

foretold in the Hebrew Bible. All they had to do was to read it carefully and they would find him. And they read it very carefully. Taking many ideas out of context, they applied them to Jesus. This accounts for the many similarities between the Gospels and the Hebrew Bible.

There is nothing predictive of Jesus in the Hebrew Bible. The similarities are due to the numerous copyings from the Hebrew Bible by the Gospel writers. The Gospels are not history or biography as we understand those words. They are theological or religious writings for Christians.

Ohio's motto was based on a saying of Jesus. It is well known to Christians. The Federal Sixth Circuit Court in Cincinnati recently outlawed it as an imposition of religion on the public sphere. How ironic, when the Hebrew Bible itself remains the source for Jesus' "statement."

Lawrence Briskin
Centerville, Ohio



Celebrating in Burma (Fifty-Five Years Later)

It was all over in Europe, but the end still seemed a long way off for those of us serving in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia. On V-E Day in 1945 — and on V-J Day as well — I was serving with the US Army Signal Corps along the Stilwell (or Ledo) Road at Myitkyina, in Upper Burma. In the south, fighting was still going on, with the Japanese in steady retreat. From Myitkyina's

three military airstrips, squadrons of US warplanes were still taking off in sorties against the Japanese in the south and in China.

I had rarely encountered anti-Semitism during my thirty-four months of service with men of numerous ethnic and religious backgrounds from all over the US. The worst experience was at the hands of a Jewish lieutenant at Camp Crowder, Missouri, who apparently thought he was defending Jewish honor by riding hardest on the Jewish soldiers under his command.

Otherwise, I was once told by an Irish Catholic from New York City, a longshoreman in civilian life, that I looked smart (we were preparing for an inspection) and would make a good-looking corpse at the battlefield. I had been drawn into several passionate but not violent discussions about why I had killed Christ. Once a Minnesotan of Swedish origin, who was angry at one of our officers, a Lt. Cohen, swore under his breath to kill "all the Cohens." When I suggested that he start with me, he relented and apologized.

In Myitkyina, it was about 3 am the night the report of the war's end reached us. We celebrated with cans of grapefruit juice and beer. In our squad tent, one small group played poker as they drank. Four of us, alongside the raised tent flap, were rather carelessly and slurringly playing bridge. My partner was Herman Kahn, later to acquire world renown as a leading futurologist and founder of the Hudson Institute. As we played we continued, slightly tipsily, our steady argument about Zionism. I failed to persuade him, though he later came to Israel several times to

share his wisdom with us, especially with his cousin, finance minister Pinhas Sapir.

Adjacent to our bridge group, next to the raised flap in the next tent, another discussion of some sort was taking place, to which I paid no attention. One of the participants was a New Yorker of Italian origin, a lapsed Catholic, with whom I was friendly. All at once, he leaned over toward me and said in a slightly tipsy voice: "I'll never forgive you Jews."

I was startled by these words coming from the mouth of this particular man, who had never dropped any hint of prejudice at any ethnic or religious group. I asked him what we had done to displease him.

He replied: "What you did to Spinoza is unforgivable!"

I was sufficiently sober to be stunned and to come back at him with: "And what about what you Catholics did to (Giordano) Bruno (the former Dominican friar burned at the stake for heresy in 1600)?"

The next day we both sheepishly called it a draw.

We had reached Burma via Calcutta after a six-week voyage aboard a troop ship sailing alone across the Pacific, via the southern coast of Australia. After we landed, we were taken for processing to an army base called, to my great astonishment, "Camp Shapiro."

A few inquiries of some "Camp Shapiro" veterans brought me the origin of the name. The camp was situated next to the Bengalese village of Kanchrapara.

Moshe Kohn
Jerusalem

A Liberal Rabbi's High Holiday Reflections

by Dana Evan Kaplan

Many of us looked at the year 2000 as far in the distant future. As an eleven-year old in 1972, I remember wondering whether the publisher of George Orwell's 1984 was going to rename the book when the actual year arrived. Now the initial shock has passed. We faced Y2K and survived (what awaits next year, when the new millennium really begins, remains to be seen). The millennium is not a Jewish milestone, but it can serve as a useful time for religious reflection. In fact, many of the themes that pertain to the start of the new era are central to our own High Holy Days.

1999 was a year of local conflicts around the world, and one of trauma and violence for Jews in the United States and abroad. The attacks on Jewish institutions and individuals, even children, have been unprecedented. After the traditional prayer of Aleinu, some have the custom of reciting a passage that begins with the words: "do not fear sudden terror." These words are soothing but, today, many of us do fear the possibility of attack. It seems that mad folks everywhere are seized by demonic rages. Three synagogues were burned to the ground in Sacramento in the same night. A drive-by shooter took aim at Chicago-area Orthodox Jews walking home from synagogue on a summer evening. A synagogue in Long Island was fire-bombed and badly damaged. A neo-Nazi fired an automatic weapon at dozens of Jewish children in a daycare program in a JCC in Los Angeles.

One of the two rampaging teenage boys from Columbine High School in Denver was the grandson of a Jewish philanthropist from Ohio. The killer became a Goth in what they call the "trench-coat Mafia," and expressed repeated admiration for Adolph Hitler. That he had attended and apparently participated in a Pesach Seder just weeks before the murders makes us wonder whether Jews should take some kind of communal responsibility for the act. A friend of mine, Rabbi Ray Zwerin of Denver's

Congregation Sinai, was quoted widely as dismissing any connection. I'm not so sure.

We struggle to see how these events fit into our comfortable suburban lives in New York, Florida, Texas, and elsewhere. When we recite "Ashamnu" on Yom Kippur, it is significant that our confession is phrased in the plural — it is society that fosters the conditions for sin in the heart of the individual. If society is unfeeling, this will breed despair. Many of the teenagers involved in the Colorado massacre told TV reporters how they too had been verbally and physically abused by the athletes and the beauty queens and the other socially prominent cliques in school. Society bears much responsibility for the acts of the individual.

Judaism has always emphasized the "klal," the collective. Rabbi Isaac Luria, the sixteenth-century Kabbalist, asks: "Why is the confession that we recite on Yom Kippur composed in the plural? Why is it that we say, 'we have sinned,' rather than, 'I have sinned'?" Because all of Israel is one body, he explains, and every Jew is a limb of that body. If my friend does something terribly evil, it is as though I myself have sinned. We may have not had anything to do with it, but we still mention the sin in our own confession. We are somehow responsible for that individual's failure.

The confessional prayer *Al Chet* lists a long series of sins that have been committed during the year, and we ask God to pardon us and to grant us atonement. Before we can deserve Divine atonement, we must first pardon one another: husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbors and friends. Living during the year 2000, many of us may be stimulated to look at our lives from a broader perspective as people and as Jews. In what must surely be the most affluent and peaceful society in history, we continue to sin against God for our failures of truth, for destructive acts, for our own passivity, for our many failures of justice.

Judaism teaches that every human being is born without sin. When we grow



up, we can no longer make that claim. God implants free will within each of us. Yet sometimes we don't show a lot of independence. We conform, avoiding the discomfort of taking a stance. When I was a student rabbi in Brisbane, Queensland, congregants explained to me what they called the "tall poppy syndrome." A poppy seed planted in a lawn will grow much faster than the grass around it; so too individualists committed to fighting for truth and justice often find themselves isolated and vulnerable. Just as a tall poppy exists with the distinct possibility that someone will walk by and pull it out by its roots, so too a person who is willing to stand up risks being shot down. It is a risk that we need to take.

Southern Baptists launched a campaign during the last High Holy Days to convert as many Jews as possible to Christianity. In a booklet published just before last Rosh Hashanah, Baptist leaders urged the Church's 15.9 million members to "pray each day for Jewish individuals you know by name... that they will find the spiritual wholeness available through the messiah." Jews for Jesus and other messianic Jewish groups have dramatically increased their publicity and recruitment efforts. If you go to Midtown Manhattan in New York, you can see an attractive young Jew for Jesus with an identifying t-shirt standing on virtually every corner.

We have to know how to respond, not necessarily in order to answer these missionaries — they're not going to listen to us anyway — but in order to provide an affirming answer for ourselves. Why be Jewish in a time when no one hates us (or so it seemed until the Sacramento fires)? It is hard to know how long we can continue as Jews if we are unwilling to engage actively in learning about the three pillars of the Jewish religion: God, Torah, and Israel. We must not only develop a personal relationship with God, we must let God touch us in our daily lives. God is waiting for us, and it is we who must take the first step. In the Torah, God commands the children of Israel to follow the mitzvot. Today we are far more responsive to American cultural and societal pressures. The result has been ritual observance that is idiosyncratic. The God of Israel demands much more.

UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie has repeatedly stressed the importance of Torah for Reform Judaism. But he can't force anyone take Torah seriously, just as nobody can force others to observe mitzvot. We hide behind the rhetoric of autonomy, protesting that as Reform Jews, we have the right to choose

what we observe and what we don't. But when congregations with eight or nine hundred families are drawing mere handfuls to Friday night services, and when temples of eleven hundred or twelve hundred families have to form consortiums in order to draw moderate turnouts for adult education programs, something is wrong.

In its classical formulation, the name "Israel" refers not to the Jewish State, but to the people of Israel. How much Ahavat Yisrael, love of fellow Jews, do we have? What do we do when thirteen Persian Jews in Iran are arrested and threatened with capital punishment on trumped-up charges of spying for Israel? What is our response to the possibly fifty-two percent intermarriage rate in the United States, as reported in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey?

Reform Jews are proud of their commitment to ethical monotheism. But it is becoming increasingly clear that whatever this once meant, it is no longer enough to motivate the vast majority of American Jews. Our approach to Judaism has become contaminated by personalism and volunteerism.

This is not the way Reform Judaism was intended to be. Rabbi Abraham Geiger, one of the greatest sages in the history of the Reform movement who lived in nineteenth century Germany, argued that through intensive, scholarly study, modern Jews could come to understand the organic connection between biblical Judaism and the much-later talmudic Judaism, by uncovering its intermediate stage in the Second Temple period. At the most recent conference of the CCAR, the rabbis voted overwhelmingly to adopt a new Pittsburgh Platform. This platform — even though it was "watered down" during the course of a two-year consultation process — advocates a more positive and enthusiastic embrace of tradition.

At this juncture in human history, we need to repent of our sins and renew our efforts to live with humility and boldness. We pray that God can help us to be honest enough to recognize our transgressions, to be big enough to admit them, and strong enough to forsake them. We pray that God may help us to create homes filled with joy and harmony and to devote ourselves to working for peace in our community and throughout the world. May God kindle within us the faith and courage we need to realize the words of our prayers. sw IS

Dana Evan Kaplan is the Oppenstein Brothers Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Missouri in Kansas City.

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