

Yom Kippur

BY RABBI STANLEY HALPERN

See Jonah run

On *Yom Kippur* we read the Book of Jonah, a text that is simultaneously incredibly simple and incredibly complex. Perhaps that is why Jonah and *Yom Kippur* fit so well together.

We know the simple story of Jonah. God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah goes to Tarshish instead. He is swallowed by a big fish (not a whale) and ends up in Nineveh.

It's a simple story that we teach our children. Simplistic Moral: Do What God Wants You To Do.

The problem with the Book of Jonah is that there is a substantial list of perplexing questions that jump up at us throughout the story:

What is the point of the gourd at the end?

Why does the book end by mentioning cattle?

Why are the most righteous people not Israelites?

Why is the big fish masculine in one part of the story and feminine in another? And more.

However, while the answers to these are worthy of exploring at perhaps another time, for me the most perplexing question of all is why Jonah runs in the first place. Certainly, as a prophet Jonah knows that he cannot go where God is not. Why would Jonah do what he did at all – such an utterly futile act?

The answer, I would suggest, is found in Newton's Third Law. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. However, we need to understand what the action is and what the reaction is, and whose action and reaction these are.

The answer comes after Nineveh is saved, when Jonah vents his frustration towards God. Jonah almost shouts at God that he knew from the very beginning that God would not destroy the city. "You are a merciful and compassionate God – I knew you could not do it. All Nineveh had to do was say 'Sorry'".

God's saving of Nineveh was the action. Jonah's anger over the lack of justice (retribution) by God was the reaction.

Jonah is angry with God – so angry that he does not even want to talk to God. God tells him to go to Nineveh, but because he is angry, Jonah instead goes to Tarshish. God produces the storm, and Jonah ignores the storm by sleeping in the bot-



DE KOVEN

(continued from page 11)

Fun things we do between us and the world:

Learning something new together

Experimenting

Trying new spices, fruits, foods, etc.

Trying out new restaurants, stores, parks, neighborhoods to visit, roads to travel

Solving household dilemmas

Inventing new ways to "make do"

New uses for common objects

Being kind to others to other people (family, friends, strangers)

Being kind to animals, insects, plants

Pointing out things to each other that we think the other would enjoy

Bringing new people into each other's lives

Pretending

Speaking in accents

Pretend conversations as we walk

by people, e.g.: "Where did we leave that body?"

Walking together

Exploring different paths

Walking and talking

Building junk sculptures on our walks

Noticing, smelling and

touching flowers

Listening to bird songs,

trying to sing along

Sharing chores –

keeping things fair, in balance

Being with the kids and grandkids

Helping together

Deciding together about

how to spend and save

I hope you appreciate these items on our list. In reflecting on the past year and preparing for what you might do to make improvements in the New Year, get together with one or more loved ones and both of you make a list of what you will do to keep your relationship alive, whole, and joyous.

Bernie De Koven, is the author of *The Well-Played Game, A Playful Path and Junkyard Sports. A Playful Path is available here: <http://www.aplayfulpath.com/the-book/> where one can also purchase the paper or download the electronic version for free. Bernie can be found on the Internet at his two main websites: <http://deepfun.com> and <http://aplayfulpath.com>. ✨*



tom of the boat. Jonah ends up inside the fish and says nothing to God for three days. Finally, Jonah confronts God. He demands of God an accounting for God's lack of justice.

And so here we come to the reason Jonah and *Yom Kippur* fit so well together. We want God to show compassion for us, for our loved ones and for our community.

High Holidays resolutions



BY RABBI MORDECHAI LEVIN

Jewish people across the world are engaged in preparations for *Rosh Hashanah* – one of the most important times in the Hebrew calendar. *Rosh Hashanah* has deep significance in that it marks the beginning of a process of reflection and self-examination that culminates in *Yom Kippur*. The High Holidays are our chance to start again, renew ourselves and renew our lives.

Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel, a Conservative rabbi and theologian, wrote a book titled, *The Sabbath*, in which he explored the importance of time in Judaism.

Heschel wrote that Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The *Sabbaths* are our great cathedrals, and our Holy of Holies is *Yom Kippur*.

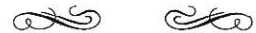
Heschel said that Judaism is a religion that aims to sanctify time. For some people, time is unvaried, homogenous. To them, every day is like every other day and every hour is like every other hour. But no two days or hours are alike. Each hour is unique and the only one given at that moment, exclusive and endlessly precious. If before going to bed every night, we would tear a page from the calendar and say, "There goes another day of my life, never to return," we might become aware of the value of time. Time is life. Therefore, if we waste our time we waste our life.

The sounding of the *shofar* calls us to examine our lives: "Awake, you sleepers, and ponder your deeds; remember your Creator, forsake your evil ways, and return to God!"

Therefore on these High Holidays, let us resolve to live a good life, a life of commitment and purpose.

Let us find the time to be grateful for the daily blessings that we are given. The blessing of life itself and the opportunity to enjoy our lives in the time we have.

Let us resolve to tell the people we love that we love them, to reach out to those who need us, to make amends with those who have hurt us and whom we have hurt. (see Levin page 15)



But at the same time we want God to mete out justice to all those would harm us.

Compassion for us? Justice for them?

Maybe that's not how it works.

Rabbi Stanley Halpern serves Congregation Beth Shalom in Carmel, Ind. ✨

Media Watch



BY RABBI ELLIOT B. GERTEL

Rush Hour

On August 6, the CBS series, *Rush Hour*, aired an episode, "O Hostage! My Hostage!" written by Brian Chamberlayne. It starts with Captain Lindsay Cole (Wendie Malick) bragging that she is going out on date to a concert with a distinguished physician. The renowned – and, as it turns out, boastful – doctor has a very Jewish-sounding name.

Soon we see the captain confiding to a bar tender that she is so unimpressed with her date that she can't even muster any feelings for him. Right then, the doctor returns and cockily says, "Did you miss me?" She reflexively retorts: "You've only been gone for three minutes." He takes the opportunity to brag about his cross fitness routine even though she is the ace marksman and expert at self-defense.

Soon the building, which happens to be the famous Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles designed by Frank Gehry, is invaded by angry masked men, who hold many hostages after some attendees escape. The captain is able to take a gun away from one of the perpetrators, but the others overpower her and hold her with the rest of the hostages. I found it unrealistic, by the way, that the kidnappers would allow a known police officer to sit right next to their sole target.

For most of the hour, the police team surrounding the building tries to figure out whom the angry aggressors are trying to kidnap. This is made difficult because some leaders in the police investigation are stubbornly taking the gunmen's words at face value. The two hero cops, Det. James Carter (Justin Hires) and Det. Yan Naing Lee (Jon Foo) are intent on cutting through all the rivalry and red tape and to plant themselves into the concert hall where they can aid the hostages, especially their captain and the person whom they determine to be the real target of this crime.

Yes, there are suspenseful moments and good action scenes. But I found the episode obnoxious because its one goal was to focus on the Jewish doctor as a bragging coward. One moment he tells the captain that he would "kill those bastards" if they put a finger on her, and the next moment he literally genuflects to them, apologizing for appearing to cross them and adding: "By the way, you guys are doing a terrific job." Later, at a critical moment when the saving of lives should

come first, the doctor demands that his hands be untied before the police rescue other hostages in imminent danger. Fortunately, no one pays attention to him since time is of the essence.

At the end of the ordeal, the doctor has the nerve to tell the captain: "They say that nothing brings people together like a tragedy. You know, I learned a few things today. You are a stone-cold fox." Yet even he realizes the lameness of his pick-up line in the wake of the let-down of his cowardly conduct. When she replies, "Get out of my way, Mel," he has no choice but to say, "Totally understandable." Obviously, he is not clueless, only gutless and graceless.

While the episode mocks the Jewish doctor, it also singles out an Israeli violinist to identify him as "worth six to ten million dollars." It does, however, offer a back-handed compliment to another Jew, architect Gehry, when Det. Lee clearly remembers a certain stairway which he "saw...in blueprints of the building years ago" because Gehry is his "favorite architect."

Someone connected with this series had Jews on mind and the results were gratuitous and insulting. The series had, however, been cancelled, and the remaining episodes were, as it happened, remaindered over the summer. So, fortunately, what was on mind on this show will now forever be out of sight and out of mind for the general TV audience.

A look back at the 2015–2016 TV Season *Blackish*:

The Christmas episode of the popular family sitcom, *Blackish*, challenged the stubborn traditions of the family's dad, Andre Johnson (Anthony Anderson) to limit gifts to one per person and to celebrate the holiday with a take-out order of cheap fried chicken.

Writer Gail Lerner informs us that there is a passive-aggressive reason for those traditions, which are in reaction to Dad's parents. But the "moral" seems to be that growth comes when traditions are rethought – or, perhaps, analyzed and junked.

When Dad's co-workers converge on the family home, a crabby guest refers to a Jewish staff member as boring, but insists that she didn't know beforehand that the "boring" person was Jewish. While probably not intended, this juxtaposition of themes could lead to an associative syllogism of sorts: Jews are associated with traditions, but here traditions are bad or at least boring, so does it follow that Jews are boring?

Judge Judy:

I happened to catch an episode of *Judge Judy* in which Judge Judy Sheindlin said to a litigant with a very Jewish-sounding name, "Yes or no. Don't give me a *geschichte* [long history]." I was impressed. That was

LEVIN

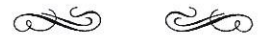
(continued from page 13)

Let us find the time to make a new Jewish beginning for ourselves and our families.

Let us resolve to study more *Torah*, to speak kindness and love, and to live a life permeated with *mitzvot*.

My best wishes for a year of life, health, fulfillment, justice and peace. *Shanah Tovah!*

Rabbi Levin has led Congregation Beth Israel in Munster, Ind., since 2013. He received his rabbinic ordination from the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary, and is a member of the Rabbinical Assembly. In 2010, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City for his years of dedicated service to the Conservative movement and the Jewish community. ✨



LETTER

(continued from page 14)

contact with Wiesel and met him on several occasions in Florida and New York City. We used the opportunity to query him about the books and projects he was working on and we used the information to publicize his literary and other activities in various Canadian and American publications. My wife, who is the co-founder of the Agnon Group in Toronto, discovered that he was a great admirer of the Israeli novelist Agnon and she used the opportunity to invite him to re-visit our home for a lecture on the Nobel Prize winning writer. He agreed and confirmed his acceptance of the invitation on several occasions but alas his schedule and later his illness made it impossible for him to follow through.

Our hearts were saddened by the news of his passing. Elie Wiesel was the conscience of humankind. He was the personification of the word *mensch*. May his memory be a blessing for all of us.

Arnold Ages

Photo Credit: <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/C-Notes/November-2012/Elie-Wiesel-Gives-a-Few-More-Hints-on-His-Book-with-Barack-Obama/> ✨



very sophisticated and literate use of the Yiddish language which is usually tied to vulgarities when employed in popular media.

Rabbi Gertel has been spiritual leader of congregations in New Haven and Chicago. He is the author of two books, *What Jews Know About Salvation* and *Over the Top Judaism: Precedents and Trends in the Depiction of Jewish Beliefs and Observances in Film and Television*. He has been media critic for *The National Jewish Post & Opinion* since 1979. ✨