

# chai TIMES

**CHABAD HOUSE** ■ **JEWISH STUDENT CENTER** ■ **BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK**  
 Serving the Community through Education and Inspiration Adar I 5765 February 2005 Vol. 19, No. 4

## in the NEWS

### Local and national Sholoch Monot service offered through Chabad's Women's League

Women's League for Chabad will soon be accepting orders for its annual Sholoch Monot service in which Binghamton residents can send attractive packages of food and holiday greetings to local friends and acquaintances on Purim day. "It's Purim made easy," says Paula Rubin, Women's League Chair. "It's a stress-free way to fulfill the mitzvah of *mishloach monot*, sending gifts of food on Purim and a very reasonable way to show your friendship and care. We do all the work for you!"

"This year we will be going back to our classic style of sending a package to each and every person you put on your list (no minimum number of senders is necessary)," said Marlene Serkin, project coordinator. "The bags and contents will be upgraded, so watch for our new, fabulous look!"

The Women's League also offers a service through which gourmet Purim gift baskets can be sent around the country. This service features custom made, original offerings that cannot be obtained through any other purveyor. Customers in past years have been very pleased with the spectacular packaging and prompt delivery.

All orders must be received by Marlene Serkin no later than March 18. For a complete information packet about this project, an order form or additional information, please call the Chabad House at 797-0015. For the local Sholoch Monot services, Women's League is in need of volunteers to assist in assembling the packages and in their delivery on Purim day, if you are able to help with this project please call Marlene Serkin at 729-3235 or the Chabad office.

### Purim Greeting Cards

Do you want to say Happy Purim and give Tzedaka at the same time? Are your relatives and friends receiving more junk food on Purim than they know what to do with? Women's League for Chabad's Purim Cards are the answer.

Alumni, parents and friends can now send beautifully designed Purim cards in lieu of a *Shalach Manot* package to friends and relatives anywhere in the United States and help Chabad at the same time. And it's easy! Cards can be purchased from Chabad (minimum of five per person) by sending Chabad House \$4 per card. If you would like Chabad House to send them for you, send a list of names and addresses with \$5 per name to the Chabad House by March 18.

## in this ISSUE

The Myth of Charity ..... 3  
 I'm in Hawaii; He's in Iraq ..... 4  
 Ask The Rabbi ..... 6  
 Chabad Happenings ..... 7  
 Alumni News ..... 8

## Purim Carnival Extravaganza At BU Comes Early

**D**ue to the Spring Break at BU, the annual campus wide Purim Carnival will be held two weeks ahead of the holiday on Thursday, March 10 beginning 8pm in the East Gym. Community members of all ages are welcome to join in the fun. A \$2 admission fee includes five carnival games: a \$5 admission package includes all of the rides and attractions. Either way, entrance includes all the Hamentashen you can eat.

The Carnival, which attracts an average of 2,000 students annually, will feature a wide array of game booths and fantastic attractions including Bungee Boxing, Basketball Challenge, Bungee Run, Boot Camp and the Pedestal Joust, plus music and great Kosher munchies for sale. High points of the evening will include a hot-dog and cream-pie eating contests and the popular Battle of the Bands set to begin at 9pm.

The Carnival is a project of the Chabad House Jewish Center and is co-sponsored by Alpha Sigma Phi, Alpha Epsilon Phi, Sigma Delta Tau, Hillel-JSU, Jewish Heritage Programs, Late Nite Binghamton, OCC, Sodexo

"The carnival is a huge program on every level that we begin to plan and work on this months in advance," said carnival directors Josh Diamond and Neil Hakimi. "Having the whole campus co-sponsor an event in honor of a Jewish holiday is unique to our campus, really fantastic! We are looking forward to the biggest and best carnival yet."

"This is a great way for people to celebrate, have lots of fun with their friends and benefit charities too, so make sure to buy plenty of raffle tickets," stated Natalie Benhamou and Ilana Sitkoff, raffle drive chairpersons.

Proceeds from the carnival will benefit various charities including the local Jewish Family Services and the Children of Chernobyl campaign, a humanitarian health effort run by Chabad in Israel and the former Soviet Union. COC airlifts children from the heavily contaminated Chernobyl area and brings them to safety and medical treatment in Israel.



Marriot and most of the residential communities, and is run in cooperation with the Greek groups and professional fraternities.

## Matisyahu!

### Hasidic Reggae Superstar to play in Binghamton

**M**atisyahu; an oxymoron if you ever saw one. He's a Chassidic Jew and New York's hottest Hip Hop artist. He has played to sold out audiences at all the greatest bars in the city including Southpaw, The Knitting Factory and Opaline but if you saw him on the street you'd think he's just "one of those." On his late, late night show (NBC) Carson Daley called Matisyahu "the most interesting thing happening in music today", so that settles that.

Sponsored by the Chabad House, Matisyahu will be appearing live in concert at Binghamton University on April 14, at 8pm, in the Social Hall (the former mini mall) in the Old Union.

crowd, he grew dreadlocks and wore his Birkenstocks all winter. He played Bongos in the school lunchroom and learned how to beat-box in back of the class. After nearly burning down his Chemistry lab he left school in attempt to "fill a void I felt in my life."

After an eye opening trip to Colorado in which he came to the realization that there is a God, Matisyahu traveled to Israel where his dormant Jewish identity came alive. Arriving back to the States was not easy and he dropped out of high school to follow Phish on a national tour. Returning from that trip Matisyahu went to "straighten out" at a wilderness school in Bend, Oregon. The school encouraged artistic pursuits and while there Matisyahu studied Reggae and hip-hop, attended a weekly open-mic where he rapped, sang and beat-boxed, developing his unique style for which he is famous today.



Born Matthew Miller in West Chester, PA, Matisyahu was never your conventional kid. By age 14 he identified as a hippie. Having fallen in with the "Dead-Head"

Continued on Page 3

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# from the DIRECTORS

## Jewish Time; Beyond the Jokes

Dear Friends,

We deserve the jokes about Jewish time. Our holidays do indeed seem to come "too early" or "too late." That is because the passage of time is marked by Jews in a unique way. Unlike the Gregorian calendar which is Solar based or the Islamic calendar which is lunar, the Jewish calendar is anchored in both. This year's Jewish calendar, in fact, presents us with an added twist, an extra month; it is thus referred to as a leap year. The occurrence of a leap year (every two or three years) is due to the fact that the Jewish calendar is in periodic need of adjustment. The extra month in a leap year makes up for the discrepancy between the lunar year, upon which our calendar is based and the solar year which determines the seasons. This periodic adjustment is imperative if we are to fulfill the mandate of the Torah that our holidays be celebrated in their appropriate and designated seasons, i.e., Sukkoth in the Fall and Passover in the Spring.

The additional month in a leap year is always another Adar, with the first being referred to as *Adar Rishon* and the second, *Adar Sheini*. Adar is the month in which we celebrate the joyous holiday of Purim and has in fact become synonymous with, and symbolic of, an added measure of happiness. The holiday of Purim is our shortest, lasting for a mere twenty four hours, but its effect on the entire month is so potent that the Talmud asserts: "As soon as the month of Adar begins we increase in joy."

It is significant that the month we repeat is a month vibrating with good cheer and gladness of heart. Happiness, a leap year teaches, should figure prominently, in our

life as Jews. Although, quite an achievement, it is not enough to obey His commandments, God wants us to do so with joy. We seek not to tolerate our responsibilities but to revel in our great heritage. We seek not to hide our differences but to pride ourselves in them; to fulfill our mandate and perfect this universe with passion and vibrancy.

Why do so many of us find happiness elusive? Perhaps because we've bought into the popular wisdom that a person needs "something" to make him happy. These *some things* are not always available to us or affordable and often time after we obtain what we thought would make us most happy, it does not end up being the elixir of life we believed it to be. The truth is that happiness is, more than anything, a byproduct of one's general outlook on life. Nothing gives a person happiness like knowing, really knowing, who they are, where they come from and where they are going. Nothing gives a person happiness like a sense of focus and importance in the grand scheme of things. And that's where a strong sense of Jewish identity can really help.

True happiness fills a person with hope, with will, with the sheer power to achieve. That is the blessing and message of the double Adar in a leap year. And that is the kind of happiness we wish upon all of you and ourselves.

We hope, more than anything, that the joy of this year's dual Adars will pervade our every day bringing many happy occasions to share together.

*Aaron and Rivka Slonim*

Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim

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# Chabad CALENDAR & NOTES

## Services

Monday - Friday .....	7:30 am
Friday Evening service, followed by Shabbat Dinner.....	6:00 pm
Saturday Morning service followed by lunch and Mincha service .....	9:30 am
Saturday Evening Ma'ariv and Havdallah at close of Shabbat	
Sunday.....	9:30 am
Men's Club Bagel Brunch (2 Sundays a month) .....	10:30 am

## Schedule of Classes

### MONDAYS

Mishna .....	9:00 am
Analysis of Rashi .....	9:30 am
Parsha & Pizza .....	6:30 pm
Men, Women and Kabbalah (JLI) .....	7:00 pm

### WEDNESDAYS

Men, Women and Kabbalah (JLI) .....	9:15 am
Lunch 'n Learn (Kosher Kitchen) .....	12 noon
Beit Midrash - Peer Study (Great Room) .....	7-8:30 pm

### THURSDAYS

Hilchot Tzniut .....	8:15 pm
Advanced Talmud .....	8:30 pm

### FRIDAYS

Weekly Parasha .....	10:45 am
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### SHABBAT

Weekly Parasha .....	4:30 pm
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NOTE: Please contact the Chabad House for an up-to-date schedule, or to request a class or tutorial on a topic or for a time not covered. Call 797-0015 or email [aslouim@chabadofbinghamton.com](mailto:aslouim@chabadofbinghamton.com) or [rslouim@chabadofbinghamton.com](mailto:rslouim@chabadofbinghamton.com)

## Upcoming Events

### Blankets for Babies

Come make sew-free, beautiful fleece blankets which we will give away to children in need through Binghamton's SOS Shelter.  
Sunday, February 20 in the East Lounge, Old Union 2-4 pm

### Spa Day for the Girls

\*Tips from Bath and Body Shop and samples too!  
\*Massage Therapist Darlene Ninos will teach stress busting techniques  
\* Free manicures! \* Great Selection of mouth watering soups.  
Sunday, February 27, 1pm at Chabad

### Pool Party for the Guys!

Water Polo, Basketball and more in the JCC Pool (plus munchies)  
500 Club House Rd  
Thursday, March 3, 8pm

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# TORAH thoughts

Adapted from the Works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

## The Myth of Charity

**J**ews don't believe in charity.

Don't be misled by their legendary philanthropy, by their saturation of social and humanitarian movements, by their invention of the *pushkah*, the *meshulach* and the UJA. Jews do not practice charity, and the concept is virtually non-existent in Jewish tradition.

Instead of charity, the Jew gives *tzedakah*, which means "righteousness" and "justice." When the Jew contributes his money, time and resources to the needy, he is not being benevolent, generous or "charitable." He is doing what is right and just.

**G-d could have allotted equal portions of His world to all its inhabitants. But then the world would have been nothing more than a showpiece of G-d's creative powers, predictable as a computer game and static as a museum display.**

The story is told of a wealthy chassid who once received a letter from his rebbe, Rabbi Abraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apt, requesting him to give 200 rubles to save a fellow chassid from financial ruin. The wealthy chassid regularly contributed to his rebbe's charitable activities, but this particular letter arrived at a financially inconvenient time and contained a request for an exceptionally large sum; after some deliberation, the chassid decided not to respond to the Rebbe's request.

Shortly thereafter, the chassid's fortunes began to fall. One business venture failed badly, and then another; before long he had lost everything.

"Rebbe," he cried, when he had gained admittance to Rabbi Abraham Yehoshua's room, "I know why this has happened to me. But was my sin so terrible to deserve so severe a punishment? And is it right to punish without warning? If you would have told me how important it was to give those 200 rubles, I would have carried out your instructions to the letter!"

"But you haven't been punished in any way," replied the Rebbe.

"What do you mean? All my wealth has been taken from me!"

"Nothing that was yours was taken from you," said the Rebbe. "You see, when my soul came down to earth, a certain amount of material resources were allotted to me for use in my work. However, my days and nights are taken up with prayer, the study and teaching of Torah, and counseling those who come to me for guidance; leaving no time for the task of managing all that money. So these resources were placed in the trust of a number of "bankers" -- people who would recognize their duty to support my work. When you failed to carry out your role, my account with you was transferred to another banker."

In our world, so flagrantly -- and oftentimes violently -- dichotomized by prosperity and poverty, there exist two general perspectives on wealth and property:

a) That these are the rightful possession of those who earned or inherited them. If they choose to share even a small a part of their possessions



with others, this is a noble act, worthy of praise and acclaim.

b) That the unequal distribution of the earth's resources among its

sold after his performance.

About his own start in making serious music, Matisyahu says: "I would turn up tapes of instrumental reggae tapes loud on the speakers and write lyrics and rap. I don't think I was practicing anything. There were no shows or audiences. It was how I expressed myself. I just felt that music. Lots of the reggae artists are called conscious and the words are about Jah, they they're talking about God. So many lyrics were taken from the Old Testaments," explains Matisyahu. "I was able to find my culture and identity in Judaism and hold onto the truth in this music."

For more information or group rates for Matisyahu's Binghamton concert please call the Chabad House at 797-0015.

By Yanki Tauber

inhabitants is a travesty. Owning more than one's share is an injustice, even a crime. Giving to the needy is not a "good deed" but the rectification of a wrong.

Jewish tradition rejects both these views. According to Torah law, giving to the needy is a mitzvah -- a commandment and a good deed. This means that, on the one hand, it is not an arbitrary act, but a duty and an obligation. On the other hand, it is a good deed -- a credit to the one who recognizes his duty and carries out his obligation.

The Jew believes that material wealth is not a crime, but a blessing from G-d. One who has so been blessed should regard himself as G-d's "banker" -- one who is privileged to have been entrusted by the Creator with the role of dispensing the resources of His creation to others.

G-d could have allotted equal portions of His world to all its inhabitants. But then the world would have been nothing more than a showpiece of G-d's creative powers, predictable as a computer game and static as a museum display. G-d wanted a dynamic world -- a world in which man, too, is a creator and provider. A world in which the controls have, to a certain extent, been handed over to beings who have the power to choose between fulfilling or renegeing on their role.

Thus Jewish law requires every individual to give *tzedakah*, even one who is himself sustained by the *tzedakah* of others. If the purpose of *tzedakah* were merely to rectify the unequal distribution of wealth between rich and poor, this law would make no sense. *Tzedakah*, however, is much more than that: it is the opportunity granted to every person to become a "partner with G-d in creation."

Giving *tzedakah* is, above all, a humbling experience. Before us stands a human being less fortunate than ourselves. We know that G-d could have just as easily provided him with everything he requires, instead



The Rebbe

of sending him to us for his needs. Here is a person who is suffering poverty in order to provide us with the opportunity to do a G-dly deed!

**G-d wanted a dynamic world -- a world in which man, too, is a creator and provider. A world in which the controls have, to a certain extent, been handed over to beings who have the power to choose between fulfilling or renegeing on their role.**

By the same token, if divine providence places us on the receiving end of a charitable act, we need not be demoralized by the experience. For we know that G-d could have just as easily provided us with all that we need Himself, and that our need for human aid is merely in order to grant another person the ability to do a G-dly deed. Our "benefactor" is giving us money or some other resource; we are giving him something far greater the opportunity to become a partner with G-d in creation.

In the words of our sages: "More than the rich man does for the pauper, the pauper does for the rich man."

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Continued from Page 1

After two years, Matisyahu moved back to New York where he attended the New School honing his musical craft and dabbling in theatre. While there he happened upon the Carlebach shul in the Upper West Side. Eventually, his thirst for Jewish learning and meaning led him to Crown Heights, Brooklyn where he studied Chassidic philosophy and slowly became a Chasidic Jew. Today he splits his time between the stage and his Yeshiva. Combining the sounds of Bob Marley and Shlomo Carlebach, yet remaining completely original, Matisyahu's performances are a powerful, unique experience. His debut album "Shake Off the Dust... Arise!" is available through his website ([hasidicreggae.com](http://hasidicreggae.com)) and will be

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# I'm in Hawaii; He's in Iraq

## Why Are We Doing This?

By Dini Felzenberg

It's been 190 days since my husband, Rabbi Captain Shmuel Felzenberg, left from our base in Hawaii to Kuwait and eventually to Iraq. Not that I am counting. Nor do I know the very exact amount of days (and minutes) that remain until his anticipated return in February, 2005. Even if I did, it wouldn't matter much, as these deployments always seem to get delayed and the only way to not be disappointed is to not have any expectations.

But it's not so easy when you are planning your first Bar-Mitzvah for your oldest child and must make all the decisions on your own. Granted, it may seem a bit petty to track him down in Iraq for his opinion on the invitations, but sometimes these details seem to be important.

Ultimately, it is all part of the territory of being married to someone serving in the US Army. And I must say, from the outset, that I don't believe there is any woman or US citizen who could be prouder of the job and role that her husband is serving.

It's funny, because people don't necessarily expect to hear such patriotic statements coming from someone like me. You see, we're not one of those "military families"; in fact, no one in my family ever served in the army. I was raised as an Orthodox Jew in New Jersey, where I worked hard on my academics in Chabad schools my entire life.

So you are probably wondering about my husband. He, too, was raised in an Orthodox home, became involved with Chabad a little later in life, learned in the Morristown Yeshivah, the Rabbinical College of America, and continued on to get his rabbinical ordination from Kfar Chabad in Israel. Also not exactly the type of guy you'd expect to be serving in Iraq.

But I guess when something is truly right for you, no matter how seemingly impractical or out of the ordinary, you find yourself doing what you are meant to do. And without question, my husband is meant to be in Iraq right now, serving his country and serving as a *Kiddush Hashem* (a sanctification of G-d's name) for the entire world to see.

From the time we were first married, I remember my husband talking about wanting to join the army. He thought it was a tremendous opportunity to experience new things and use his outreach and rabbinical skills. At first, I didn't think it was something he would seriously pursue, but over the years he kept mentioning it and I saw it was something he deeply desired. After some time I finally told him that he either had to join or he had to stop bringing it up. He decided to join. That was five years ago.

The biggest question we are asked is "why?" Why would you give up a comfortable life to live on an army base? Why would you move out of a religious environment and neighborhood to a place where your children will have few, if any, Jewish friends? Why would your husband risk his life to be a chaplain in Iraq when he could be a rabbi in virtually any community? And why would you be supportive of all of this?

Granted, all good questions. Yet, in our opinion, our answer is pretty good too. Why? Because as Jews we were created to be a light unto the nations, to illuminate the darkness, and to sanctify G-d's name

wherever and however we can. And that, I believe, is exactly what my husband is doing, and by extension, we, his family, are doing it as well, living on the base.

Shmuel's position in the army is as Chaplain. What this means practically is that he is responsible for taking care of the spiritual well-being of the soldiers in his unit, which currently number about 1000. His job is three-fold: he advises the Command on ethics and the proper way of helping soldiers; he provides spiritual, religious or general counseling for soldiers in need; and he is responsible for arranging religious ceremonies or



services. Every chaplain functions both within their faith, and as a unit chaplain. Currently, there are only eight active Jewish chaplains total, and in the entire Middle East there is only one active duty Jewish chaplain (though the army is working on arranging visiting chaplains for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur).

Shmuel has actually made quite a reputation for himself with his daily non-denominational inspirational gathering, which includes the recitation of psalms, and is intended to give each and every soldier the strength and spiritual boost for another difficult day in Iraq, far away from family and comfort. Although he has had some wonderful experiences with some of the Jewish soldiers throughout the years, he is currently assigned to a unit in which there is not a single Jew.

What we have found through our service is that the more we try to help and give to others, the more the US Army works to help us and make our lives as comfortable as possible. For example, when Shmuel recently needed to travel to Afghanistan for a number of weeks, everything possible was done by the Army to ensure that he wouldn't need to travel on Shabbat.

Because of the way Shmuel behaves and respects others, he too is showered with respect. Every year, all military personnel are ranked. Shmuel was warned not to expect the highest rating, since the commanders, each of whom has a limited number of high rankings to give out, often reserve these high ratings for the line officers, and not for chaplains or other positions. Yet Shmuel has received the highest rating for the last four years.

Another recent accomplishment is the RCA (Rabbinical Council of America) award he received for "Chaplain of the Year for Distinguished Service Rendered."

Now I will give you a little background as to our life in the army. After Shmuel started his service, we were first stationed in Washington State, and now, for the past two years, we have been living in Schofield Barracks on the beautiful island of Oahu in Hawaii. Our housing area has about 150 families, and at present, there are perhaps ten fathers who are not overseas.

You can't imagine what it is like when virtually all the men are deployed. There is a camaraderie here that bridges all religious, financial, social, intellectual or racial gaps. We are all families. And we all want our husbands and fathers to return home, safe and sound. Never in my life did I realize I could receive such love and support from those who were not my own family, let alone so many non-Jews. I feel blessed to be living amongst such wonderful people.

Shmuel and I are the parents of six children. Our two oldest, eleven and twelve, are boys, followed by a ten-year-old girl, then an eight-year-old boy, and the two youngest, ages five and eighteen-months, are girls. Our baby was less than one year old when Shmuel was deployed. In order to make sure that she remembers him, we have his picture taped onto her high chair tray so that she can see him whenever she eats. He left videotapes of himself reading bedtime stories and telling Torah lessons to the children. We live in a community where fathers have no choice but to write goodbye notes before they leave, praying they can throw them out upon their return. Unfortunately, we have already lost two men in our unit, who were ambushed in a convoy heading towards Kuwait.

There are also practical difficulties. I home-school my children since Jewish education is not available, and I have to cook absolutely everything from scratch. But these things seem so petty in comparison to the thousands of soldiers dedicating their lives to protecting our freedom. Fortunately, we live driving distance from the Chabad house in Honolulu, so whenever possible, we attend events and gatherings so that

my children can play with other Jewish children and be part of a community. Furthermore, we spend summers with our families in New Jersey where the kids attend camp, so they do get to experience a more typical Jewish community lifestyle, as well.

But raising children in such an environment has also been remarkably strengthening for them. They know who they are, what they are allowed to do, and what they cannot. And I have never seen children who are so proud to be Jewish. The other kids respect them, and the families know they cannot give them non-kosher food and that there are certain days or times they cannot come out to play. And I am still moved to tears when I watch my younger ones explain a custom or Jewish law to a non-Jewish child with such pride and excitement.

So that is basically the "why" of why we are here. Just like everyone else who has a job to do in this world, we are trying to do ours. It just so happens that our life's work landed us, for now, in Hawaii and Iraq. But we know that we are serving a purpose and we definitely see the fruits of our labor. And remarkably, even though we joined to give, we have found that we have gained tremendously as well. There is something to be learned from every situation and every environment, and let me tell you, the army has plenty to teach.

There is one last thing I want to share that has had a great effect on me. I try to use it as an example when I pray or attend shul. Every day, right around sundown, the US flag is lowered and music (called "retreat") is played. The second this begins, every car that is in motion stops, people get out of their cars, those walking come to a halt, children jump off their bikes, and all stand at attention or with a hand over their hearts in the direction of the flag. It is quite moving to witness such a thing as the respect and love for one's country permeates the air. During these few minutes, you could hear a pin drop, anywhere on the base.

I have taught my children that if this is how people can treat the flag, so much more so, how we as Jews must behave toward our holy Torah. My children have learned what it means to have respect and awe.

So as I continue to prepare for my son's Bar-Mitzvah, and count the minutes until my husband returns, I feel extremely grateful to G-d for the opportunities He has given us. I have witnessed first-hand that the more you give, the more you truly gain.



(AP Photo/Evan Vuccl) At a special White House Menorah lighting during Chanukah 2005, Dini Felzenberg, wife of Captain Shmuel Felzenberg, and her daughters Freida and Ahuva look on as David Felzenberg kindles the Menorah.

By Rabbi Aron Moss

## What Does 'Mazel Tov' Mean?

Question:

I always thought *Mazel Tov* meant "congratulations". I recently heard that it actually means "good luck". But I thought Jews don't believe in luck...?

Answer:

Your confusion is understandable. The Talmud – the ancient encyclopedia of Jewish wisdom – seems to contradict itself on the issue. In one place it states, "On your birthday, your *mazel* is strong". Elsewhere the Talmud reports, "The Jewish people are not subject to *mazel*!"

The word *mazel* literally means "a drip from above". *Mazel* can have different connotations depending on its context, but they are all connected to this basic definition – something trickling down from above.

The signs of the zodiac are called *mazalot*. Jewish tradition sees the constellations on high as directing the destiny of individuals and nations down below. Thus *mazel* is the influence dripping down from the stars. (Over the years, bad or good *mazel* came to mean luck more than destiny.) When the Talmud says that we are not subject to *mazel*, it means that we are not limited to our destiny; rather our own actions determine our fate.

There is another meaning of the word *mazel* that is more relevant to the phrase *Mazel Tov*. *Mazel* is the term used in Jewish mysticism to describe the root of the soul. The mystics say that only a ray of our soul actually inhabits our body. The main part of the soul, our *mazel*, remains above, shining down on us from a distance.

Have you ever experienced a sense of spontaneous intuition, where out of the blue you suddenly feel at peace with yourself and the universe? Or a sudden flash of inspiration that makes you see life in a new light? Occasionally we may receive an extra flux of energy from our soul above. It can happen at any time, but is most common at a time of celebration – a birth, birthday, bris, bar/bat mitzvah or wedding. It is especially at these times of joy that we are able to see beyond the mundane and the petty and sense the deeper truths of life.

When we tell someone *Mazel Tov*, we are giving them a blessing: May this drip of inspiration from your soul above not dissipate, but rather have a positive and lasting effect, that from this event onwards you should live your life with higher consciousness. You should be aware of the blessings in your life and be ready to receive more and more!

In other words: *Mazel Tov!*



## How Does One Quit Judaism?

Question:

Dear Rabbi Moss,

Although I was raised in a traditional home, was brisned and barmitzvad (sorry about these spellings) I have never had any faith or "religious" belief. I am now aged 34, and would describe myself as an atheist. I have no wish to be buried in a Jewish cemetery (and my Will will also make this clear) and have married a non-Jew in a civil ceremony.

My question is, can I consider myself officially non-Jewish, by my effective opting-out, or do I need some sort of form or dispensation to be officially no longer Jewish?

Many thanks for your help with what is perhaps an unusual question.

Best wishes,  
Edward

Answer:

Dear Edward,

I would like to help you, but I feel there's nothing I can do.

According to your question, you have done everything possible to negate your Jewishness: in practice you do not keep Jewish tradition; in belief you are an atheist; in family life you have married a non-Jew and thus won't have Jewish children; and even in death you are determined not to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

One would think that all this would be enough to confirm your un-Jewishness.

But no! For some reason, you are still unsatisfied: you still feel Jewish! So much so, you feel you need official dispensation!

And so, being an atheist, who do you turn to to solve this problem? A doctor? A psychiatrist? The civil celebrant that married you? No... You turn to a rabbi!

I'm reminded of the child who ran away from home, but ended up just going around and around the block because his parents told him never to cross the road by himself.

I'm sorry, Edward. There is nothing more you can do. You are as Jewish as Moses, Ariel Sharon and the Chief Rabbi of Wales!

In fact, it seems that being Jewish is the most dominant factor of your personality. It is even influencing the place you want to be buried! (Why would an atheist care about where they are buried?)

Edward, Jewishness is not a belief, a feeling, a conviction or a lifestyle. It is a state of being. We can either celebrate it or fight against it. But it will always be there. So why not celebrate it?

## Why Don't Miracles Happen Today?

Question:

Why don't we see miracles today like the Jews saw in the story of Chanukah? And don't tell me that every day is a miracle, childbirth is a miracle, and the sunrise is a miracle. I am talking about splitting seas, dead people coming alive, and voices-from-heaven and hand-writing-on-the-wall type of miracles. The really supernatural stuff -- what happened to that? Why did the people of the Bible get all the special effects and we don't? Has G-d retired?

Answer:

Have you ever wished you were a child again?

Don't kids have it made? Their parents do everything for them. The child is hungry and, amazingly, food appears in front of him. The child hurts herself and the parent is immediately there to kiss it better. The child is lovingly put to sleep at night, and lovingly taken out of bed in the morning. It's a comforting and secure existence. But it doesn't last for long.

As the child develops and grows, the parents gradually withdraw. A baby becomes a toddler; she can walk on her own two feet, feed herself, and look after some of her own needs. Eventually she will grow into a young child, and can even go out of the house for the day, without her parents, and go to school. Then the child becomes teenager, when he asserts his independence even more. Teenagers brush off their parents' advice, because they have to find their own way, and they think that they know best. As difficult as it is, the parents have to accept this as a part of their child's maturation process, and to some extent allow the teenager to make some silly mistakes. Otherwise the child will never grow up.

The parents have to let go, because only then can children finally grow up -- and become adults. Then, as adults, they can relate to their parents with respect and understanding. They don't need their parents to clothe and feed them anymore, they can do that themselves. But they can enjoy a relationship that is even deeper and more real, because now, as an adult, they have grown to appreciate what their parents have done for them. That the child is the person he or she is is due to the love and attention that their parents devoted to him or her.

Humanity has taken a similar course. In the early days, G-d was like a loving parent, very apparent and obviously looking after us. He spoke to us to give us directions; He intervened by doing miracles to save His children from harm. The wicked were punished immediately, and the righteous rewarded. That was the era of humanity's infancy. We had yet to

develop the spiritual tools to relate to G-d in any subtle or sublime way, so He spoon-fed us with open miracles.

As humanity developed spiritually, so G-d withdrew His open manifestations in our lives. As a parent allows his child more and more freedom, so G-d removed His open interference in world affairs. But of course, while parents may not interfere, they never really withdraw their love and attention. They oversee every move their growing child makes, and quietly influence their child's life direction, albeit from the sidelines. Similarly, as time has moved on, G-d is just as present as before, pulling the strings of history and human destiny this way and that, but not in such an obvious and obtrusive way as through a miracle. He hides behind the coincidences and daily occurrences that seem on the surface to be quite normal. But on reflection, they are not



- the hand of G-d is clearly there.

Over the last couple of centuries, humanity went through an adolescent rebellion. We threw off the yoke of our Heavenly Parent and sought independence. Belief in G-d was seen as a childish crutch and an immature myth. But our generation, having learnt from the adolescent mistakes of modern history, is starting to mature. We are realizing that our Divine Parent's values are not so bad after all. And we as a generation are seeking to reconnect with G-d and true spirituality -- not as children who need miracles to convince us, but as spiritual adults, who can discern the magic behind the everyday, and the Divine within the mundane. We are finally coming of age.

Perhaps this new thirst for G-d is the greatest miracle of all.

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Rabbi Aron Moss teaches Kabbalah, Talmud and practical Judaism in Sydney, Australia.

Aron Moss served as a Rabbinic intern at Chabad of Binghamton during the Fall '99 semester.

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## PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

## My Birthright Experience

by Elizabeth Klein



Talitot. This was the first of very spiritual moments for me. I felt empowered by the moment. To think, how important religious freedom is, and most people take it for granted. To know we are a people who are shunned just for being Jewish makes me appreciate the opportunity to be living and it makes me want to practice my Judaism openly. Never would you see such a beautiful sight on an ordinary plane.

It is often hard to give justice to an experience of a lifetime. You would think that being in Israel for just ten days is not a long a time, but the impression this visit made on me will no doubt last forever. I went on Birthright from January 9th through January 20th and every day since I strive to connect myself back to Israel. I keep in touch with soldiers, and with people on the trip. I go to special events and yes, I have tried to practice my birth religion, Judaism, more so now than in the past. I have found nourishment for my spirituality.

I remember sitting on the plane, on the way to Israel, feeling completely at peace, waiting, contemplating. I felt like my life was really coming together, like I was finally on the right track. I first got to Binghamton University, not realizing how strong the Jewish Community is, how truly at home I would feel. I found friends who inspired me, who pushed me harder to become more of myself than I ever thought possible. I can pinpoint quite a few milestones in my life over the past few years, and I can picture how one event led to another... I was able to value my life more just thinking about how important this trip would be to me.

As I sat there on the plane, I noticed when daylight broke. Presently, I saw a group of men congregated towards the back of the plane. They were davening the morning prayer with their Talitot on. The window shade was open and a white light surrounded them, filtering through their

**"... we spoke about how the Second Temple had stairs narrower going in then coming out. The reason is for people to go in as individuals and come out as a community... I definitely entered the trip as an individual and left with a sense of pride in my Jewish community..."**

When we got to Israel, the Oranim president said welcome home. He gave us a speech, as we sat there in Jerusalem. He spoke how we need to love Israel and love each other. Israel is the home for all Jews, no matter Yemenite, Sephardic, Ashkenazim, Orthodox or Reform. We must love Israel, because it's OURS.

Later that day, we spoke about how the Second Temple has stairs narrower going in then coming out. The reason is for people to go in as individuals, and come out as a community. When I heard this, my eyes began to tear. Judaism is a religion where everyone is a part of a family, everyone is accepted, everyone is wanted. We are all human beings, we enter this world alone, but we

leave it with all the memories of the friends and family we take with us along. I definitely entered the trip as an individual and left, with a sense of pride in my Jewish community. I felt with more friends than I went into the trip but most importantly, I left knowing I had a country I can always turn to.

But the journey did not stop there. We prayed at the Kotel; we floated upon the Dead Sea. We went to clubs; we rode on camels, we saw the Golan Heights, but most importantly we absorbed the Israeli culture. I sat there in the Independence Hall towards the end of the trip, and the speaker summed up our entire experience in just a few words. She said to us, "You are not here to learn or see the sites. You are here to feel this country. It is yours." The words sunk into my pores. She could not

have been any more right. In order to understand the importance of such a holy place, Israel must be felt. Everything must go deeper inside the person than just the five senses. I understood what she meant when we

spent hours at Masada, when I sat at the Bedouin tents in silence listening to the other people in the group play music, watching the fire flicker to the sky. I knew what the woman meant



when I watched life go on around me, seeing the Israelis dance near the shores of Tel Aviv Saturday morning. I still know what she meant, and I will always remember how Israel felt.

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# Chabad HAPPENINGS



## Tu B'Shvat Seder

Braving the snow and frigid weather, over sixty BU students turned out to participate in a Tu B'Shvat Seder at Chabad House.

The Seder, based on Kabbalistic teachings, imbues greater meaning and appreciation in the celebration of the "New Year for Trees."

The great assortment of fruits and nuts and the great company made it lots of fun too! said participants.



## Moon Fun for the Girls

The "girls" get together for some chocolate fondue, women's bonding and some thoughts on the significance of the new moon at a Rosh Chodesh gathering marking Rosh Chodesh Adar I.



## Fun and Games at Chabad Cafe!

Great pastries, coffees, ice cream and a whole slew of games were enjoyed by all who attended the Chabad Cafe.



## Chabad House Students Raise \$4,000 For Charity



Members of the Chabad House Student E-board joined by two students who were very active in this project, David Shmookler and Jennie Haberman pose with a check for the Koby Mandell Foundation in Israel. The Chabad House Jewish Student Center, through a series of fund raising efforts, raised \$4,000 which will pay for three Israeli children whose lives have been shattered by terror to enjoy a session at the Koby Mandell healing retreat camps.

Pictured from l-r are Josh Diamond, Rabbi Aaron Slonim, Meeka Levin, Oren Kashi, Natalie Benhamou, David Shmookler, Leila Nehmad, Gil Efrati, and Jeremy Zenilman. Sitting in front are Jennie Haberman and Harris Ringelheim. Board members Karen Wisotsky and Neil Hakimi were unavailable for the photo.

# Chabad Alumni News

## Mazel Tovs!

### Class of '89

■ Gil and Victoria Vilkas announce the birth of their daughter, Isabella on January 11. Isabella was welcomed home by older sister Brooke who is very excited to have a new sibling.

### Class of '91

■ Roni and Mark Loeb Richter announce the birth of their daughter Sinai Niry on December 22, 2004. Sinai was born in the holy city of Jerusalem and welcomed home by her three older sisters.

■ Orly (Hirsch) and Ofer Gamliel announce the birth of twin boys, Liam and Matan, on Oct. 10th, 25th of Tishrei; they were welcomed home by big brother Or. They live in Ra'anana, Israel.

### Class of '94

■ Andrea Tellerman and Alexander announce the birth of their son, January 6, 2005.

■ Menucha (Melissa Millman) and Marty Rothenberg are pleased to announce the birth of their son, Meir Uriel Netzach. He was born on 7 Shevat and is welcomed home with much excitement by his brothers, Aryeh 6, Binyamin 4, and Mordechai 2. They make their home in Passaic, NJ.

### Class of '95

■ Brad and Erica Schwartz announce the birth of their twin sons, Ethan Joshua and Justin Ross on December 22, 2004

■ Ari and Naomi Rosenfeld announce the birth of their daughter Abigail Rose, Rachel Avigail, on December 2, 2004.

■ Rafi and Shoshana Shulman announce the birth of their son, Yaakov Shai, Jacob Sidny on December 30, 2004.

■ Gila (Zamir) and Andrew Shaw announce the birth of their son, on January 13, 2005, in London, England.

### Class of '96

■ Naomi and Ari Rosenfeld announce the birth of their daughter Abigail Rose, Rachel Avigail, on December 2, 2004

### Class of '98

■ Rob Ernst announces his engagement to Ofe Behar; an April 10 wedding is planned. They plan to make their home in the New York area.

### Class of '99

■ Randy Szalavetz announces her marriage to Andrew Katz on October 23, 2004. The couple reside in Manalapan, NJ

### Class of '00

■ David and Elana Landman announce the birth of their daughter, Batya Devorah on December 29, 2004.

■ Bradley Spiegel and Jaclyn Levy announce their marriage June 27, 2004. The couple lives in Forest Hills, New York.

### Class of '01

■ Josh (aka Shragi) and Nava Schreiber announce the birth of their daughter, Golda Zahava, born December 6, 2004 in Jerusalem, Israel where Josh is studying for the Rabbinite in YU's Gruss Kollel.

■ Meira (Axler) and Yaakov Sacks announce the birth of their daughter, Nava Ruby, born December 22, 2004 in Pittsburgh.

■ Jaclyn Levy and Bradley Spiegel announce their marriage June 27, 2004. See '00 for more details.

■ Adami and Tamar Farkas announce the birth of their daughter, Yakira Chava, Kira Eve, on February 9, Rosh Chodesh Adar I.

### Class of '02

■ Shoshana Bruckheimer announces her engagement to Mark Schimel; an August 2005 wedding is planned. Shoshana works in recruiting for Goldman Sachs, Mark is in pharmaceutical sales; they plan to make their home in New Jersey.

### Class of '03

■ Josh and Caroline Berman announce the birth of their son, January 30, Shevat 20.

**Send us your Mazel Tovs so we can share them with the world!!**

**Get your Mazel Tov pictures posted on the website by E-mailing them to [rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com](mailto:rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com)**

With pain, Chabad House expresses condolences to  
**Niki '99 and Miri '02 Silberstein and family**  
upon the untimely death of their father, **Arye**

and to

**David Berk '00 and family**  
upon the untimely death of his father, **Michael**

*May Hashem comfort you among the mourners of Zion  
and Jerusalem.*

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