets and completed the most successful counter-terrorist

operation ever in 90 minutes. I wanted to end this chapter on a note of exhilaration, to show the triumph of the Jews against Anti-Semitism and terrorism.

William Stevenson, author of *90 Minutes in Entebbe*, begins with a thought from Yerucham Amitai, Former Deputy Chief of the Israeli Air Force, spoken in a plane while flying over the Temple of Solomon:

"If Israel should ever fail to protect her own, she would cease to have meaning. We have been forced into aggressive defense and the stakes keep getting higher. In the end, we may have to choose between action that might pull down the Temple of Humanity itself rather than surrender even a single member of the family to the executioners. Survival in other circumstances is not survival at all. And all of us, whatever our race, won't be worth a damn if we buy our lives at the cost of our conscience."



Living Judaism

Living Judaism is about living life to its fullest. There are so many paths to take and if we stand for nothing, we may fall for anything. Judaism is a great thing for which to stand. One need not be religious, only committed. If you can work 80 hours a week for stock options that may be worth nothing, can't you find 3 hours a week to dedicate to something that can reward you for a lifetime and pass along to generations to come?

Here are some quick random thoughts about living Judaism.

The world revolves around good food so go out and get yourself a good Jewish cookbook. Everyone has a favorite so ask some family and friends for suggestions and favorite recipes. Watch the funny 15 minute film ***Gefilte Fish*** that captures three generations of Jewish women who describe how they prepare this Jewish treat, with varying degrees of dedication.

Listen to Jewish music every once in a while. Just about three weeks ago I purchased two wonderful CDs from www.jewishmusic.com, ***The Best of Israel*** and ***Cantor Stuart Binder's Shabbat Songs***. I am going to sing the words in Hebrew to my favorite songs and use this as an aid in learning Hebrew. Recently in Israel I have found some beautiful modern Israeli

music by popular artists like Sarit Hadad, Shlomi Shabat, Dana Berger, Gaya, Sheva and Friends and many more. You can listen to Israeli radio through Real Audio and other streaming media players.

Don't be intimidated by Judaism. I was and have learned that you can find a very comfortable place for yourself in Judaism—look carefully and move on when not satisfied but don't give up. You have to be committed because if you give little, you will receive less. Judaism is about community so travel the path with lots of good people.

Take a day out of your life once a week to not worry about your problems—don't talk about your boss, don't stress about your credit card bills, and go out and make the day holy by living life to its fullest and being with the people you love in places that you love. Enjoy yourself, take a break. Read the book *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel. Working and stressing out is easy, not working and relaxing is hard. Try it for a week or two or maybe longer.

I recommend getting a copy of the book *Jewish Literacy* by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin. It's a nice, very readable resource for the most important things you need to know about all things Jewish—holidays, history, people, places, interesting facts.

Give to a Jewish charity and heal the world whole in the Jewish tradition of Tikkun Olam. Give of yourself and not just your money because then you can see how you do not need all the riches and excesses of American life to achieve satisfaction in your life.

Visit Israel soon. I know that I've bugged you a lot, but I promise you there is something special awaiting you in Israel. Also, stop by the websites I've mentioned for some good starting points. Stand in solidarity with Israel in these times of conflict. Israel needs all of our help.

When you visit Israel, donate blood to Magen David Adom—it's a great feeling knowing that your blood will help the Jewish State.

Don't let the drug war in America result in the continued imprisonment of black men, women and children in disproportional quantities to the general population. If you were in their shoes, would you expect help?



Don't believe the one-sided UN or American press when it comes to Israel. Read the **Jerusalem Post**—www.jpost.com—or your local Jewish newspaper either online or in the traditional form. Talk with Jewish friends about what is going on and what you can do to help. There are lots of sources for the facts and I suggest that you arm yourself with all the facts, not just the ones that paint the Jews as the bad guys.

Hey, it's 2:13 a.m. and I've got my first Hebrew class tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. so I better stop writing and get to bed. I wish you the best of luck with your personal journey into Judaism. Take it slow and don't get discouraged. It's a wonderful relationship because Judaism needs you and you need Judaism!

If an American Jew like myself can find a way to connect to Judaism in my late twenties, there is hope for all. That's the one thing of which I am sure. If you just have a little time, read the book *My Life* by Golda Meir, watch the documentary *The Longest Hatred* and visit Israel. If you have more, maybe you will explore some of the wonderful resources that I have highlighted.

And, if you think this guide was helpful, pass it along to a friend.



10

A Word About Torah & the Jewish Calendar

This chapter was never planned, and I am writing it more than two years after the rest of the book. I did know that a whole other world of Judaism in Israel awaited me. I spent 11 months from December of 2002 (the Jewish year 5763) through October of 2003 (5764) studying Torah and living Torah in different *yeshivot* (centers for Torah learning) in Israel. Why did I decide to return to Israel to learn Torah?

Good question. Something started to happen in America and around the world with the Intifada entering it's third year back in the fall of 2003. Nearly 800 Israelis had been murdered and over 2000 Palestinians were dead too. The Oslo War had really taken its toll on Israel and the Palestinians. I was consulting in San Francisco and one could feel palpable anti-Israel sentiments in the air. There were massive pro-Palestinian rallies and the general opinion was that Israel was abusing the Palestinians. In a city that was accepting to every ethnic group and way of living, the Bay Area seemed to be particularly united in its anti-Israel views. Jews all over America were coming out to say that the world's one-sided condemnation of Israel was unfair and motivated by anti-Jewish sentiments.

I felt an intense desire to understand more about what was happen-

ing in Israel. Back in America, I started attending more religious Shabbat services because I liked their unbreaking solidarity with Israel. Nowadays it seems Jews in America are more on the same page in standing with Israel, but in 2003, there was a lot of doubt. Land for peace? How about peace for peace.

I did not doubt that the world was bullying Israel. Israel is the only Jewish State, the only democracy in the Middle East, and the Arabs were blowing themselves up all over the country to murder Jewish women, children and men. The Arabs have over fifty countries, and there are plenty of Christian countries. We Jews have only one little Eretz Yisrael. If Jews around the world did not believe that we were right in the battle, then who would stand up for us? At that time, I did not know much about Torah or religious Jewish practices. The world was coming down hard on Israel, threatening boycotts, rallying around the world against Israel, and anti-Semitism was rising at a scary pace. I felt nervous and Yasser Arafat's Intifada woke up something inside of me.

My logic for deciding to learn Torah in Israel went something like this. What is the Jewish claim to the Land of Israel? We could say that Jews used to live there thousands of years ago, but since then Arabs more recently lived there, that claim seems rather ancient. Any historical claim that we had falls through in the modern context of acquisition of land. The American Indians once lived all over America and technically they owned the land, but they can't come back today and claim it.

I felt the same with Israel. If the Palestinians were claiming that the land was theirs, perhaps they had as much claim on the land as the Jews. Furthermore, if world governing bodies could decide to whom the land belonged, they could give the land to the Jews and take it away too. The more I looked at the situation and the more I thought about it, the reality came into stronger focus that the greatest claim that the Jews had to the land, the eternal claim, was that God gave us the land. Like the sign that the people held up at the pro-Israel rally in Washington, D.C. in the spring of 2002, "Read the Bible: the Land of Israel Belongs to the Jews."

Since I had not read the Bible, I did not know where the Bible, the

Five Books of Moses, said this. So, I figured that I could learn some Torah and also help support Israel once again by living there.

My journey into Torah in Israel led me to new places and into a new world in Israel. I had had unpleasant experiences with religious Jews before and that had caused me to hastily prejudge all religious Jews. I was fortunate to meet many nice religious families and to experience Torah in Israel with joy and *simcha* (happiness), with passion and joy. I used to think of Torah as boring, dry and dull, and now I know that Torah can be powerful, exciting, graceful and enlightening. Shabbat meals were filled with beautiful nigguns (songs), delicious food, blessings, and stories. Also, we drank scotch and wine and fine liquors which can give you something for which to look forward each and every week.

The Jewish holidays came to life in a new way for me. I experienced Torah observance replete with *davening* (praying) three times a day, blessing my food before eating it, not doing any work on Shabbat, and wearing a kippa. I attended religious weddings, entered into religious society and saw a lots of nice things. Now, not everything was wonderful. I had troubling experiences along the way too. I learned an important lesson of making changes in moderation, and I think that I took off too big of a chunk of Torah too fast. There is a lot of pressure to conform and a person can lose his or her inner sense of balance. In Israel being religious makes a lot more sense. The country has synagogues everywhere, kosher restaurants are standard, kosher food fills the grocery stores, the country bubbles with excitement for Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Succot, and on Yom Kippur you feel the intensity of the Jewish people asking God for forgiveness. During Chanukkah there are candles lit everywhere and during Purim, the whole country parties. Wearing a kippa in Israel does not stand out at all, being religious there is natural. However, many Israelis feel that religious Jews are intolerant and want nothing to do with them.

America is different. Here, to live a more religious Jewish life one can live in one of only a few cities in America that have religious Jewish communities. Israel is young and you feel the youthful energy everywhere.

America has an aging Jewish population and it just feels light, not intense. In Israel, many of the synagogues look out onto the mountains and their huge windows let in light that fills the whole room. There are chandeliers and extremely comfortable chairs, gorgeous paintings and Torah inspired art. And then there is the Kotel where you can daven to a blue sky, gorgeous sunset, and you are a stones throw from where the Temple used to stand. If you are going to daven three times a day, in the morning for around 45 minutes, in the afternoon for around 10 minutes and in the evening for around 15 minutes, a beautiful location makes all the difference in the world. By the end of my year of learning Torah, I was excited to wake up in the morning and daven for around 45 minutes. It was invigorating.

When I returned back to America, I encountered a lot of problems because America is not the Jewish State and everything seemed weird, out of place. I am not going to go into details about where I studied in Israel because I am still letting the experience sink in and I don't know for sure what was right and what was wrong. I can say that learning Torah is important and it can bring you much closer to all the generations that lived by Torah in Europe and before that in Eretz Yisrael. On the other hand, anytime you cross the line and go over to the other side, you run the risk of dealing with people from a different world who may not be looking out for your best interests.

I found that learning Torah with religious Jews deeply upset my Israeli cousins who feel the religious Jews are to blame for many of Israel's problems. My father and I had a conversation about religious, Reform and Conservative Judaism and came to the conclusion that, in my father's words, "Religious Jews spent too much time looking in and not enough time looking out." I agreed. However I replied, "Reform Jews spend too much time looking out and not enough time looking in." All the groups can learn from each other.

The point is that there are lots of options for learning Torah and it's wise to proceed with caution. There is a very strong social network that can really put pressure on a student to conform, and being independent,

I had to stand my ground with several rabbis. I also had to leave several yeshivoat to establish the right relationship and balance. For me the greatest thrill was understanding the Five Books of Moses in their original Hebrew. I find it amazing how these words, which have had such an impact on the whole world, and still have, are Hebrew. They are the words of our Torah, our most guarded possession as a Jewish people, that guide us, inform us, challenge us, and inspire us from generation to generation. My goal was to learn how to daven in Hebrew, to learn how to read the Torah in Hebrew and to gain a deeper understanding of religious life. From that regard, I accomplished my goal. It was by far the most difficult challenge of my life because I had to step out of the world that I knew and enter into a completely different world.



I would like to share with you some insights into the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar had always been a complete enigma to me. Our holidays bounced around and while I had a general idea of when they popped up, it never had a rhyme or a reason. After learning the Jewish calendar and keeping a watchful eye on the moon, it all makes a lot of sense. The Christian calendar is completely based on the sun, and the 365 and a quarter days that it takes for our planet to go around it. Holidays hit on the same day of the month year in and year out, regardless of the position of the moon. The Muslims focus entirely on the moon for their calendar: It takes 29 and a half days for the moon to fully circle the earth. The 11 day difference between the lunar cycle and the solar cycle causes the Muslim holidays to constantly change and they celebrate the same holiday at all the different times of the year as the years progress and the difference in days grows from 11 after one year, to 22 the next year, to 33 days difference after 3 years, etc. It would be weird for us to celebrate Passover which we always celebrate in the spring at different times of the year such as winter, fall or summer!

Because most Jews relate to Judaism through our holidays, I would



like to present to you some of the logic behind the Jewish calendar. It took me a lot of time to grasp this so if you don't get it the first time around, try reading it again.

The Jewish calendar starts with the month of *Nissan*. *Nes* in Hebrew means miracle and in the Torah the redemption of the Jewish people starts when God takes them out from the land of Egypt. The very first month declared in the Torah was Nissan and at that time the Israelites were busy preparing to leave Egypt to be taken to the Promised Land. *Pesach*, or Passover as we call it, starts on the 14th day of Nissan. In the evening which is the 15th of Nissan, we have the Passover Seder and read the *Haggadah*, the story, and recount the journey out of Egypt as if it happened in our generation. In Israel, Jews only have one Seder but outside of Israel we have a first night and a second night. I'll come to the reason why shortly.

Unlike the Roman calendar, the days of the Hebrew calendar are connected to the cycle of the moon. The moon takes 29 and a half days to circle the earth. Because you can't have a half of a day, Hebrew months have 29 or 30 days. The first day of the Hebrew month begins with the new moon. The moon then waxes growing from new moon to quarter to half to full over 14 days. The middle of the month is the full moon. So, the 15th of the month is the full moon and then the moon wanes for the next 14 or 15 days until it disappears. When the moon waxes the light is on one side and when it wanes the light is on the other. The more adept you become at looking at the moon, the more you can easily recognize its state. It follows a set cycle month after month.

Your Hebrew birthday will tell you the state of the moon. If you were born on the 1st day of Nissan, then it was a new moon. If you were born on the 15th of Nissan, the eve of Pesach, then you were born on a full moon. If you were born on the 22th of Nissan, then you were born on a half moon that is waning. This intimate connection with the moon is very important to the Jewish calendar.

Spring is the time when nature comes to life after a long winter. In

Eretz Yisrael, the winter time is a time of rain and it is cold in many parts of the country. It might even snow in Jerusalem a couple times in the winter. Aviv in Hebrew is spring, as in Tel Aviv, Hill of Spring. In the spring, all of Eretz Yisrael comes alive with longer days, nicer weather and growing crops.

Spring is the time of Passover. When the Nissan moon grows into fullness and all of nature bursts alive, we celebrate our passage from slavery to freedom. It's the Jewish Declaration of Independence, an event that happened 3600 years ago and has been a the defining moment of our Jewish nationhood. The entire world knows the story of our Exodus.

The Torah tells us to celebrate Passover for 7 days. For religious Jews preparing for Passover can be a lot of work. It takes religious families at least a month of work to clean the house of all forms of leaven and bread. In Israel, the whole country is somewhat in vacation mode for this week and it is a commandment for religious Jews not do work during this time if they can avoid it.

We start counting the *Omer* (a quantity of grain) on the second day of Pesach and count 7×7 or 49 days of the Omer, once each day, leading all the way up to the momentous occasion of making the covenant with God on Sinai. We count up for the Omer, starting with, "Today is the 1st day of the Omer", and increase by a day, each day, all the way up to the 49th day of the Omer. Shavuot occurs 50 days after the first day of Passover. In the Parsha Jethro in the book of Exodus, the Torah tells the story of how the Israelites received the 10 Commandments. The first day that Moses went up to Sinai was *Shavuot*. Shavuot in Hebrew means weeks and it comes 7 weeks, 49 days, after the 2nd day of Passover. After going up to Sinai the first time, Moses stayed up on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights learning Torah from God. This is the equivalent of the Constitution that followed the Declaration of Independence. That's how Passover and Shavuot are connected. Passover, the journey out of bondage into freedom is like the Declaration of Independence, and Shavuot, setting up the laws of the free society, is like the Constitution.

Passover comes on the 15th day of the first month of the Jewish cal-

endar, the month of Nissan. The second month is *Iyar* and the third Hebrew month is *Sivan*. Nissan has 30 days, *Iyar* has 29, and *Sivan* 30. If you add the remaining 15 days of the month of Nissan and the 29 days of *Iyar*, you get 44 days. To make fifty, we need another 6 and that's why Shavuot falls today on the 6th day of *Sivan*, the third month. The first Shavuot may have actually fallen on the 7th day of *Sivan*. Because the Jews might have celebrated Shavuot on the 7th day of the 3rd month (*Sivan*), this is a perfect time to talk about the importance of the numbers 7 and 3 in Judaism.

In Judaism, 7 is a very important number. There are 7 days of Creation; 7 days in the week because of the story of Creation; Shabbat is the 7th day of the week; the 3 Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and 4 Matriarchs, Sara, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel total 7; there are 7 species of Eretz Yisrael: wheat, barley, grape vines, figs, pomegranates, olive trees and date palms, and many other things of 7. When studying the year in Israel, every time I came across something with 7 I added it to my notebook and filled up many pages.

3 is also an important number in Judaism. There are 3 Patriarchs mentioned before; religious Jews pray three times a day; on Shabbat religious Jews eat three meals; we say Kaddosh, Kaddosh, Kaddosh, is the Lord of Hosts; there are three books that make up the Tanach—Torah, Prophets and Writings; in the Amidah there are 3 opening and 3 closing blessings, and on and on.

One just needs to look at one's two hands to come up with the answer to $7 + 3$. 10 is the number of perfection and 7 and 3 work together to make the world as we know it whole. In Judaism, elements of 10 are usually divided into 7 and 3. For instance, of the 10 Commandments, 3 are positive and 7 are negative. Of the 10 Plagues with which God struck Egypt and Pharaoh, Pharaoh's sorcerers could recreate the first three of them but not the remaining 7. In Kabbalah (the mystical interpretation of the Torah) there are 10 spheres which relate to forces in the universe or expressions of God—7 of them appear in

this world and 3 of them are hidden. Now let's take a look at another number that appears frequently.

The mystical side of Judaism believes that there are 4 worlds, each relating to one of the four Hebrew letters of God's name that stands for Will Be, Was And Am. In order to make a permanent change in the world, mystically speaking, kabbalists believe that you have to affect each of the 10 spheres in each of the 4 worlds. If you multiply 10×4 , you get 40.

What does 40 have to do with Passover and Shavuot? The Jews were freed from the house of bondage and that's why we celebrate Passover. Then, Moses went up to Sinai to receive the Torah 50 days later, or 49 days after the second day of Passover. That is the holiday of Shavuot, the receiving of Torah. Moses stayed up on Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights!

First we have Pesach, then the 49 days of the Omer, followed by Shavuot when Moses ascends Sinai for the first time and Am Yisrael receives the 10 Commandments. Now, it just so happens that the Omer is two loaves of bread, in a way very symbolic of the two tablets each containing five of the 10 Commandments. What bread represents and what matzah represents is a whole other discussion, but of course they are related not just to food, but what food represents to our bodies and our souls. Sometimes we need to feed our bodies, and sometimes we need to feed our souls.

The Talmud is filled with page after page of Rabbi's presenting ideas and proving them with sources. Some of the Rabbis in the Talmud state that the first Shavuot was on the 7th day of 3rd month, Sivan. There we go with that 7 and 3 again.

Shavuot was the first day of Moshe's first 40 days on Sinai when he received Torah from God for 40 days and 40 nights. This takes us through the remaining 23 days in Sivan (the 3rd month) and into the first 17 days of *Tammuz* the 4th month. The 17th of *Tammuz* is a fast day, it is the day when the Romans burst through the walls of Jerusalem before destroying the Second Temple. The 17th of *Tammuz* is also the last of Moshe's

40 days on Sinai, when he descended with the two stone tablets that he shattered when he saw the Golden Calf. The Golden Calf, as we know, was a major sin because it was a form of mass idol worship and there is nothing that makes the Jewish God madder than that! Bad things tend to happen on the same day throughout Jewish history. 40 days after the first Shavuot in Jewish history, the Jews sin with the Golden Calf and Moses descends on the 17th of Tammuz and shatters the two tablets. More than a millenium later, the Romans on the 17th of Tammuz break through the walls of Jerusalem. 3 weeks later, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple on the 9th of Av. Av is the 5th month in the Jewish calendar, it follows Tammuz. The 9th of Av, or *Tisha B'Av* (tisha means 9 in Hebrew), was also the day that the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple built by King Solomon, the son of David.

We have just walked through Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, and Av (the first five months of the Hebrew calendar) seeing holidays that we celebrate today and connecting them to events that occurred in the Torah. Their connection with the moon and the events in the Torah clarify why they happen when they happen. None of this is random. The Jewish calendar is connected to mystical concepts such as the significance of the days and the number of days between holidays. Now we are going to walk through the second half of the Jewish calendar:



The Torah tells us that Moshe was on Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, then he came down to the Israelite camp for 40 days and 40 nights and then went back up on Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. (Note: Moses may have ascended up to Sinai and descended right after the Golden Calf incident.) Moses' 40 days on the ground come after the 17th of Tammuz and bring us through the remaining days in Tammuz, the 4th month, through Av, the 5th month and to *Elul*, the 6th month. On the first day of Elul, Moshe Rabbenu ascended Sinai again for the second 40 day and 40 night period that concludes with him descending on the 10th day of the

7th month (*Tishre*), or *Yom Kippur* as we know this day. He has in his hands the new 10 Commandments that he chiseled out himself to replace the first ones that he broke on the 17th of Tammuz for the sin of the Golden Calf.

Religious Jews blow the Shofar in the morning prayer service every day beside Shabbat, starting from the first day of Elul all the way through Yom Kippur. This makes 40 days. There are many reasons for this. The one that connects with this brief description is that the Shofar sound is a reminder to *Am Yisrael*, the People of Israel, not to have another Golden Calf type of sin when Moses was away up on Mt. Sinai receiving Torah and learning Torah from God. Each day that we hear the shofar we are reminded about Moses being on Sinai.

In celebrating the holidays however religiously or unreligiously, I never understood the underlying connection to what is written in the Torah. For this reason, I am including these Torah details in the hopes that it helps you understand better why we do what we do.

Let's return to 7 and 3. Tishre is the 7th month. I stressed the importance of 7, and will now add to it. Four of the 7 holidays mentioned in the Torah occur in Tishre. They are *Rosh Hashanah* (the New Year), *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), *Succot* (the Festival of Booths), and *Shemini Etzeret* (the 8th Day). Just as the timing of Passover occurs in the Spring when life is awakening, the 7th Jewish month, Tishre, comes in the Fall when farmers will gather in their last crops and prepare for the hopefully rainy winter in Israel. The Jewish calendar is connected to the seasons in the Land of Israel and that's why Succot does not make a whole lot of sense in the northeastern United States when it is cold and rainy outside.

The Fast of Gedaliah falls on the 3rd day of Tishrei, the 7th month. Rosh Hashanah comes on the 1st day of Tishrei, then 10 days later comes Yom Kippur. The Fast of Gedaliah on the 3rd day of Tishrei divides the 10 day period into 3 days and then 7 days, perfectly fitting the pattern of dividing everything of 10 in Judaism into 3 and 7. Jews are supposed to strive to be good people who follow the laws of Torah

every day. Depending on your background, this has different meanings. For religious Jews it means following the Torah as closely as possible. For Reform and Conservative Jews, it means keeping some rituals and striving to be moral and ethical the whole year. For many the *10 days of Teshuva* (return to Torah values) from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur are a great time to start.

On the full moon of the month of Tishrei, or the 15th day, we start Succot. This comes 6 months after Passover which was on the full moon in the first month of Nissan. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can be a pretty intense time. Having to think about our lives and sins is a lot of work! What makes Succot nice is being outside, working with our hands to build and decorate the sukkah, and enjoying the nice days. The sukkas that we build are supposed to remind us of the sukkas in which the Israelites slept during their 40 years in the desert. In the desert God took care of the Israelites and in a similar manner we eat and drink and even sleep in the sukkah to remember the Exodus from Egypt and the protection of God.

In Israel the days are nice. In rainy New York and snowy Chicago, it's a different story! Succot lasts for 7 days and climaxes with Shemini Etzeret which is the fourth Biblical holiday that comes in the month of Tishre, the 7th month.

Why do Jews living outside of Israel celebrate (or not celebrate depending on your religiosity) two days of holiday when in Israel there is only one? This is for Passover's 1st day and 7th day, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, and Succot's 1st and 7th day. Historically, there was a delay in communicating the New Moon. Because a month could have 29 or 30 days, there is a day of doubt. As a result, to make sure that they did not desecrate the holiday, Jews farther from Jerusalem celebrated on two days knowing that one of them had to be the right day. Nowadays we have instantaneous communication all over the world, but, those living outside of Israel are penalized with an extra day. Experiencing the holidays in Israel is amazing—the entire country comes alive. What else would you expect from the one and only Jewish State in the whole wide

world? My favorite holiday in Israel is Succot because there are outdoor concerts, people travel all over the country and everyone invites you to join them for a delicious meal in their sukkah.

Shemini Etzeret can be thought of as the close to the holiday season in Tishrei that comes on the day after the 7th day of Succot—the 8th Day of Conclusion. In Israel, this day is also Simcha Torah, the day that we start the Torah over again. Outside of Israel, the day after Shemini Etzeret is Simcha Torah.

So there you have a quick walkthrough of the Biblical Jewish calendar and the numbers 3, 7, 10 and 40. What happened to Chanukkah and Purim? These events happened much later in Jewish history. Consequently, Chanukkah (the celebration of the victory of the Maccabees and the rededication of the Temple) and Purim (the celebration of Queen Esther saving the Jews in Persia from annihilation) both celebrate miracles that God performed for His people during dark times in Jewish history. These holidays occur during the cold winter months and their timing helps light up the dark winter days with a message of hope, light and laughter and lots of Scotch on Purim which keeps you warm too.

Judaism believes that just under the surface of everything in the entire world and the entire universe is God. Growing up, I never really thought of God as being intimately involved in our daily lives and my experiences in Israel woke me up to new possibilities. It's a lot to swallow and that's why it's important to go very slowly when learning Torah. Of course, it's one thing to take a year off work and learn Torah in Israel and another thing to come back to fast-paced American life.

It is a balancing act. Finding the proper balance between the spiritual and the physical, between the secular and the holy, between work and family requires constant attention and effort. We all have our own special relationship with our heritage, Israel, and Torah, to learn from, to grow with and to help us through the cycles of life.

I wish you all the blessings with your journey—May God guard you and bless you and may He shine His light on you.

