

The Rebbe-on-the-Road Travelogues



***North America, Europe
South Africa, Israel***



**The oddly inspiring, surprisingly intellectual, uniquely spiritual
and improbably madcap adventures of**

**Rabbi Goldie Milgram
and Hubbatzin Barry Bub, M.D.**

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Tenth Wedding Anniversary

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Cross Country USA.....1-94

On the Road Again

Cross Europe.....95-111

America Revisited

Southwest Crossing.....113-117

Coast Hopping.....118-122

Southern United States.....123-129

South Africa.....130-149

Hungary.....150-152

Germany.....153-159

Spain.....160-161

Former Soviet Union.....162-170

Belgium and Holland.....171-172

Israel.....173-187

Introduction

Would you like to see the world? To be welcomed, hosted and feted? To our great surprise, we've been doing that and all because of one e-mail mistake. The sort of mistake that could happen to almost anyone, couldn't it?

Barry: "I don't understand. Why is someone I've never heard of responding to the e-mail we sent to a few family members about our cross-country trip? That note was personal – how did it get to a person in another country?"

Goldie: Hun, I don't know. Probably someone forwarded our posting to a friend or something; that happens. Actually, we've received a lot more than a few responses to that e-mail, here's a reply from Israel.

Barry: I just don't get it. I've been sharing intimate thoughts with close family members, now I find a total stranger is responding?! This is an invasion of my privacy and IT'S NOT OK!! What have you done?

Goldie: Hmm...what's this message?! Oh no, AOL has just shut down my account. What's going on? Our trip has barely begun and already problems. I'll just need a few minutes to get through to AOL for some answers. Don't worry, I'll figure this out dear.

Three hours later.

Barry: "What do you mean you accidentally caused our account to shut down and it's not AOL's fault? How does writing to family qualify as spam?"

Goldie: Well, dear, there's a bit more to it. As you may recall, I asked Adam (my son) to set up our laptop with email capability for this trip. As part of that, I saw that he created a folder on the laptop marked "Trip Email." So, I used that folder to send our first posting to the family. Unfortunately, inside that folder was every email address I have ever saved from any of my personal and business encounters. Oops.

Barry: (Seething) Exactly how many e-mails were in that folder?"

Two thousand seven hundred and eighty three emails went out that day, by accident, to senators and congressional leaders, clergy of every denomination, old friends, former spouses, students of ours in numerous countries, family speaking to us, family not speaking to us, vendors, people who write in asking for guidance from us, teachers we write to asking for guidance, hairdresser, lawyer, accountant, social justice, journalism, educator, doctor, meditation and clergy lists, you name it, we had spammed them our first posting.

At 2 a.m., as the magnitude of this error was still dawning on us, Goldie, a prominent rabbi well-known for her teaching presence on the web, drafted a rapid apology and negotiated with AOL for our posting to be declared for what it was, completely non-

commercial Kosher spam, and for her account to be turned back so that at least she could send an apology.

While the AOL bulk mail staff person was reading both travelogue and apology over closely, our e-mail account came back on, and the hundreds of messages we expected were all waiting there – but instead of angry delete requests, our in-box was filled with people saying “don’t stop – keep writing; you are reminding us what life is all about; or, “as a home-bound person I want to thank you for being my eyes – I never expect to get to see these parts of America and love experiencing it through your unusual spiritual approach.” Many inquired if they could forward the posting to family or friends, or lift sections for their own websites. Folks sent us the names of places to visit, restaurants to try, and some of them even had family wanting to meet us and put us up along the way.

We were deeply moved and astonished by the daily breadth of world-wide public response. We were also bemused, what had we written that couldn’t already be found in a travel book somewhere? As you begin reading what became many years of travelogues to a self-expanding audience, perhaps you will see the uniqueness that we needed others to point out to us: A joy and appreciation of our two very different styles, and the intensely personal insider views we were giving of people’s lives and homes along with our critical, creative and curious set of eyes for well-known and little-known tourist destinations and conferences in our fields (healthcare and religion).

Our next postings were written with a sense of greater responsibility, with eyes wide open to what might interest others even beyond our usual appetites for the fascinating things in life. We began to tour such scenes as a beer festival and a historic atomic research site that might be important not only for our edification, but also for those who might never get to experience them. We never felt alone, unappreciated or unmotivated because so many people we knew and people we’d never heard of were writing right back.

Why publish the travelogues now? Because people keep asking for them, is one reason. And, Goldie has become a prominent author, with three books in her field on the market and two more manuscripts under contract, so the intensive time it takes to write the travelogues is no longer possible. And, alas, Goldie has agreed to be grounded, for now, by taking an exciting new professional position at the 92nd St Y in Manhattan, NY, so her days as an itinerant spiritual teacher are nearing their end. And, Barry’s first book, *Communications Skills that Heal: a practical approach to a new professionalism in medicine* (Radcliffe Medical Press, 2006) received magnificent reviews so he is off on his own world-wide travels as a keynote conference speaker and workshop leader.

How to relate to mistakes proved to be an important part of our deepening repertoire of spiritual practices. We’ve learned to view mistakes as something to be understood very differently over time, because the toxic initial distress or disappointment a mistake can cause, when one stays in process with the error leads to understandings and opportunities that can become fossil fuel for a better future. Or as Goldie says, “growing pains become knowing gains.” You’ll soon see how that miraculous process, built into creation as naturally as the healing of a broken bone, when understood, becomes possible for all of us.

Welcome to The Rebbe on the Road Travelogues, the world's first Kosher Spam.

United States of America and Canada

 Cross Country #1 

Opening Ritual

Barry: "What should we name our van?" We optimistically decided to call our 1990, 116,000-mile vintage Oldsmobile "Van Gogh." Goldie, being very Goldie, performed an appropriate ritual. We hung our traveling *mezuzah* on the rear view mirror next to the green throw beads from our trip to New Orleans. We created a little bed on the second row of seats using sleeping bags and pillows, loaded up the rear with miscellaneous camping equipment, gifts for friends we were visiting, enough clothes for three months and enough books for a lifetime.

As long as I can remember, I have always wanted to do a cross country driving trip. Goldie had done one as a teenager on a USY tour, though judging from the stories she has told me the adolescent scenes in the bus distracted from the best nature had to offer outside - like the Grand Canyon. Her subsequent trips around the country were almost always work-related, such as attending meetings and conventions. So she, too, has not seen much of the country.

Goldie gets bored easily and the thought of watching five hundred miles of Nebraska n scenery pass her by is as intimidating to her as the thought of flying in a little plane is to me. So to keep her occupied, we packed a laptop computer and enough work to keep any executive busy for six months. Besides grading school papers, preparing workshops, she is also hoping to write a book.

Our other goals are for Goldie to visit Jewish communities along the way, doing meaningful work there, seeing if there is a community that we would like to settle down in one day and finally, but most importantly for me, visiting relatives and children and grandchildren (Jason and Natalia Aristides in Seattle.)

I will be doing a Gestalt training workshop in Cleveland, Goldie a Project Keshet workshop in Chicago. We will be taking a two week environmental education cruise to Alaska with Mark, one of Goldie's sons. His bar mitzvah is soon and his Torah portion is Noah, so this we he will get a deeper understanding of creation as part of his b-mitzvah year. We will also be teaching at a week long Jewish renewal conference in Oregon.

So I will be realizing my dream of jumping into my van and driving carefree cross country. Goldie has embellished it a little and no doubt I will be returning suntanned, fit and ready for a vacation.

Cross Country #2

Pott Kos

Barry: I'd had the van checked out by the dealer and his pronouncement was "it's perfect, Doc!" reminding me of many a patient in our community expiring after being given a "clean bill of health." The heating contractor was much more positive, finding a \$500 leak in the boiler.

Goldie: I laughed when my Barry said that to break up the ride to Warren, Ohio he'd organized an overnight in Pottsville. We would be going only 35 miles north, to visit good friends in this coal mining town. Laughter turned into appreciation of his wisdom as we experienced pure South African hospitality, warmth, humor, total sharing and a peak behind the curtains of life in a town I'd been ready to stereotype as boring.

Barry: Walking on a street lined with mansions of former coal barons and brewery owners and prosperous physicians, I was struck by friendliness of the people. My friend Les Dubowitz waved to or chatted with everyone in a way reminiscent of our walk a few months earlier on Sea Point beach front in South Africa.....only the scenery had changed.

Goldie: Talking to Jean, Les's wife, I discovered that imprisoned here is a Russian Jew currently on death row for murder...I'd actually consulted on the very case only two weeks earlier. She also shared with me a letter to the editor of a local newspaper from a non-Jewish woman whose son had died when hit in a drunken driving accident. Her note starts with appreciation to the tiny Jewish community for their loving emotional and economic support of her in a time of trauma and loss.

I was struck by the optimism of this community as it shrinks to 50 families and yet is planting a carefully researched biblical garden in the synagogue's front lawn.

Barry: The dress code in Pottsville is baseball cap; the local vehicle is a 4x4 or truck. This is prime gun territory with hundreds of miles of deer-filled forests, even some bears and only a few miles from the notorious Hegins pigeon shoot (an annual festive occasion where pigeons are released, shot at and when they are only wounded, children run out on the field and break the pigeons' necks.) Thinking of the tragedy in Colorado, no way these guys are going to give up their guns.

Goldie: Which reminds me of an amazing book Barry found in the garage yesterday. Titled "The History of Berks County" (where we live), written in 1925, it gives a view of how people saw the manifest destiny white America in terms so dramatic to me I must share them. Describing Native Americans it speaks of them as: Savages, Red Skins, who built no monuments, did not improve the land in the way we civilized people have, they leave the land untouched.

Leaving the Dubowitz's with what South African's call "padkos" [food for the road] - South African grapes and Provita crackers, we almost immediately drove past the gaping wounds in the earth left by two centuries of mining and more recently strip mining.

Barry: We had to bypass the town of Centralia, Pa, which is largely abandoned because a fire in the coal seams smolders underneath it. The cemetery is the only part of the town that is maintained.

In tiny town of Ashland, PA we were greeted by a sculpture of a woman atop a hill in the center of town. Goldie's feminist nature was immediately piqued by the rare phenomenon of a public statue of a woman in small town America. This weekend is mother's day, and this sculpture proved to be an image of Whistler's mother as portrayed in his famous painting, dedicated to motherhood by the Boys Association of Ashland in 1938.

Settling into the drivers' seat, Goldie turns the key and says "uh, oh....it's Van NoGo!" Our affectionately named Van Gogh wouldn't respond, not even a kvetching of the alternator, nothing. Happily within moments we fixed the loose battery terminal and resisting the urge to call the dealer off we went to visit our family in Warren, Ohio.

We were met by typically wonderful mid western hospitality. Cousins Bernie and Louise Schultz organized a dinner at a local resort and we were joined by a dozen relatives, several of whom came from Cleveland. Goldie shared some stories and we enjoyed getting to know one another.

So tomorrow I go off to Cleveland and the Gestalt Training Center.

Goldie: Time with the family in Warren was just so joyful and interesting. Richard Rose, age 16, taught me about his favorite music genre which discourages drugs and alcohol, he's very active in his USY [United Synagogue Youth] region and spoke glowingly about Hebrew High School in this area. I know my teenage sons will enjoy meeting him some day, as much as I did today.

So tomorrow I'm off to Chicago to work with Project Keshet at their international gathering in support of Jewish women in areas under economic and political stress. We'll post again in a few days!

 Cross Country #3 

Stereoscopic Version

Barry: We left the Schultz's at 6.30 am once again with padkos of South African grapes (the fruit exporter we had met in Cape Town at Ralph and Helen's must be doing well) apples and strawberries. Bernie was making damn sure we were not going to get lost again he drove ahead of us in his red Volvo sports car - (possibly an indication of some latent wild streak in an otherwise conservative man?) until we were on the highway to Cleveland. On our drive we reflected on this couple whose life revolves around giving to children, community and even a blind elderly relative in Argentina. We thought about their story of a recent trip to Israel to visit their children and grandchildren with four heavy suitcases filled with toys and gifts, two items of hand luggage with their own personal effects. Seems like a metaphor for their priorities.

Louise gave us a genealogy of our family before we left and we plan to share it with our other family members.

The workshop at the gestalt center is titled "The voice of shame." There are about 25 participants, most of them therapists. The first person to speak is a woman with a strong southern accent. She says she is uncomfortable around Jews. Before she is lynched she explains it's because she so envies our long traditions, family roots and all the Jews she knows have long family genealogies. She's from Appalachia, and they have no pride in their roots, just want to escape the poverty. Another is a Native American with issues around prejudice.

I just love these coincidences.

It was a mind blowing workshop with lots of new concepts about shame and the role it plays in shaping our connections to others. Everybody was very friendly and I made some good contacts. Two women offered me a place to stay. I declined, choosing instead to indulge myself in my king size bed in the Cleveland Clinic Hotel and watch junk TV without any rabbinic interference. Unfortunately, being the Cleveland clinic, several of the channels are in Arabic.

They have more institutions in one square mile of University Circle in Cleveland than anywhere else in the world. Museums are outstanding, the buildings and gardens are beautiful. Saw a huge exhibition of Diego Garcia paintings, also the actual 13 foot boat in which an Ohioan sailed across the North Atlantic.

With everyone's good wishes, I set off on a three hundred mile drive to Chicago to join Goldie.

Goldie: (after this we wrote our postings almost always together)

On our way across the country we first stopped in Pottsville, a Pennsylvania coal mining town. One Jewish resident was telling the story of another who had asked the local Imam: "What is your community doing to help Moslems in Serbia?" The gleeful report was that the Imam's face fell in shame.

Later I met a synagogue leader. Ignoring the former report, I asked her: "What do you think about meeting with leaders of the local mosque and exploring a joint initiative for non-sectarian relief work?" My heart lifted to hear a most affirmative and excited response. To build the possibility of a decent human future it will take such deliberate consciousness to transform ethnocentric impulses into a potential mitzvot.

Despite the dwindling population typical of small Pennsylvania towns, optimism glowed on the synagogue's front lawn. A biblical garden was being planted, carefully researched and proudly emerging. They are looking for a part-time rabbi or rabbinical student....any takers on this list? A lovely house and very appropriate part-time salary are included; there are fifty hopeful families, growth unlikely.

We stopped briefly near the eerie heat of Centralia, Pennsylvania on our way out of state. Devastated by strip-mining, the town has been evacuated while coal fires burn out of control beneath it. A pristine and carefully kept cemetery meets one at its entrance, testimony to a collectively maintained memory.

The grossly carved coal country-side reminds me of a book from 1935 my husband found in the garage just before we left. In it the writer proclaims something to the effect that "We white men have almost leveled the forests, factories proudly dot the horizon. We have done so much for this great land!"

We stayed our second night in Warren, Ohio with cousins of my husband, whose huge Lithuanian family (via South Africa) spans the globe. They had gathered a dozen of the clan and presented us with an extensively documented family tree and news of family in Argentina whose poverty is being eased by a family campaign.

Some healing work was also needed; it seems shortly after leaving their employ to move to California, the student rabbi who trained in their synagogue committed suicide. Feelings of betrayal, guilt, sadness and despair were shared when they learned of my professional capacity as a seminary dean. They emphasized the importance of psychiatric screening for the rabbinate (mandatory at The Academy for Jewish Religion, where I serve.) I found myself praying for guidance and the ritual work we did together seemed cathartic and healing....I hope so.

The Project Keshet Women's Exchange International gathering in Chicago for four days was special far beyond my expectations. I can't forget the women from Russia and Ukraine commenting angrily on the action in Kosovo, "Men of all nations drop bombs on problems they cannot solve." Among the sessions I led was a bibliodrama intended to reclaim meaning from the sacrificial system, the amazing women present redeemed the voice of the High Priest's daughter who is described as being required to be burned to death should she play the role of the harlot.....these brave, bright women helped to take the *parsha* to an amazing level of healing and hope...incredible.

My husband had just returned from training at the Cleveland Gestalt Institute on the topic of shame. "In the long view," he observed by way of validating the women, "shaming results in the inability to act based on values. One enters a state of toxic shame; a sort of immunity to it develops as one continues to prove oneself right and enters into solidarity with those who share one's inclination.

What is the goal of all this traveling - so many countries in one year? At the Project Keshet Conference a sense of the flow of history became clearer....the goal is to carry ideas and methods of peace-making, of new ways of leading and living.....methods that will feed into the several hundred year project of taking humanity to a new level of behavior.....send ideas, come along with me, critique gently and as much as necessary....we can and must do this work!

Generously endowed with guidance for enjoying Chicago, Barry and I took an architectural walking tour which began with the great fire of 100 years earlier that destroyed much of the commercial part of town. We learned fascinating facts of how fire-proofing strategies came out of the strategy and also saw much of interest regarding Art Deco and Frank Lloyd Wright design.

The last surprise was one of a related series. People from various countries keep asking for help in conversion to Judaism....universally they cite being turned away by rabbis of all denominations. A woman on the F.S.U. (Former Soviet Union) team at the Project Keshet Conference takes me aside....."please work with me, it must be a woman, a rabbi who understands us...please..." Raised under communism, many have only one Jewish parent and a deep sense of needing a ritual for authenticity of their passionate commitment to Judaism and our people. I felt tears begin to fall at their asking this, and wonder your thoughts on how to proceed?

Billboards are speeding past with curious messages:

"Know who the father was: 1-800-DNA-TYPE"....."Care for my land or I will make rush hour worse...God."

The wind is severe and it looks like Tornado weather, hopefully all will be well.

Love and blessings and hoping to hear back from you. Goldie



Weather or Not

Barry: Des Moines, Iowa. Driving here from Chicago is quite an experience...threatening skies, wind buffeting "Vinnie," a road sign blows off its pole in front of us, flying across the high way....the swirling soil of recently plowed fields created an eerie haze...

Goldie: Golden-gray skies yielded a sense of danger; impending tornados perhaps...switch on the radio to learn of the devastation in Oklahoma, only a few hundred miles away.

Barry: just read that Illinois has 60,000 square miles of prairie, now reduced to three square miles. At the Fermi National Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois, they have a prairie sanctuary surrounded by the linear accelerator.

Goldie: In a film at Fermi scientists reflect on their creative process. I was elated to hear one talk about long, long showers as his favorite spot for integrative thinking.....he once worked out an equation in the condensation on the shower door that led to the discover of the "top quark".

Barry: Now reading about the adverse environmental effects of parking lots and thinking about evolution. Forests, yielding to glaciers, yielding to prairie, yielding to plowed farm land, yielding to suburban sprawl and parking lots....Civilization improving on nature.

Other lessons learned today.....

Victoria's Secret is that no one over thirty can fit in her lingerie...

In Chicago we met a woman who said that for three years she used to fly back to NYC to have her hair done by her favorite hair dresser.

Goldie: In Chicago I called all over, couldn't get an appointment for a haircut. In Des Moines my usual method prevailed. Wandering a local street, enter a local salon, and there stands someone waiting. We share the Torah of our lives.....his wife died when their daughter was 13...etc., etc. I left looking and feeling well cared for and rich in details about farm and city life in the mid-west.

Barry: Had the best steak of my life at the 801 Steak House and Saloon. The cow died and I went to heaven. Goldie wonders if you call it "dead-stock" instead of livestock at this stage in its process.

Barry: My son Jonathan calls, saying he enjoys reading my email postings of the journey, but wonders how I'm feeling about traveling like this. It occurs to me that this is a profound question and makes me feel proud of his sensitivity.

Answer - On the one hand I feel some loss in my identity as a physician without important work in the world, on the other there is a certain satisfaction that I am pushing the limits of creating time for myself and experiencing the world.

 Cross Country Posting #5 

In the State of Ambivalence

Goldie: Zoos and military installations are two points of ambivalence on our trips. We passed on the albino tigers and simulated rain forests promised by the Omaha Zoo brochures and highly recommended by my hairdresser in Iowa.

Instead an hour later I found myself leaning against a metal canister about three feet high and seven feet wide as a World War II veteran explained the "Peacekeeper" airplane in whose shadow we were standing. Vaster than my sci-fi conditioned imagination, the impact of the plane which circled the world during the Cold War as a "deterrent" was diminished by his next comment.

"We never used them, but, the woman in the beanie is leaning against a nuclear bomb six times the power of that used at Hiroshima. These were stacked inside the Peacekeeper as it constantly circled Russian airspace."

My husband recently studied how to use Gestalt to deal with those who suffer from toxic shame. The Strategic Air Command Museum docent's comment sent me into toxic ambivalence. A sequence of memories played through in what seemed like years, yet must have been seconds.

The first was during my years as director of an archive, taking depositions on video from Holocaust survivors and Allied soldiers. Changing his voice from sad reverie to pure passion, the survivor described furiously scribbling notes to the President of the United States and begging every passerby to see it would get there.....he would slip the notes through slats in cattle cars into fearful fingers...sometimes they were dropped like electric shocks after being read, others were furtively pocketed.

Always the same message....."Just bomb us all. Stop the death camps. We are prepared to die." Later inside Auschwitz he waited for a message to tell him to have everyone turn on their attackers and climb atop the crematoria to mark the spot for allied bombers. "Just make it stop." Until he died whenever he would come to my office he'd leave a message with my affectionate name for him, "Queen Esther will be dropping by." I was one of two people in town who knew his secrets, gay and Jewish, he was marked twice to die.

Sixth graders on our tour caress the cruise missiles on display as we are told the US inventory is down to only 100 and it takes a year to go back into production. Barry photographs a girl hugging the missile unconsciously as she listens; so elegant and sleek in design, both of them.

I flash to a Bosnia rally. My sons are with me at the Liberty Bell. From the stage I see my youngest tugging on the jacket of a camera person. She pushes him away...don't bother me little boy. Undeterred he goes to the anchor person, who obligingly films his passionate view which airs for 16 seconds on the 11 o'clock CNN News. "Why are you all standing here shouting at bad people in Bosnia? Do you think they are watching television? Why doesn't my mommy and her friends charter airplanes and go right up to those bad men. Do what you do when I make a mistake. Take their hands and lift them high into the air and say: "This is unacceptable behavior."

Flash to the High Holidays. An angel of a board member has given me a week at Club Med on Turquoise Island as a gift between leading Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur services. The trick to meeting people turns out to be what language you speak at the entrance to the dining room. Each day when asked "how many people?" I mutter my lonely "one" in a different language. That day I spoke in German....the Berlin Wall was coming down as we ate.

Seated at a table of young German businessmen on a company holiday I feel foolish and out of place. The German banter flies over me, I don't really speak the language. At some point though, I start to make out some of what they are saying. Blood freezes in my veins. "We will defeat America on the battleground of commerce. Then our might will rise again as it always has and next time we will prevail...." "Yah...Yah..." (Yes, yes.)

A word which has become holy to me (as in hallelu-*yah*) is supporting horror... "Yah...Yah.....". Anger churns up inside me from more voices than my own. I speak out involuntarily...something to the effect of "How can you say that? Was it all for nothing?"

Heads turn toward to me. One asks in German: "What language is she speaking? Why can I understand it?" Silence. The blond-haired, green-eyed man beside me finally speaks. "It is Yiddish ." They look blankly at him. "Yiddish?" one asks. He responds, "It was the language of the Jews." Silence. Another man looks at him and says slowly, distinctly, "and how would YOU know that?" Hot tears are splashing down my face. The green-eyed man looks at his peers, wipes my cheeks with his napkin, stands and says to me in English...."come, let us walk." To this day we are still in touch...the secret of his Jewish grandmother wandering between us like a lost missile.

The tour has moved on, we are beside a Russian MIG that was flown against our forces in Vietnam. I walk off lost in oceans of ambivalence. On the other side two tourists stand talking. One reveals he is an air force engineer that works on fighter-planes. He is in transit from a base in Germany to one in Utah. The other was a pilot during the Vietnam War. He recalled that the technical superiority of the Russian MIGs was terrifying. "That plane could outmaneuver us, we would have been doomed, if not for the fact that our pilots were better trained and we had more aircraft than they."

Flash. Economics 101, when I was a student at the Wharton School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The thick accent of a professor from India stills resonates in my ears....."One foolish, arrogant leader of a third world country can attack us with a nuclear bomb for no sane reason. How much for guns, how much for butter? Nothing I can teach you will give the right formula. How will we ultimately decide? That is the question that really belongs on the final exam."

Cross Country #6

US 80 Rules

Barry: Flashback. We're exploring the tiny medieval hill towns of Tuscany (not Hiltons). A strange man wraps his arm around Goldie's shoulder and kisses her in a little ceramics shop. It is Barry's cousins Gary and Colleen Bub from Los Angeles, California. What a bizarre coincidence that our paths should cross in such an off-the-beaten track place.

What does this have to do with our cross country trip?

Join us in the moment.....somewhere farm-fragrant on Route 80 in Nebraska .

Barry: On impulse, I call my children in Seattle, Washington. from the car phone. Speaking to my son-in-law Dino, he tells me that his father has just retired and his parents have recently departed from their home in Minneapolis on a cross-country adventure in their luxurious converted bus.

Goldie: Was focused on writing a story and didn't hear much of Barry's call. But about fifteen minutes later I do notice one of those rock-star type buses up ahead and say "Hey, that's probably like the bus Dino's dad owns."

Barry: Overtaking the bus, I notice it has a Minnesota license. I slow down to get a closer look at the driver, but can't really see in.

Goldie: Brainstorm. I call Dino back in Seattle and ask "what does your father's bus look like?"

The bus beside us matched the exact description, I asked for his dad's cell phone number.

Barry: Dianna, Dino's mom, answers the phone and I ask "Where are you? Are you on US 80?" She consults with George and says we are near North Platt, Nebraska . Goldie shrieks and I tell Dianne we are the gray mini van right on the road in front of them. We pull off for an incredible reunion. Their bus is gorgeous - mirrors on the ceiling, immaculate fresh flowers on the kitchen table. We share pictures, Greek coffee, and travel stories.

Goldie: Returning to our van, Vinnie the Minni, which resembles a filled Dust Buster with over a hundred thousand miles on it, we zoom off amazed at G*d's mysterious ways of unifying the field of family.

Barry: I was relieved that they did not come over to check out our humble digs.

Barry: What's between here and Denver I ask a traveler at the rest stop. "Nothing," he replies, "It gets interesting after Denver. Fifty miles further we pull off the highway and stop in the little town of Gotenberg, named after Guttenberg Germany but more recently become the sister city of Goetenberg, Sweden.

Goldie: We see an original Pony Express station, the ads for riders stipulate "small, thin and orphans preferred." Further along we find a Sod House Museum . Built and operated by a man who wanted meaningful work for his retirement, he replicated the original home built of sod by his parents in the 1930's. We learned that Nebraska was originally a tree-less state, formed primarily of sand deposited by the glaciers. All the trees we see were planted to stop the dust-bowl effect. Recent grassland fires of 54,000 acres threaten a regional dust-bowl effect and economic hardship.

Goldie: We asked for a small town he could think of between here and Denver where we might find lodging and local fare.....we are on our way to discover Julesberg, Colorado .



Taking out the Mad

Barry: We stood on the hill with the wind blowing furiously. It is covered with tombstones with inscriptions such as "Pedro", or "John Smith shot 6 / 12 / 87", or "Pauper." Yes, there really is a Boot Hill and it's in Nebraska. I can think of many places in the world that can use a boot hill or two.

Goldie: What touched me most was a small fence-enclosed wooden headstone reading: "Miss Lilly and her infant child."

Barry: We ate some excellent Mexican food for dinner in a restaurant in the basement of a church in Sterling, Colorado a railroad town. There was no sign outside saying there was a restaurant down there. Asked the hostess why not and her reply was "we're famous hereabouts." She was a very attentive waitress.

The next morning having breakfast at a local pancake house I asked Goldie: "isn't that the same waitress?" Goldie replied that it was probably the waitress's sister. The waitress also recognized us and came over and gave us the same excellent service; a resourceful woman.

Goldie: Working two jobs evening and morning like that....pretty and perky and as she put it, "stuck."

Barry: The sun is shining, and the sky is intensely blue. I feel rejuvenated and like a seed ready to germinate. It's remarkably stimulating to me to be in such sunshine. We were in the Denver Zoo today, surrounded by what seemed like every mother and her child this side of the Rockies.

Of course being in the zoo presents another opportunity for those Goldie puns and seeing huge South American fish swimming in a reef, she describes the scene as "un be reef able" and when we skip the long line to the polar bears she says we are "polarizing ourselves."

We stand outside a small glass tank containing a cuttlefish . It's a cross between an octopus and a squid and apparently it is quite intelligent. About six inches long, it lays on the sand its color blending in with the background. Goldie begins to move around, hoping her bright hat will catch its attention. Then unbelievably, the cuttlefish mimics her, doing all types of hovering maneuvers and begins to change color. This goes on for quite a while till the cuttlefish becomes bored and turns its back on us.

Goldie: It was like an intelligent hover craft - amazing!

Barry: Our hosts, Rabbi Steve Booth and his wife Jan Cooper give us some insight into the many issues that are emerging following the shootings at Littleton, Colorado . At dinner last night with my cousins Ben and Joan, one of the guests complained painfully that her local Orthodox rabbi told her she was not practicing Judaism because she did not follow his exact understanding of Judaism. Then Jan told us about an awkward situation where the rabbi spoke with non-sectarian compassion at a public memorial service in Littleton, only to be followed by a preacher (Billy Graham, Jr) who said there is only one route to salvation and that is through Jesus. We spent some time talking about the similarity between the two incidents. We were able to agree that while spirituality always is inclusive, religion often is exclusive.

Sadly, Littleton is very unlike Denver. Littleton is a fairly Christian fundamentalist town, and observers feel this tragedy is likely to drive them more into evangelical fundamentalism, which was part of the problem to begin with. Apparently it's difficult for anyone who is different to live in that community. This is also the West, and guns are valued here.

Goldie: Went to synagogue with host, friend and colleague Rabbi Steve Booth today. Such a sweet service rich in music, spirit, meditative touches and a great Torah study contrasting Y2K issues and the value of taking sabbaticals; led me to reflect on midwifing Barry through his fiftieth year not so long ago. What's amazing is watching the unfolding of reflections and learnings in the subsequent years.

Goldie: While waiting for Steve to handle some pastoral counseling needs of folks after services, I wandered the blocks surrounding the synagogue. Just around the corner was a tiny house with broken screens and a mailbox covered with Christmas messages. On the lawn sat a small girl. Also on the lawn were several small crosses. One in pink had the name "Rachel" printed on it in a child's hand. Another had a crocheted piece on a string slipped over it...reading: "Prayer changes things."

Asked the little girl if it was her house. "Yes."

Did she help make the memorial crosses on the lawn? "Yes."

And who was Rachel? "My favorite cousin, she was like a big sister to me....I love her. I miss her."

How does prayer change things? "It takes out the mad and puts back the love."

Tomorrow we go hiking near Boulder, Colorado and mentoring from Goldie's teacher, Reb Zalman.

Lots of love to all.



Snaking Up on Boulder

Goldie: Industrial district dotted with Mexican families reclining on porches in the sweet evening breezes. We are lost. We keep calling the restaurant for directions but can't quite grasp the lilting Japanese voice which answers. We are rewarded for our persistence by

Barry: the emergence at the next intersection of an authentic Japanese country house. The building had been a gift from Japan. Dojo, museum complex and meditation gardens are provided for "wondering" through while waiting for the food. All signals were good (no sushi and the signs said "don't ask for soy sauce"). It reminded me of the time in Italy when the waiter scornfully slammed down a bowl of olive oil - at our request to go with the bread - muttering "tourists!"

Goldie: It's called Domo Japanese Restaurant in Denver, Colorado...sake was served in a lacquer box....I learned from Cousin Bennie that Japanese houses are measured by the number of floor mats it takes to carpet them.

Barry: We knew we were in the West because a little while earlier we had seen men handsomely dressed with tuxedos and cowboy boots entering the opera house. The downtown Denver area is booming, areas previously dangerous have been gentrified. Magnificent modern buildings have sprung up. Yet the streets are filled with people estranged from society and economically disadvantaged (note I'm being politically correct.)

Goldie: He's learning! My social-worker eye wrestles with artist-awareness as pierced and spiked haired men and women cruise by our street-side café seats. Harleys roar past, shining neon greens, deep reds, topped by leather-coated studs smiling for sheer joy in the sunshine. A stark contrast to peachily prom-dressed daughters on the arms of dads and moms heading to the opening of Romeo

and Juliette at the Denver Opera House

Barry: In contrast, Boulder, Colorado, just forty minutes away nestled between the mountains, is a booming college town. The downtown area is alive with gardens, parks, music, expensive cute stores and restaurants. The sky is so deep blue, the clouds vividly in contrast - like looking through polarizing filters. The backdrop is the mountains, so close one can hike up from any part of town. The town water supply is drawn from a zillion year old melting glacier. Everyone is friendly and polite. Streets are lined with the healthiest, thin, athletic people I have ever seen.

Goldie: Though I'm not, I feel fat; have stopped looking in the mirror.

Barry: Nagging thought. This place is so perfect, what's wrong? The closest I can come to finding what it is, is that housing is expensive and with all these healthy young people and their alternative health practices, doctors cannot possibly make a living. They cannot even do counseling, because almost everyone is a therapist. Reb Zalman tells us the therapists survive by counseling each other. Jan Cooper says that therapy has been replaced by something called "coaching" since people have either been through therapy or turned off by it. On the other hand, it's hard to find a house painter. Guess it's easier (and cheaper) to do guided-visualization and learn to live with a bad paint job.

Barry: We hike up Chautauqua Mountain Trail behind Reb Zalman's home. It's sunny and hot, we are short of breath because of the altitude. Coming to a fork in the path, we take the right one up. There is a sign about one area being closed, but Goldie assures me it's the other fork. A couple of hundred yards further up, I see a ranger coming down round a bend in the path. He looks at me, raises his hand, and in a very authoritative voice says "Stop."

Goldie: Uh, oh. I assume we're in trouble for being on the trail.

Barry: The ranger then points and not three feet from me lies a five-foot snake. He says "Not to worry, it rattles and looks like a rattlesnake, but is in fact harmless."

Goldie: Synchronicity. Read a Smithsonian piece about camouflage that morning. Did you know that protective coloration wasn't an accepted theory until the 1950's!? Came upon a rattler on a trail in California last year and ran for my life. Ranger says (when I run smack into him on the trail) "never run, stand stock still if you see one or they'll go for you." Got lucky! (Dry mouth, heart pounding....)

Barry: We drove about an hour north to visit Cindy and Yaakov Gabriel and their son David in Fort Collins, Colorado. (There never was a fort there, guess they called it that to scare away the Indians.)

Goldie: I won't wait in line for concert tickets, but the roadway to friends always feels easy to travel. Delighted to learn that Jack (ok, Yaakov) is half way through a new CD....did he say reggae-klezmer flavored!?

Have you ever met a child prodigy? Thought I had but learned differently upon spending time with their two-year old son David. *Reb Levi Yitzchak* is supposed to be in this kid's lineage somewhere.....such precision in language, kindness and ability to engage with people. Wow.

Goldie: Cindy fills me in on "co-housing." I have a passion for community (Jan and Steve have found a safer version of Mt. Airy, Pennsylvania to live in here - just great!) When Barry and I decide where to live when we grow up it must be rich in community.

Co-housing is where you own your own home or "unit", with a central commons that might have a guest house (that way one's home can be sized more efficiently), play areas, gallery space, and communal meals a few nights a week. Usually no traffic allowed in and parking is on the periphery. Cindy took us to see an example....bunches of small children playing happily independently in the center; it was immediately congenial to my soul. There's a web-site for such projects around the nation (have to get the address from Cindy Gabriel) and it's rumored some Jews around San Diego, California hope to form their own co-housing community. Those who know, please tell us more!

(Anything near NYC?)

Barry: Back in Denver, Colorado, I am amused to find, after driving through miles of shopping malls and stores of every kind, a sign pointing to the shopping district. The Jewish population here has doubled in the past ten years (so that's where the Jews from smaller towns like Pottsville and Denver are migrating to.) Apparently they are all united by an interest in shopping, but few are formally affiliated with synagogues.

Goldie: Steve's community is fascinating...some 800 members, initially made out of a confederation of small Jewish study and prayer groups called havurot. Primary identity for most is through their specific *havurah*. He is treated with such appreciation and respect....lucky "wabbi".....they must really get who he is!

Barry: In the intense Denver affluence, manicured lawns abound. Just read that a hundred years ago, lawns were rare and only owned by the rich. Now there is enough lawn in the USA to cover the entire state of Pennsylvania. What about the butterflies, and the birds and the bees?

Let them eat grass!

Goldie: Did we tell about the lost Jewish family of nine from Pakistan that has shown up in Denver...saris and all? Hmmm. That will be for another posting.

Are You in Moab for a Bite?

Goldie: We are hiking through western Colorado's dinosaur-laden desert mountains, on our way to Moab, Utah. I am pondering a question posed by Rabbi Arthur Waskow about Ruth. "If the biblical character Ruth was to show up at an American border station, how would she be received?" Then we arrived in Denver to see our friends Steve and Jan and one possible answer emerges.

Jan Cooper greets us at the door filled with joy: "I got two of the daughters out of sweatshops and into jobs at the community center."

"Got who....what?" I ask. It seems an immigrant family has come to her attention, all desperately trying to make it after having mistakenly been deposited in Denver en-route to another theoretical contact. With incredible love and presence Jan, Steve, friends and synagogue community have mobilized to get the girls out of abject labor situations, the family properly housed and supported in all possible ways.

If you and I came across such a situation - would we see our role as turning back the unwashed masses at the border or welcoming them to our world? The patriarch of the family, a strong, tall ebony toned man with white beard shows me a gash where he'd been attacked as a minority in his country of origin. In the attack he had turned back the hilt of the adversary's knife, choosing not to kill his aggressor. "I looked into his eyes and asked myself," he said, "what is justice? Then I walked away, choosing not to become a murderer."

His words brought to mind a day in Germany. I had been leading High Holiday services in nearby Holland and had asked the group what does the traditional Jewish prayer, the *Shema*, (which is a verse in Deuteronomy) mean to them? For me it is about loving and listening because spirituality ultimately leads one to experience that all of creation is One. I told this experience to Rabbi Michael Goldberger who we were visiting in Dusseldorf, Germany. He recalled a time when a man came up to tell him that during the war he had to shoot a Russian soldier in self defense. As the man he'd shot fell, he heard him uttering the Shema - that same prayer, which is traditionally said at bed time, which appears in the mezuzah on a Jewish person's doorpost and it is said at the time of death.

Meditation and mysticism have a salutary effect on the human soul....denying our oneness becomes impossible. Then it occurs to me Ruth was a Moabite! What great synchronicity on our way to Moab, Utah.

Goldie: Day 3 in Denver, Colorado. Yesterday it was 78 degrees F. Today it's snowing huge flakes, like the kind we used to cut out in nursery school.

Barry: Vinnie the Minni needed some minor repairs. Have decided she is the feminine side of Van Go, so I'll characterize the repairs as cosmetic.

Goldie: Barry!! (I just released the parking brake and it seems the cable snapped.)

Barry: Driving off from the dealer, she actually seemed to be pulling better. Is it psychological, an "engine over body" type of thing, I wonder?

Goldie: Everyone says we have to see this one book store in Denver....Barry: It's THE cultural center of Denver. It's not one of the glassy new buildings. Called The Tattered Cover, it's housed in a four-

story building. What makes a great bookstore?

Like spirituality it is hard to define, but you know when you're experiencing it.

Goldie: Each bend of bookcases enclosed snugly chairs, current and antique photos...little setups for tea and comfort abound. All so gloriously devoid of the McDonaldization of chain-store America!

Barry, what are you growling about?

Barry: Chains such as Barnes and Nobles, Borders are seductive because of their comfortable browsing areas and coffee shops but are ultimately destructive to our cultural environment (like lawns) because of their mediocrity and power to control which authors will sell and be hits. Ultimately corporate America decides what we read.

Final stop on our final full day in Denver, Jan, Steve, Goldie and I go to Idaho Hot Springs about forty-five minutes away in the mountains. It's 8 p.m., we are tired and hungry but find ourselves rejuvenated by the hot mineral springs which are located in caves. There are three pools; the hottest is about 110 degrees. We skip the mud baths (Jan had been working in the garden all day and didn't feel the need) and ended the day with lots of stories over Chinese food. Actually the restaurant was closed by the time we got there - never mind, that's another story.

Our last day in Denver.

Barry: Surprise! I am still embarrassed to find strangers are writing to us commenting on these postings even though our retraction resulted in hundreds of people asking to stay on the travelogue list and virtually no one asking to be taken off! What a remarkable thing to happen it feels so affirmed and unexpected.

I have a final breakfast with Cousin Ben. We talk for about two hours over breakfast. The time flies. Ben asks really good questions about Gestalt theory. After breakfast we leave Goldie and continue walking and talking. A final goodbye call from Steve and we reluctantly take our leave.

Our love to all on this list...Barry and Goldie

 CROSS COUNTRY #10 

How Did Teddy Bear It?

Barry: We drove through mountain passes at 10,000 feet elevation. It was snowing lightly; the air was fresh and invigorating. It was an opportunity for more bad puns - "The gorges are gorgeous." or "look - the mountain is playing peak a boo."

Goldie: The names of towns fascinate as our roadway flirts with railroads and the rapidly running Colorado River... we passed the villages of "Parachute", and "Rifle" and a place called "No Name".

Barry: For my part it was an opportunity to reflect on geology - how the mountains have shifted, risen, ancient seas come and gone. The west makes it impossible to think of nature as permanent and stable. We stopped to hike in the desert in western Colorado, learnt to identify dinosaur bones imbedded in rock. Colorado means "color red" because of the red sand that results from the weathering of rocks and is washed out to sea (now dams.) I never thought of rocks as having lifespans, births and deaths; they do, just on a much slower scale than humans. Somewhere I remember reading that if planet earth's life was one year, humans have been on it since the afternoon of December 31st.

Goldie: Ever since entering this part of the country a vision I once had keeps recurring. I often wonder if everyone gets visions, this one was so powerful I had to go out and lie on the grass to get grounded. It happened during a chanting service led by Rabbi Shefa Gold at the National Havurah Summer Institute. We were chanting a Hebrew verse in the feminine: "me olam ad olam, at Eyli." (From world to world (or eternity to eternity) you are my G*dtaken from Psalms which in the original uses the masculine "atah el" (you are G*d) in this verse.

A phenomenal awareness of eternity overtook me, endless cycles of birthing and rebirthing of planets and stars, creatures and civilizations. Then the earth beneath me shifted and I found myself slipping down the tectonic plates, sliding furiously toward the center of the earth....splashing into the swirling magma. There is no pain as the roaring redness reveals layers of happenings.

I see dinosaurs trapped between layers of rock, breaking down into fossil fuel. Then civilizations are decaying before my eyes....Incan, Judaeen, Roman,.....the republic yielding to the democracy.....a voice says "remember I am also thus, the decay of each civilization becomes the fuel to energize the next level....remember for me to destroy is also to create...." Then I met that which I had only heard of.....from beneath me huge gnarled hands lifted me up through the magma toward the light of day.....the image of a great huge crone seemed connected to those hands....a wise woman side of G*d acknowledging aging as natural, decay as evolution. Could barely stand, sank gratefully to the earth.

BACK TO EARTH

Barry: Vincent VanGo did fine taking us over the Rockies. In the past, I had always chosen a vehicle for its features - "Does it have a light in the trunk" No? Sorry, we'll have to keep looking." Now, as I've grown older and wiser I realize that like a good woman, it's not the features that count. It's the staying power and upkeep that is important.(If I was really wise I would keep this thought to myself.)

Goldie: What woman would dare touch that line!?!....

Barry: Two years ago we were offered one thousand in trade for our van. We declined and now, thirty thousand miles later it is still going strong. We have a very good person at the dealership, who takes a personal interest in Van Go. At the SAC museum we learnt that the B52 bombers, 30 years old, are going to be kept in service for another 30 years, must all be in the maintenance.

Goldie: Enough machinery, next we'll be having an organ recital (like how my back and buns are sore from all the riding.)

Barry: Anyway we finally come to Glenwood Springs, Colorado the home of the largest hot spring pool in the world. We stay in the Victorian treasure the Colorado (not to be confused with the El Coronado in California.) which turns out to be birthplace of the teddy bear. Apparently Teddy Roosevelt returned to the hotel disappointed after a failed hunt. A woman on staff made him a teddy bear to comfort him. The hotel is located behind the hot spring. The receptionist cannot tell us the exact way to walk there - she has never been there. Doesn't it kill you...

Goldie: In the huge hot spring pool regulars recline with Newsweek in hand and red faced babies look ready for naps...me too. The heating system knocks all night in the elegant hotel tarnishing its glory for me.

Barry: Actually we can't complain - the room only cost us \$44 with the national version of the Entertainment card.

Goldie: Where to next honey?

Barry: Moab.

Goldie: Whither thou goest, I will go.

Goldie: Ruthlessly bought a Moab t-shirt when we arrived and we went to town to catch a bite. (Moabite?)

Barry: We found the same waiter that served us last night, working in a different restaurant where we ate tonight.

Goldie: We are traveling with a mitzvah consciousness, trying to do little things like clear the dishes off our restaurant table in one horse towns, cut down on stress for the waitpersons. Need to become aware of more little things like that.

Barry: I read about Butch Cassidy over lunch - he used to hide out in this area. This evening there are Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid plays on TV. Talking about lunch, after a morning of hiking the Arches National Park, I craved a hamburger and a good beer so what better than to go to a microbrewery restaurant. They were out of beer!!!

My friend Les calls from the east, he tells me of his favorite restaurant in Moab. It's the one we just ate at.

It is all getting a little weird.

Goldie: The silky feeling is not fabric, it is the wind. Giant urns, temples and stelae fashioned by ancient upheavals and constant erosion greet us and point toward red walls higher than the imagination. Devil's Garden makes science fiction notions look tame....no where on earth have I met such an astonishing magnitude of landscape.....a landscape on which can be read time in millions and billion of years.....here was a layer of salt and sand one mile thick which cracked and a world was remade. This place, Arches National Park, how did I not know of it previously?

Meditation would be redundant. To be here is to be creation, to redefine recreation.

Breathe.

 CROSS COUNTRY #11 

A Capitol Idea

Goldie: It is like one is becoming the land.....each day city-jaded senses are growing roots to the magnificent earth.

Flashback. First trip to Israel, I am staying with a niece of the then president of Tadiran, Israel's nuclear development corporation, she is a founder of the Israel Nature Preservation Society . Another cousin joins us, one of the Founder's of Peace Now . They listen to my collegiate tour bus itinerary and in Hebrew exclaim: "ee-ef-shar!" (Not possible!)

With the affection for one's youth inspired by important memories, they described their regular public school hikes around the land. "To live with the land, one must know it", they exclaimed. "To understand this land, you must walk it, hike, climb it!" So I dropped off the tour to explore with them, see the land through their own senses.....fragrant etrog groves, ancient ruins, caves (perspectives...."we'll hide here or here if attacked),Magnificent children of the land.

And why were most of us not raised as children of the land? With the earth for a classroom, why be confined each year to a room with some 30 children? Could we envision lives linked differently to the land? Could our youth and our lives rotate like crops onto farms and forests and inner cities as

volunteers? What if sabbatical years were incorporated into our lifestyle and work site expectations with options containing learning, experiencing, contemplating and mitzvah-making carefully rolled together?

As I write we are entering what the Navaho called "the land of the sleeping rainbow"...pink and yellow strips are emerging in the huge rock faces, doing their own version of midlife and aging....dunes of mountain-turned to silt-lie wrinkling at each base...time out.....be back later.

One e-mail list I'm on has a fascinating discussion on mitzvot vs meditation. Last night I clipped all of it out from several weeks' postings to read as a coherent unit. "Mitzvot as Sacred Acts of Consciousness" is the topic I have chosen to teach at the Aleph Kallah (large festival of Jewish spirituality to which we are headed in Oregon.) An earlier choice of title was "Mizvot as Sacred STATES of Consciousness"....the title's evolution speaks directly to the controversy.

A more secular friend writes that our journals reflect we are living through a totally Jewish lens.....why not try other lenses he asks? It's like asking a horse to live through the lens of a fish. Another dear one asks "why isn't it enough to use one's intellect, why emphasize feeling or spirit?" Another questions taking time from study of Talmud and Torah to "hedonistically" tour the land. A year ago someone wrote to us "Thank you for the prayers, but have you seen my alps?" signed G*d .'

At a recent meeting a woman came to ask, "Why in my totally *tikkun olam*, social justice, focused life do I feel so depleted, so disconnected from G*d and myself? I give all I can, money, time, ideas, labor.....I'm exhausted with giving, friends say Judaism is too focused on action, to try Buddhism or Hinduism, get into a contemplative community. A colleague at the table responds "Who told you it's supposed to feel good or rewarding? We just do it because it must be done." My heart sinks for the lovely mitzvah-nik who is burning out. For me it is precisely the interpenetration of contemplative, celebratory and mitzvahness that is recharging.....there is a synergy among the many spiritual practices of Judaism which, when practiced in balance, enhance the enchantment and sustainability of our lives.

Like all practices, there is a time when each are distinct entities. When I started learning to paint...manipulating the brush, choosing colors, understanding perspective....each were separate skills.....today they are integrated within me, there is no labor allocated to each. Similarly a Jewish spiritual life begins with distinct categories of skill, knowledge, experience and over years becomes an integrated way of being.

Often I find myself walking through life so utterly embedded in the One that with each step or eye-lash movement or rustle of a nearby bush and twitch of my cat's tail I feel the fabric of the universe responding to the tug. Lift your hands up when saying the washing of the hand blessingcan you feel the net of light particles lifting the fabric of the universe with you?

So connected is this growing mystical consciousness that everything becomes a (w)holiness. Like an ant serving its function for the community, I often respond to mitzvah moments as one whose fullest purpose is attained through the doing. The finger points in every possible direction.....health comes with balance. We may have become top heavy, (in the head) we Jews, in the intellectualization of study and through the emphasis on the "doing" mitzvot - we find this in both orthodox and liberal Judaism (Barry and I have both been both). The pendulum has swung strongly so that we could get back into the rest of our bodies and souls. Now it is time to speak of balance.

Remember with a pause and a breath, that mitzvot encompass not only *tikkun olam*, but also *tikkun nefesh* and *tikkun haguf*, renewal of soul and renewal of body.....*shabbat*, *shmirat ha guf* (watching over one's body), *kashrut* (conscious eating practices), *tephillah*, *k'vod hamet* (respectful care of a soul's former body after death)....and many more.

Like the intermixing of artistic skills over time, increasingly I no longer elect to meditate now and do a mitzvah then. An imperfect yet perceptible cultivation feels underway. Soon one need no longer distinguish between the *devekut* (intimacy rich in G*d intoxication) of private meditation and that in a

mitzvah....the current of (w)holiness runs through it all and every moment of a life when one gets close to the balance.

We Jews keep the mitzvot and *midot*, "qualities," associated with them *l'totafot beyn eynekhah*, between our eyes....this is our third eye consciousness and perhaps if my experience is correct, the continuous meditative way of the mystic.

Barry: .It's 7 a.m on a cloudy morning we find ourselves on Route 24 heading towards Capitol Reef National Park. Yesterday the ranger at the Arches had suggested this route, even though it was slower, would lead onto Route 12 which is described as being the most scenic road in America. That was an understatement.

Approaching Capital Reef each curve in the road revealed radically different vistas..The mountainous formations change color from red to white to black to gold, to ribbons of color. Clouds gave way to bright blue sky. Even Goldie looked up periodically from her laptop to gasp at the changing terrain...and we were not yet on the stretch of road that was marked as scenic.

We hiked for a couple of hours in Capital Reef (Called Capital because of the dome shaped mountains and 'reef' because the early explorers were sailors and the jagged rocks resemble reefs in areas).

In one section of the park we hiked for about two miles on a "wash" a dry river bed which floods during rain driving rocks and silt towards the Colorado river...in sections only 11 foot wide between sheer cliffs towering upward for 300 ft. Goldie declares this is exSTREAMly interesting.

We then continue on Route 12 through a section called the Grand-Staircase Escalante National Monument. "What is that?" We wonder. We soon find out that it is a vast area of wilderness, totally uninhabited and at night one can look as far as the eye can see from the mountaintop and not find any lights at all. As we climb the land falls away on either side of the road, for several thousand feet, the vista is indescribable. Goldie wipes away a tear - finding the view so overwhelming she is rendered pun-less. I ask her if this compares to the Grand Canyon and she suggests that I may find the Grand Canyon an anti-climax after this totally unexpected sight.

We hike up the mountainside in Estrada State Park to reach a petrified forest. Along the way rocks covered with multi-colored lichens...I read that there are 16,000 species of lichen and some colonies are 1000 years old. We walk through a of dwarf evergreens, several hundred years old but no more than 4-8 feet tall. Dwarfed because of lack of rainfall, this is nature's own bonsai. Finally we reach the rock-hard multi-colored petrified wood, uncovered on this mountain is 5.5 million tons of it.

Hiking down the mountain in solitude I notice that almost everybody who approaches offers a greeting and a smile. There is something about being in this environment that seems to make people relaxed and pleasant. Most are foreigners; many speak German, few of our generation.

There are no school children (I know it's not summer vacation yet). My point is not to save this for vacation, rather make it an integral part of the school year Instead of taking children by the bus full to museums of natural history to see a rocks in glass cases, let them stand on the mountain!.

Goldie: Meditation has taught me that being present is not only for adults. The present school systems quickly strip natural presencing abilities from our children. Could we envision reframing our educational systems to empower youth to live consciously and could we reduce the hours now allocated to cloistered classroom learning?

The past few years at The Academy I slip out to Central Park with my classes at every opportunity.....teaching methods of d'vekut and hitbodedut indoors ...absurd when unnecessary! Bio-ethics under an oak tree, why not! Devorah the Judge had a teaching tree, why not the rest of us?

Here comes one of those road signs. "Eagles on the Road" Nope.

Another one of those signs: "Open range watch for cattle next 12 miles." Yup.

Shabbat Shalom.



Arid Zona

[Question: Can anyone recommend a sweet place to stay in Carmel or San Francisco?]

Barry: Well, the Grand Canyon was a wash; obviously huge and deep but not surprising, since I had seen many photos of it; far too many people and no easy hikes readily apparent. So I looked at it for about an hour while Goldie was on a long distance phone call planning a retreat, then off we went looking for greener pastures.

Goldie: Almost a decade ago I was part of a Kosher Canyon Run, two weeks white water rafting down the Colorado through the Grand Canyon. We had a *milchig* (dairy meal) raft and a *fleishig* (meat meal) raft, davenned (prayed) melodiously in the side canyons, it was glorious. Have a mind to organize another similar trip for next year or the year after...anyone interested This time, though, have to agree with Barry, especially since the park service was conducting deliberate forest fires and the place was all hazy and hard to discern the usually gorgeous colorful panorama.

Barry: We landed at Jeanettes, a bed and breakfast in Flagstaff just off old route 66. Goldie insisted on some place less frugal and more romantic, some place she could enjoy working in (the retreat thing). This is a very authentic, newly built post-Victorian style building down to the last detail and furnished in period antiques. Our tub is 7 foot long, ceilings; even in bathrooms are 12 ft high - strange at a time when people were shorter than us. One bedroom has old medical equipment and an exam table. We passed on this, though in hind sight seems kind of kinky.

We toured the Lowell Observatory (where Pluto was discovered and the idea that the universe is expanding was hatched.)

Goldie: You have to visit the observatory, the domes rotate so that the huge telescopes can be pointed properly....Light pollution from a near-by sports complex has limited the formerly ideal nature of the site for research....Hillary Clinton has booked the place for a private viewing of space on Wednesday night....resourceful woman!

Barry: We needed some fun, so we took our host's advice and went to a western style place called Black Bart's. We had a directory of restaurants in Flagstaff and the comment next to this name was "barf."The restaurant was in a trailer park, adjacent to a junk store. The area was dark and seemed fairly deserted except for the trailers. We looked at one another and smelled an opportunity for adventure. Walked in and it was filled with people. Piano music was playing. Students from the local university school of music are the waiters. They put on a bit of a vaudeville show between serving and it was lots of fun. Food was fine by the way.

I climbed a volcano in Sunset Crater Volcanic National Monument this morning while Goldie worked (retreat.) It's named Sunset because the volcano has a rust color at its summit due to iron in the lava. In the twenties, a movie producer planned to stick dynamite in the cone and blow the top off for a movie, so they decided to make it a monument to protect it from similar idiots. Adjacent to this volcano is a taller snow covered one called San Francisco named such by Franciscan priests about 200 years before they named a little backwater town on the west coast with the same name.

Goldie: Barry reported walking on a field of lava as a highlight; sniff, sorry to have missed it.

Barry: Some brief impressions to keep this short:

Sign in Kanab, Utah which is the location for filming many western movies: "Greatest earth on show."

Sign at Bryce Canyon National Park, site of incredible geologic formations caused by erosion: "Keep off, erosion control."

Sign along road - at a place where there was no fence along the 75 mph highway (the only place) "Beware cattle on highway." And there were! Reminds me of the sharp corner of the door of our Olds van which has a tendency to expose bone. In later models they fixed the problem by putting a sign on the door which read "sharp corner."

Standing at an observation spot at Bryce inhaling the pristine scenery and clean crisp air. Someone lights up a cigarette. Heard someone speak English in a national park the other day. No Japanese tourists, lots of German and French folk. Guess you can say something about the world economy based on this.

Goldie was irritable and exhausted the other day while we were on a long drive. I suggested she meditate. She slept for half an hour and felt much better. Had I suggested she nap it wouldn't have worked, I'm learning the lingo.

Utah was amazing. Don't know who came up with the landscaping, but it worked for me. Read how the Mormons chopped their way through rock to build roads, then lowered their wagons 1200 feet by rope. Just like the Voortrekkers in South Africa.

What I have learned so far is that nothing is permanent on this planet - seas, mountains, deserts, species, they all disappear. Human civilizations come and go, layering on top of one another just like the Grand Canyon. Everything on this planet ultimately dies and even the planet one day, recent headlines suggest, will end up being like Mars.

Goldie: The Northern Arizona Museum states its purpose as being "about ideas more than information" and lived up to it. Became aware of so much about the native peoples that I didn't realize in full before....one that comes to mind is how in 1610 the Spanish colonists forced the Pueblo people of the Rio Grande area to labor for them and to convert to Catholicism and cease their native religious practices. In 1680 the Pueblo revolted and reclaimed and held onto the region for 12 years. I'm finishing a story about when I stayed with the Bedouin which relates to similar contemporary circumstances, will try to post it in a week or so.

Here's a factoid for my sons, during the Wild West public school only met for three months during the summer. And another, physicians were unschooled and self proclaimed for the most part. Here's a cure for rheumatism one of them sold: Fill a whisky bottle half way with vinegar, add a handful of red ants and apply internally. Sounds like the Talmud.

A couple of facts brought to our attention by readers:

1. The bookstore in Denver is called "The Tattered Cover." (Thanks Bennie !)
2. The Japanese mats are used to measure room size not house size. (More thanks Bennie!)
3. The co-housing website is: www.cohousing.org (Thanks Jeff!)
4. Rabbi Gary Ellison and his community raised the funds to get the Abraham family out of Pakistan. (Thanks Steve!)

Barry: Tomorrow we drive through Sedona to spend a night in Jerome, Arizona, an old mining town built on a hill. Not surprisingly our bed and breakfast is located on Hill Road. The town is perched on Cleopatra Hill on the side of Mingus Mountain. Once there were 15,000 residents, in 1960 they were down to 24 voters, now it's up to 450. It was wild and called the Sedona-Gemorra of the West. In

1903 a reporter for the N.Y. Sun visited Jerome and went home in a state of shock saying, "It is the wickedest town in America!" The town is still crooked since one end is at 4,400 feet and the other end is at 5,600 feet. Why are we visiting Jerome? We'll let you know, when we know.



Tuzigoot to Be True

Barry: We are sitting in this exquisite terraced garden nestled against the side of a mountain about 500 feet above the semi desert valley below. It's 5.30 p.m., the intense heat is fading. It is silent except for the incessant chirping and carrying on of birds. A hummingbird has just hovered about fifteen feet away and now flown off. Goldie is reading a book of biographies, wine glass of wine in hand, courtesy of the B & B.

The name of this little bit of paradise is "The Surgeon's House." It used to belong to the surgeon for the local copper mine till the present owner, bought it from the mine and rehabilitated it. Below us is the utterly wild west town (village?) of Jerome, formerly a near ghost town. We have not explored it yet, it's tough to tear ourselves away from the cool garden.. You get the picture.

Goldie: If the antidote to civilization is Club Med, then the antidote to Ramada Inns are B&Bs, bed and breakfasts. We need soothing after a challenging couple of days dealing with work-related issues. Robust, eclectic, impeccable on detail both our hostess and her stunning home have nifty aspects to explore that could take years. Scarlet opium poppies, a harpsichord and copy of a Bobbsy Twins at the Seashore novel vie for my attention at this very moment.

Barry: We came here via the much hyped Sedona. The drive from Flagstaff to Sedona on Route 89A along the canyon was very pretty, although after Utah there wasn't much oohing and aahing in VanGo. Sedona appeared to be an oasis of shlock filled with tourists whom I assume came to see the scenery. The red mountains in the background are beautiful; it's the foreground that's the problem. We escaped after taking all of this in, and had a delicious \$5.50 Indian (real Indian as in next to Pakistan) buffet lunch with the locals on the opposite side of town.

The little town of Cottonwood was the antidote we needed for Sedona. It isn't even mentioned in our Fodors Guide. Unspoiled, it seems little changed from the 1920's. Even the movie theater - which touts itself as the oldest single screen theater in the country, recently did what all good old movie theaters do - Cinema Paradiso style it burned internally, leaving primarily the old west facade standing. The entire town center is going to be "improved" - plans have been posted. I felt I was seeing the germination of a second Sedona.

We visited the Tuzigoot National Monument. Great name isn't it?! It is a thousand year old Native American Pueblo village that was unearthed in the 1930's as part of Roosevelt's Public Works Administration programs. When this country had 25% unemployment due to the market crash a huge government employment program was instituted which included projects which particularly benefited the preservation of natural wonders, as well as building of bridges, dams, roads and such. Why, I wonder, is this type of thing not being done in South Africa (we were just there) where they have 50% unemployment, poverty, crime and lots of tourism.

Goldie: Another mystery, that pueblo was active from 1000 CE to about 1300 CE, and then all the inhabitants left a hundred years before European explorers arrived and no evidence of why or where they went remains. A previous host notes that my earlier comment about oppression of the Pueblos needs to be tempered with the fact that they, of all the tribes, were not deported east off of their lands and then resettled in reservations. They were able to continuously live in their homes and do so in New Mexico to this day. (Thanks Jeanette!)

Barry: Some observations today:

On a path in the canyons, a sign on a patch of recovering grass: "Healing in progress, please stay on the trail."

A mountain-side building bearing the sign: "Therapy on the Rocks"

A sign on the outskirts of town: "Future home of Sedona Cultural Park" - another oxymoron is born. A worker on the road holding a sign saying "stop". I stop and he immediately waves me on. The other side of the sign says "slow." Same thing happen with the next car. Presumably the only requirement for his job is to hold up one side or the other. This is the second time we've encountered this in the southwest.....are we missing some local custom?

Goldie: We selected books from our sweet room. "Women Who Charmed the West" by Anne Seagraves, which I've been reading over a glass of Chablis. The book offer biographies of Lilly Langtree, Sara Bernhardt, Adah Isaacs Menken, Maude Adams, Lillian Russel, Caroline Chapman, Laura Keene, and Annie Oakly. Barry's reading (by the same author): "Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West." Both books are written with insight and compassion that is clearly grounded in the biological knowing of a woman writer.

Berhardt's life is very colorful and has some Jewish nuance in that born Jewish, she developed a fear of a Jewish funeral in a plain wooden coffin (f.y.i. to readers unfamiliar with Jewish traditions, it is traditional that there be no differentiation between rich and poor in the matter of burial, so no soul or family would be shamed or stressed to provide an opulent coffin....all are equal in death.) Sarah Berhardt actually convinces her mother to buy her a carved rosewood coffin when she is 15 years old, it often travels with her. She converts to Catholicism. Her career expands to the point where she owns three railway cars with which she tours the West as an acclaimed classical actress. Pregnant out of wedlock by a man of means, his plan to marry her is aborted when his parents objected to her Jewish ancestry. Late in life she has a leg amputated at the thigh, insists on performing without a prosthetic and at a ripe old age is finally buried as a Catholic in her Rosewood coffin.

Barry: Some more observations about Jerome, Arizona . The Jerome family members were New Yorkers that invested in the mining industry in the 1890's, one of the daughters married Randolph Churchill and hence Winson Churchill's mother was a Jerome. The copper mines here produced a billion dollars worth of copper, enough so that each human on the planet could have twelve pounds for themselves. Gold is still mined here on occasion.

It was a hell of a town, drinking, gambling, prostitution, murder being common place. There were three major fires that destroyed chunks of the town. All the vegetation on the hills died from sulfur pollution from the mine.....occasional earthquakes led to surprises like the night the jail slid 200 yards down the hillside coming to rest in the center of the town. Last night we enjoyed a pizza in the former fire hall, now a café, joined by a couple from Oregon...he a fishing boat captain, she an artist. We shared travel tips. After dinner at Goldie's insistence went into a saloon frequent by tough looking cyclists...complete with the old jukebox and hammered tin ceilings.

This morning in bright sunshine the town looks so different, invaded by day tourists and I wonder if we are seeing the germination of Sedona III. We escaped the tourists by visiting a ghost mine deep in the hills. Trucks, tractors, steam shovels - large and small saw mills - old vehicles of every description littered the site between old shacks and signs warning of rattlesnakes.

While Goldie was chatting up a 45 year old mule (who is said to have just wandered in 15 years earlier and stayed), I stubbornly and persistently tried to glean information from the non-communicative, wild-looking character who works the site with his father-in-law. I asked him how many trucks they have, he responded that they once tried to count them and stopped at a hundred. Almost all the vehicles are operational, despite that they're rusting in open air.

Goldie: No more greasy eggs and toast.....breakfast was a nine course event, all of the guests clustered around a glass table overlooking the mesa. She'd labored much of the evening before and rose at dawn to perfect the moment for us.....every dish complex.....chilled fruit soup thickened with pear.....cranberry apple juice specially selected to compliment the aromatic rosemary bread with whipped pineapple butter.....three olive salsa over sage rubbed scrambled eggs....herb crusted potatoes scalloped with three tangy cheeses...and how I longed to try the too *trufe* (non-kosher) balsamic turkey shreds intended as a second garnish for the eggs. Dessert at breakfast?! A new one for me. She served her own recipe, sugared tortillas layered in dark chocolate, peanut butter, rum, cinnamon and pear.....

Barry: Reality sets in when I realize that our hostess has been multi-tasking up the wazoo (she even did the wash for \$5 herself, an advertised service and is self-catering a wedding on the site for this weekend.) She has created the perfect garden, living space and breakfast for guests, and if any element was missing it would be a calm ambience.

Goldie: Barry, I understand your point of view, yet, for me this was like peering behind the scenes of a bed and breakfast.....the volume of labor and commitment required to get the magnificent results were revealed as though we were in Oz. When we left that's what I blessed her with, "ohz", which is Hebrew for strength.

Barry: I suspect she was too busy to take in your blessing. When I fly (reluctantly) I want a smooth calm ride, and don't ever want to know what's going on behind the scenes. I think you just wanted me to see someone who can out-multi-task you!

Goldie: The Arizona State Museum branch in Jerome dramatizes the life of folks in a mining town.....waves of small pox, influenza, scarlet fever decimating the place.....shards of mica inhaled when pneumatic drills were introduced - called "widow-makers"....and days when the ore finally ran out and people traded their homes to pay a grocery bill; sobering reminders of the wages of industry and the tides of fortune.



When Your Art Aches

Barry writing my first impressions:

Urban sprawl; mile after mile of contemporary buildings, town merging with town and traffic - incessant, aggressive driving.

The sun is blazing. I was excited and invigorated by the sun in Denver. Here I hide from it. Like in the old westerns, with the sun beating down on horse and rider, as they stumble across the desert.

The heat - its 97 degrees Farenheight and I am told it is a relatively cool spring with the temperatures not topping 100.

Next day: Goldie is now in Vancouver leading a retreat. I think I'll stay an extra couple of days. It's still hot, and the drivers on Interstate 10 still seem hell bent to get out of the sun (my only explanation why they are driving so fast. The guidebook says the pace is slower in the southwest. I wonder when last the author was here?)

So why stay longer? I'm beginning to like it here. I've learnt to drive old VanGo as if I'm in Goldie's sports car in New York City. I keep the blinds drawn and stay mostly indoors.

And.....

On the way to the new Phoenix library, I find myself walking in the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Park. At the entrance is a sculpture of five people entering treatment and three emerging smiling, ready to embrace life. On either side of the path, between succulents, are affirmations e.g. "Cancer is the most curable of all chronic diseases" and "make a commitment to do everything in your power to help yourself fight the disease."

I sit on a bench in the park and think how empowering this is. The walk is a form of ritual. Who are the Blochs?

The library itself is a five floor ultra-modern building, stunning in design but what catches my eye are the quotes on the wall: "Imagination is more important than knowledge." - Einstein. (ha! Try telling this to med school)

"A book is like a gift from the sea....listen quietly and it will speak." - Janet deBerge Lange

"Some books are undeservedly forgotten- none are undeservedly remembered." - W H Auden

"A book ought to be an ice pick to break up the frozen sea within us." - Franz Kafka.

Another quote. This time from Fodor's Arizona 99 page 123: "Walk toward the red-granite Viad Tower, the lobby of which contains the Breck Girl Hall of Fame."

I walk past the lifelike sculptures of a window washer, security guard and a man reading a newspaper, past two "hand painted" tapestries (isn't that an oxymoron?) but no Breck girls. The real life security guard tells me they were removed long ago: "People are always coming in to ask to see them."

An obvious question is why we tolerate getting outdated incorrect information from these guide book publishers. Another quote this time from the cover of Fodors: "The King of Guidebooks." - Newsweek."

Anyway, I enjoyed the sculptures and move on to the Phoenix Fine Art Museum. In the lobby of this beautiful green stone building are quotes relating to art (can you begin to see a pattern in Phoenix? At home the only quotes are unintelligible and spray painted. Could this be what they do for graffiti here?)

"Art disease is caused by hardening of the categories." - Adina Reinhardt

"Art is a higher type of knowledge than experience." - Aristotle.

"Art is the elimination of the superfluous." - Michelangelo.

"Life is short, art is long." - Hippocrates., etc.

On display was an exhibition of modern chairs from a gallery of design in Germany. I was just in time to join a tour. Imagine my delighted to see that the guide, an assistant curator, is a former patient of mine from Reading, Pennsylvania, David Reuben. Visit was very stimulating; as was the rest of the museum. I am seeing western art differently now. There are even some paintings of Jerome, showing the poverty of the people and hardship of the miners.

At a display of vintage hats are more quotes. Listed are fifteen expressions with hat in them e.g., "I'll eat my hat" "to pass the hat around." Also found out where the term Art Deco comes from. It derives from the 1925 World's fair - Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs. For some reason I'm pleased by this discovery.

I rounded off the day watching "The Amazing Jonathan" at The Improv . Jonathan is "amazing" because he does crazy tricks like hacking his arm off, snorting a bucketful of cocaine, imbedding a scissor in his assistant's head, etc.

The two young guys at my table had one thing in common; each one had a girlfriend waitressing there. Occasionally the girls would sneak them a little something - roll, piece of cake. I shared my sandwich with one, since he was still starving. I left after an hour of grossness - Jonathan had made his point.

So where are the quotes here? I found them on the shirts of the waiters. "Life is too important to be taken seriously."

Day two very briefly, started off with the justifiably famous Heard Museum of Native American art and artifacts and ended with jazz at sunset at the Desert Botanical Gardens - both unique. Also managed to discover the "Downtown" by zooming off the expressway at 75 mph into a sleepy, peopleless, carless section of the city abundant in parking spaces. Now I have it figured, this is a city where the freeways and suburbs are hectic and downtown is dead.

Day three, moved to The Ivy on the Waterfront in Scottsdale (irrigation canal in case you're wondering.) I was given their show unit - \$49 for a plush apartment with 2 TV's, private pool, evening wine, a.m. buffet breakfast. They "forgot" to tell me the water was polluted with a serious stenchly hydrogen sulfide problem. Still, it was fun till I turned on the water to take a shower.

With my new found interest in western art I thought I'd check out the 100 art galleries in Scottsdale. Goldie always tells me to be positive. So here goes, they have the best bad and expensive Western art on the planet. How many noble Indian chiefs staring into the sunset (get the metaphor?) or lonesome cowboys can one appreciate? And the cute bronze little girls sniffing flowers or playing ball? There were about fifty of them all over the place; an upscale Sedona.

Tired of the superficial, I'm off on my first visit ever to Las Vegas.

Lots of love to all, Barry

 CROSS COUNTRY # 15 

Contravand

GOLDIE: Re-entry after teaching or attending a retreat is usually a spiritual challenge. Imagine going from standing at Sinai in preparation for the Jewish holiday *Shavuot* with the Or Shalom (Vancouver, Canada) Jewish Renewal community to sweltering in the desert and neon of Las Vegas, Nevada. Fortunately US Customs helped to bring me down to earth on the way back.

Didn't spend a penny in Canada, noted that on the customs form. The smiling agent stamps a big red word: EXTEST onto my form and sends me around the corner where all the people with large suspicious boxes go. Ugh. A zillion overseas trips and today, winging my way back to my beloved, to get stuck in bureaucracy.

"Oh," the agent says. "It just means you are number 100. We randomly check every one hundredth person to validate our existence to the US government, plus I'm in training."

He starts gently looking through the piles of handouts, books about Sinai, covenant, mitzvot and then starts on my stack of hats. "Did you list the value of this merchandise?"

"I didn't buy the hats in Canada."

"You can't just carry stuff in and out to sell without declaring the value."

"They're not for sale. I wear them." Looking skeptical he continues the search.

He gets to my Jewish prayer paraphernalia, *tallit* and *tephillin*. Unwinding the tephillin he comments, "kinky. Tell me madam, you note your purpose in Canada was business, exactly what was your business in Canada?"

"I'm a rabbi; I came to teach a synagogue retreat in the mountains." (Uh, oh...wait til he gets to the spices in the *Havdalah* box....agricultural goods?)

"May I see some form of professional identification please?" (Guess who gave away all her business cards on the retreat?)

"Kind sir, since you are in training and I am not aware there is anything illegal about carrying hats and leather across state lines, could I speak with your supervisor please?"

The supervisor comes over with a flock of trainees. He looks at the mountain of once carefully compacted stuff and then at me and then does a double take at the pile:

"Do you know what that is?! *Tephillin* shouldn't be tossed around like that!"

Needless to say it was smooth sailing there-after.

More from Goldie: Serving as guest teacher for the Or Shalom retreat was such a delight. A very caring community, it felt like a *menschlich shtetl* (ethical village) up there in the glorious mountains outside Vancouver. It's been very hard on my husband as I methodically prepare for teaching. Successful retreats take solid infrastructure and a thoughtful mix of deep learning, joyful prayer, free time and lots of fun.

My favorite moment was hiking on Shabbat up mountains covered with long-ago fallen trees that have grown a curious long-haired deep green moss. We heard the rushing sound of water falls mixed with glorious bird calls and came to a magnificent multi-level water fall landing at our feet on colorful rocks....soon wet socks, deepening friendships and laughter also joined the moment.

So deeply inadequate is the feeling of this prayer leader just before services. Praying that The One will send what this particular community needs, praying to get ego out of the way....feels like waiting for the pang that lets the milk come when one is nursing....one has to consciously get out of the way for the "flow" to come...

With time one even feels the beginning of trusting this process and learns skills which can help via what Rabbi Shefa Gold calls "stereoscopic consciousness." This is the ability to discern different attributes of the group energy and incline one's voice, soul, prayer and body to fine tune them.....any person praying can do this form of leading too, right from their seat. A harmony of souls begins as a community practices this (particularly palpable on retreat) and the hum of the village being intentionally created is so beautiful.

We did three meaningful witnessing experiences of Torah reading during the service, this is called an *aliyah* in Hebrew. The first, *aliyah* is for those who felt that this Shavuot they were climbing a particular mountain in their lives. Those who came up were blessed that they receive the needed vision for how to proceed in their life. We found in the words of the scroll "let the earth be your altar, not hewn stone" and rejoiced in the power of that awareness of the meaning of "earth" to both ancient and contemporary peoples.

The second *aliyah* came for the reading of the Ten Commandments. Those who came up did so to

signify this as the tradition's natural recommitment ceremony- for those who see themselves as in a long-term committed relationship with Judaism. The *mischabeirach* (blessing) was for support in serving on the research and development team of the Jewish future, for a blessing as Torah comes through the prism of our consciousness that what we discern will increase holiness in this world.

The third was for those who are healing their connections to Judaism or who need healing of body, mind or soul. In most such gatherings are many who have needed to be distant from their Judaism for some time, the blessing was for the reconnection to be joyful, full of consciousness and treasures found. We sang Rabbi Shohama Wiener's "Waters of Healing" (available on my website along with a healing meditation under the topic of "prayer") to conclude the Torah service.

We explored many, many mitzvot on the retreat as part of our theme. I love to formulate creative experiences to facilitate learning and the Or Shalom folks jumped right in and took everything to an amazing level. The hardest work was on the requested topic: "When boundaries are broken, is forgiveness still a mitzvah?" No words could do justice to the deep sharings that happened. There is a powerful reclaiming of body, mind and soul that happens in a full *teshuvah* [experience of revisiting a difficult relationship encounter and working toward healing] experience....a joy that comes when the time is right, when the group is a safe place for working it out together.....never did I pray harder to be a clear channel than during these moments.

Also want to emphasize an awareness, that when one is involved in rabbinic work, both the perpetrator and those who have been hurt are souls for whom we must give care and guidance, BOTH. There is story in the Talmud where a rabbi sees some thieves and curses them. His wife, Bruriah, corrects him saying not to curse them, rather to pray that they transform themselves and change their ways. Once one gets passed the pain and anger, this perhaps is a wonderful next step for some to take.

For *yizkor*, the memorial service for loved ones gone to the next plane of being, we gathered in the evening before *havdallah*, the ritual of braided candles, blessings, spices and wine to end the Sabbath. (An unusual convergence of religious events, that was helpful.) Around the memorial candles that had been lit before Shabbat we chanted about eternity "Me-olam ad olam, atah El." Each person had brought a photo or memento or just a memory to tell about someone who has died. The mitzvah of *Zachor* is to tell their stories so that a person's zachor, "memory," will be for a blessing. Oh, how we listened, amazed, amused, tearful, astonished, united through the weaving of the lives into the collective memory of a community.

There were infinitely more highlights - Yiddish songfest at the campfire, making take-home moss gardens, prancing around during new games.....and the walks, the long walks with a few singular souls desiring to share a challenging moment in their lives.....walks with golden *neshamot*, "souls," who I will never forget, may the blessings which came multiply for them and bring healing.

Vancouver, you ask. What about Vancouver? Didn't see much of it. Had one glorious afternoon hosted by a very nice interesting family from the North Shore.....walked to the beach, looked out upon a golden sunset from their picture window over the huge expanse of water below. "It's a rain forest here" they said, the flowers, glorious abundant flowers everywhere proved it. I don't know about the rain part, we had four days of radical sunshine.

During the *tikkun*, all night study session, Or Shalom's delightful rabbi, David Mivisair led a study of chapter 36 of the Tanya, a Chassidic text which I studied first with amazement in rabbinical school with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Through Reb David's skillful teaching a message that came through this time is that perhaps The Source has generated conscious beings because an exponential increase in action and thought power is needed to repair the problems inherent in creation. Big project, so there is a big team. (On the other hand, if we are holographically replicating that in which we are embedded, wouldn't we also exponentially increase the amount of shadow?.....help me out with this!?)

Coming down the mountain faces radiant, a possible interpretation that I argued for as a rabbinical

student recurred to me. *Al tigshoo el eeshah*. The Torah portion text usually is read as Moses telling the people "don't go near a woman." One could change the vowels, and make it, *al tigshoo el aysh-ah*. "Don't go near Her fire." So nice to live in times where we can make our own kind of midrash (interpretive story based on an opportunity in the grammar or missing dialogue in the text).

The temperature had gone from 45 degrees to almost 90 degrees. Watching the snow caps of high Vancouver mountains transformed into raging waterfalls visible from the highways on the way home....one wonders...do we ever know what a verse really means?

Las Vegas? Barry and I will have to tell you about that one together, after Shabbos.

P.S. For those who are interested I posted a Four Worlds approach to Torah study, would love readers' ideas on how to express it better or deeper. Look on my website under Torah or What's New. Thanks!



How to Never Be Out of Lux

Barry: It's hard not to be cynical in Las Vegas. So I won't try, especially since Goldie hasn't arrived here yet, returning from Vancouver tomorrow. I will have vivid memories of a chunky woman in the long line behind me at the breakfast buffet having a panic attack at the thought she would have to get in the line again for seconds.

Goldie: Hi honey I'm home. Thought we were going to work on being more politically correct. How do I look? [Little does he know that getting off the plane I was dressed in old t-shirt and hiking boots.....saw a sale in a little airport boutique and came away with a cerulean-blue swishy dress and sun glasses studded with rhinestones [costuming is everything on the stage of life] (all together came in under \$49)...changed in the powder room, an airline hostess catching a smoke between planes did my hair while she had the giggles over my retaining a kippah....]

Barry: Or the very impressive Luxor, built in the shape of a pyramid containing all things Egyptian including a recreated King Tut's tomb next to La Salsa Mexican Restaurant in the atrium.

Some say the official bird of Nevada is the Crane - you see cranes all over town towering above the new buildings. I believe the telephone directory is published twice a year because of the steady influx of newcomers.

Spoke to the waitress in the buffet restaurant of the hotel (\$4.99 for breakfast.) They have upward of 12,000 people a day in this one restaurant alone.

Goldie: Vegas has changed dramatically since I was here as a teen on a USY on Wheels tour of America about 30 years ago. Then it was tawdry, smoky, small and when I dropped a quarter into a slot machine in the bathroom and \$250 rolled out, the counselor kept the money saying it was illegal for kids to gamble.

Of course Barry has a way of turning each day of travel into a work of art. He reviews every possible map (not my field), brochure, chats people up and develops a pastiche of the most glorious and most absurd elements of each place we visit. Vegas is no different.

Barry: Our modest room in the Tropicana is \$59 a night. At the check in I heard a clerk offering rooms at \$49 and apparently the prices are constantly changing. The price on the door in our room lists it at a maximum of \$500, no doubt to make suckers who spent \$100 feel good.

In front of the hotel they are selling oxygen to the gullible. They have different colored O2, each one

designed for a different effect at \$5 for 5 minutes. Nothing seems to be a straight deal over here. All over town there are "official" tourist information booths selling "discount show tickets". VIP express lines at restaurants are jammed with tourists. Waiting in an express line is supposed to make one feel privileged? Like arriving 3 hours late flying first class instead of economy. Same principle.

The ultimate gamble for those who find the casino action too tame - 108,000 marriage licenses were issued here last year. Unlike the buffets, there is no wait. 24 hour-a-day wedding chapels in every casino and on every street. Weddings can be had for as cheaply as \$200 and on credit if necessary; didn't see any quickie divorces advertised.

Goldie: Brides flounce by at every turn. Divorces are advertised by price not speed; one billboard claimed \$39, cheaper than a hotel room.....wonder if they even have Hertz Rent-a-Rabbis? My soul is real queezy at being here....everything leads you back to a slot machine....free drinks are...over by the slots.....free shows are.....over by the slots.....magic show takes you....over by the slots. I once lost \$15 in nickels gambling at Resorts Casino when it opened in Atlantic City...never gambled with money again (trips to South Africa and the Ukraine...well, we all have our risk tolerances) ...meanwhile, I WANT MY \$15 BACK....could'a gone to tzedakah.

Barry: On the other hand, given a day to find my feet, I was able to see beyond the sleazy. The buildings are marvelous extravaganzas. The best entertainment is free. Just to walk around and gawk at the excess of it all; like seeing a simulated volcano erupting at the Mirage, water show at Bellagio, and the sailing ships battle at Treasure Island. I soon forgot the insanity of this placewish my granddaughter was here.

Goldie's punning her head off. We decided on a truce (which lasted about 30 minutes when I asked her what drug would fix the van. Answer: Vangomycin. ((Vancomycin is an antibiotic for you non-physicians.))

Goldie: In the \$100 minimum bet pit the guy with a lovely smooth bald head, gold bangle, black leather pants and a diamond earring is sweating bullets. I want to take him for a walk, talk.....anything. He goes to the phone and placates someone who's waiting somewhere.....slides \$2000 of chips onto a number.....I have to walk away...keep remembering the Holocaust survivor, from a town I long ago lived in, who lost his house and business to the big "g" addiction. It's like a decadent Disney land here, only, instead of paying a flat fee for entertainment, the entertainment is free and the fee is endless for those who get caught up in the slots.

Barry: The ultimate moment was seeing the show called "Mystere". It left me feeling stunned from the intensity of the experience. If I had seen nothing else in Vegas, this show alone would have made the trip worthwhile; a pearl in the oyster that is Las Vegas.

Goldie: Have to agree. It was one of the best pieces of "circus" theater I've experienced....a hybrid of Greek myth-like motifs, Japanese theater, pre-war German humor, Klez vivacity.....the costumes must have been by a Danskin designer on acid.....and the effect is at the level that Fantasia must have taken society in its time.....breathless, joyful, imagination stimulated and a sense of what lies beyond the visibly possible is evoked.

Some of the best and the worst that America can be is reflected here. Most places are fun and operated efficiently, creatively and effectively. There's not much smoke anymore, probably due to a combination of technology and changing habits....that's good.

Visually this place is a total stitch.....one arrives to see the NY sky-line, which turns out to be a tromp d'oeil building which is a gargantuan casino, another is shaped as a humongous pyramid, another is a duplicate of the Eiffel Tower, yet another duplicates a square in Venice down to the very cracks in the walls and trolling gondolas on winding channels. Water fountains dance on a created lake to classical music.....not much skin is shown, on the street one is handed flyers advertising discreet visits available as a room service....

Barry: Having taken in the essence of the place, (including a \$4.99 breakfast of steak and eggs for me...Goldie on the other hand is turning orange from all the carrots), I am ready to point Van Go due west and in a few hours hit the California coast where she assures me I can lie on the beach while she works on teaching materials.

 Cross Country #17 

When a Sunrise Gives You Paws

Our gratitude is profound to everyone who is sending us notes of encouragement and guidance along the way....it's wonderful to live in amazing times among such caring people. Cyber connections can indeed yield holy sparks.

The air in Santa Barbara is scented with every variety of roses. One huge peach globe of a rose arrested both of us outside the Victorian Upham Inn where we are staying. Maybe six inches in diameter each diaphanous petal was gracefully dancing in the breeze like prom dress chiffon. Should we bother to go to the botanical gardens? The whole town is in bloom! (One could call this place Scenta Barbara.) The air is cool and moist; 40 degrees lower than in Vegas.

This weekend's festival is an Italian Sidewalk Painting Festival. Families, art students, best friends, adults, children - hundreds of people all squatting within the squares allotted to them in front of the old Spanish Mission church. Over a matter of hours sensuous works of pastel art emerge. While everyone is busily engaged staring at their emerging masterpieces, we look up, and wonder about the possible consequences of the threatening clouds.

I try to imagine Barry and I working on a section together....should we? A memory recurs:

Early in our relationship we went to Turquoise Island together. A silk painting studio at the resort caught my eye. Hmmm. Been getting invested in this relationship, let's see.....how could we test our ability to survive some challenges. "Barry, how about we do a silk painting together?" He agrees.

We select a panel that is six feet long and two and a half feet wide. The sketching part goes well....a multi-colored pastel parrot superimposed on a turquoise sea with Bougainvillea in the back ground and ferns in the foreground; so far, so good.

We begin painting. His style is poster-color clarity, vivid, bold direct. Mine is buttery merging of softened shades, oil-painting like. The battle commences for whose style is correct. He stalks off to the beach. Oh, no, no, NO. I stalk him and seconds after he settles into a divan to watch the sunset....flam! I flip his lounge chair over and he goes sprawling into the sand, comes up sputtering....."How dare....."

Barry: What she is not pointing out is that this has become a typical pattern for us. We had never done a silk painting before and we do the largest one possible - 15 square feet, pushing ourselves past any reasonable limit.

Goldie: We agree to work through disputes rather than increasing distance. Five days later a truly gorgeous piece has emerged.....poster-style background, buttery-detailed foreground. That night at dinner a woman at the table asks if we are the couple who was working in the silk studio.

"Yes..."

She wants to know if we are both psychiatrists.

"No....why do you ask that?"

"Because you two processed everything!"

"Yes...and?"

She looks straight at me. "Honey, if it was me I just would've upped and hit him!"

Ok. Maybe we'll skip taking a turn at sidewalk painting.

Barry: Shabbat dinner was going to be candles in the room and Kabbalat Shabbat, the evening service, by the ocean. Following up on a thoughtful email from Marcia Brooks of Kehilla Community Synagogue in San Francisco let us know that: "There's one Jewish renewal person in Santa Barbara, you must call him." Rick whisked us right over to his house in the hills for Shabbat dinner with a cluster of spontaneous, deep, delightful folk...sang great niggunim, "wordless melodies," studied the Torah portion [wherein, we see swings of intimacy between G*d and the people - in one verse letting them eat meat "until it comes out of their noses" and many die of it, in another verse extending the benefit of *Shechinah* [intimacy with G*d, for some the feminine attributeds] connection that Moshe feels to include seventy elders.....sounds like a regular relationship to us....]

We also had dramatized for us the unique challenges of living in refined, lovely, picture-perfect Santa Barbara. Rick's concrete driveway had slid when the hill shifted and is unusable.

The last time Goldie was here was in the 1970's, as a hitch hiker (in those days it wasn't perceived to be as dangerous) coming down from visiting San Francisco on her way to attend the Brandeis Institute near Los Angeles.

Goldie:

FLASHBACK: The August day was blazing hot, the folks who drop me off in Santa Barbara and are continuing on beyond it, comment how unusually smoggy the air seemed.

Not smog, it was smoke. All possible ways to the house of my never-met-in-person pen pal were closed off and no one answered his phone. Fire trucks were clanging everywhere. With \$5 in my pocket I slide into a juice bar seat and wonder what to do next, it was getting dark. The proprietor is a friendly fellow who invites me to stay over with him and his wife, accepting began to seem prudent once the moonless night became more evident.

Back at their place they offer me a drink.

"Orange juice would be great," I mutter, mouth dry and ashy.

"How about a Sunrise?"

"Sure." What did I care what brand of orange juice they like?

The long, tall glass of thirst quenching juice arrives and I down it in seconds.

"Are you sure you want to drink like that?" asks the wife.

"Always drink OJ that way, love it!" I exclaim and fall off my chair within minutes, crash landing on the chartreuse shag rug.

PAUSE PAWS

On either side of my head were huge paws, bigger than huge with claws extending and retracting

spasmodically. "Dead, must be dead", was my first thought....."do the dead have headaches like this?" "Hope not." was the second.

A huge tongue is heading toward my face, leonine teeth descending with it and a crop of lengthy whiskers shading dilated pupils set in golden eyes.....SLURP.....my scream must have outshone the fire engines.....footsteps pounding and laughter. LAUGHTER?

Seems the proprietor's wife was a large animal veterinarian. Her pet puma was distressed at my downfall from the TEQUILA sunrise and has been perched on my chest trying to revive me for hours. The puma was nothin', you should have seen the boa constrictor in the bathroom. Never hitch hiked again.....for that matter never drank that kind of OJ again either.

BACK TO THE PRESENT: The fog is lifting, sunlight streaming, some rather good jazz wafting in from the street....Barry's off at the botanical gardens with Rick and will return for dinner and Contra dancing tonight....sweet feat!

 CROSS COUNTRY # 18 

Got OUR Seal of Approval

Goldie: Hundreds of seals, slide...flop.....slide....flop.....a reasonable cause for the gaper delay on Highway I. We pause and start to count them...185 seals.....turns out we are standing beside a park ranger who tells us sometimes 4000 of them congregate here to mate. I search for a blessing and recall an Orthodox colleague challenging one of my classes to stop using the *shechecheyanu*, blessings for a special season, as a generic blessing (which technically, it isn't...there are set moments for saying it, which make those set seasons particularly special). In the spirit of a Judaism expanded, I bless the One who filled the seas....who *yiram ha yam u'm'lo-oo*, as the psalm reads, and burst into a song on the theme written by Rabbi Geelah Rayzl Raphael of the women's acapella recording group Miraj.

Barry: From fresh sunny spring weather in Cleveland, through stormy gale forced winds in Nebraska, over snow flurried mountain passes in the Rockies, across scorching desert in Arizona - now this. We have arrived in Carmel, California. Till this point, it has seemed as if spring has been following us across the country. But here it's foggy, grey and cold. Goldie is out with a rabbi friend talking rabbi business. I have decided to give them a wide berth opting instead to light a fire in the fireplace of our motel room, watch TV, type, and keep warm (in reverse order.)

If Jerome was the antidote we needed to Sedona, then Santa Barbara, where we just left, was the antidote to Vegas. Santa Barbara is like a Garden of Eden, with Shangri-La in the hills behind. The entire town is spotlessly clean, they not only have signs warning to pick up after your dog. They also provide you with biodegradable plastic gloves in dispensers in the park. It felt as if I was in one gigantic flower garden. Happy.

Nevertheless, I went to the botanical gardens with our new found Jewish renewal friend, Rick, while Goldie had the day off to prepare for her next workshop. We ran into Goldie on our return. She was returning from Kinko's where she had gone to do some photocopying. Oh, the reason she was carrying an armful of new dresses was because of this irresistible sale etc. etc. Needs them for high holy days at Kripalu etc., etc. [Goldie: Blessings upon Rabbi Wayne Dosick for recommending Tienda Ho....found lots of reasonable, beautiful funky regal replacement rebbe threads...]

Barry Rick is a delightful man. He quit his job as a fireman a few months ago, and like me, is uncertain of the next step. G's comment about his resignation: "Burnt out." didn't faze him. He took

her contra dancing that night, while I meditated in front of the TV.

Goldie: The contra folk dancing was on a "sprung floor"...new concept for me, an old wooden floor laid so that each step becomes a bounce....it was like flying into the arms of dance partners, whirling and reeling into a seamless dance of joy! People had come in from many states for the event and some were "calling" dances they had written themselves....one person noted upon seeing my kippah (skull cap): "Shouldn't you be praying?" To which my response was: "I am!"

[A favorite quote found on my computer, likely from one of Yitzhak Buxbaum's books is from the Besht:

"Dancing is to lift up holy sparks" also he notes that "the Baal Shem Tov used to dance to attain religious enthusiasm (*hitlahavutt*) and communion with G*d (*devekut*). He taught his followers that "The dances of the Jew before his Creator are prayers...[his great-grandson Nachman of Breslov] believed that to dance in prayer was a sacred command, and he composed a prayer which he recited before dancing."]

Barry: We left Santa Barbara the next day feeling we had left behind an old friend. I was reminded of our meeting with Patch Adams a year or two ago. He pointed out to us that even though he has few assets, he considers himself a wealthy man because he has so many friends all over the world.. I can understand his point. I know someone who spent several years and several million dollars building the ultimate house. It burnt down the week before they were ready to move in.

Immediately out of Santa Barbara the vegetation changed - still beautiful and interesting, but more grassland and drier. We drove up the coast past charming little towns, choosing instead to head straight for Big Sur. We skipped the Madonna Inn and then Hearst Castle at San Simeon . Umberto Eco had written a scathing piece comparing the garish Inn to the incredibly poor taste in the much more expensive Castle.

On the way to Big Sur our cell phone rang. It was the manager of the hotel in Phoenix responding to my complaint about the fumes of hydrogen sulfur (rotten eggs) coming from the shower.

Goldie called her beloved colleague Rabbi Leah Novick in Carmel only to hear a message that she was away for the long weekend.

We pull into the famous retreat center at Esalen, near Big Sur where we are hoping to spend the night. We check out the hot tubs perched high on cliffs which "oversee" the Pacific. And who emerges from one to greet us? A gleaming Rabbi Leah Novick . And the hot tubs are reeking of sulfur fumes. Here people are paying to soak in this stuff?!

(Goldie: Among the important discoveries on this trip is that as soon as we got west of Nebraska the various skin ailments that have been plaguing me ceased. The sulfur baths were an extra boon - no chlorine or bromine, which have been keeping me out of swimming pools and spas.)

Esalen was an exciting place to be in the sixties. It was a major center for Gestalt then. Now the programs are more eclectic. We did not attend a workshop, choosing just to spend one memorable day as paid guests, soaking up the beauty, the pool, hot tubs, and good food.

Goldie: Esalen: Profusion of huge succulents in flower, a live piano and cello concert after lunch where everyone just sprawls out on pillows to listen, a long multi-tiered water-fall runs through the center of everything,they did manage to shock me, one option is being massaged under the sunshine by a nude masseur, also both meat and veggie are served and smoking is allowed on the premises!

Barry: And wine and beer at dinner. Much more permissive atmosphere here in the west coast tradition I guess. We opted to sleep in a dorm room, each of us were assigned to our own top bunk with two strange guys below us.....friendly snorers....tight quarters.....]

We left reluctantly heading to Carmel on the Monterey peninsula. This area is noted for its famous golf course sold to Japanese in 1990 for 850 million. Next, Santa Cruz for Goldie's next workshop.

But not before going on a hike in the canyon at Esalen. Here we came across a big snake not two feet from me. Goldie said it was harmless - she always says that when the snake is near me, but runs like hell when it's near her. This was the fourth snake I have almost run into on our journey. The Arches National Park, Boulder - hiking the mountain, Santa Barbara in the botanical garden, and now here. This is getting very spooky. I decided to carry a staff. This sets me off thinking of the medical insignia of a staff with a snake encircling it. And like a snake eating its tale, this leads to more thinking and causes me to lie awake at 4 am wondering is this a sign from my buddy upstairs that I must return to the practice of medicine.

Barry: This is as good a time as any to point out that this journey has many dimensions to it. Seeing America, understanding more about the country we live in is just one. The others that we can identify are: getting to know ourselves and each other better, meeting new friends and old, Goldie teaching in various places, scoping out a possible community for us to live in several years from now, and for me to explore what I am going to be doing professionally once this journey is over.

It's not much fun doing medicine in America at present, and when we move, getting licensed in another state can be a major, if not impossible task as a foreign medical graduate. Besides I prefer the counseling and therapy aspect.

Goldie: Such a *mechayeh* [Yiddish for life-giving experience] receiving mentoring from a mature woman colleague who I love and whose work I so deeply respect ... unforgettable. We spoke at length about how to work with and select rabbinical students, how does one teach the use of one's body, mind and soul to bring G*d energy and connection through a community? Sometimes I wonder about my sanity after receiving contact from rebbes or souls long gone to the next world....she illustrates how this is a form of blessing, a healthy remarkable gift to receive (phewww...).We explore and share for hours over an exceptional meal at Casablanca under the stars and an outdoor heater.



The Mission Position

Barry: The Carmel Mission. I spent an hour walking through this historic site. Its full title is The Basilica of Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo. About 250 years ago as the Spaniards moved up the California coast they established missions.

They did what was obviously right to them, converted the locals to Christianity and introduced civilization to the area. This mission was lovingly restored by a gentleman, Harry Downie, who spent 50 years of his life doing it. He was honored for his work and now we have this beautiful mission to give us insight into that time and a church for people to pray in as they did back then.

We see the ceremonial garb of its founder, Junipero Serra, his books, the room he died in restored to its original condition, even pieces of his coffin bundled up with gold ribbon. He is being treated as a hero. Some school children are being taken around.

I feel troubled by this and wonder why. I think back on my schooldays studying history - the Dutch that settled South Africa in the 17th century. Being treated as heroes by the ruling Afrikaners and us kids studying history from their perspective. Obviously they had been the good guys doing the right thing.

I wonder what systems in our present lives we buy into. Like why do we accept that it is "normal" to work 90 % of our lives and only play 10%.? Why do we wear neckties? Why are suburbs built without any thought to planning? Why children are taught boring facts and not relationship skills and how to

use their imaginations? Why do we accept these systems (and others) as normal? The Spaniards were wrong, the Afrikaners were wrong, and there is a lot in our present society that is wrong.

The second thought is why there is no plaque or memorial in the mission remembering those who suffered at the hands of the Spaniards? I feel angry that in this day and age, these people are still being revered. Prayer goes on in the churches they established as if nothing had happened.

I want my \$2 back.

Barry: Yesterday went awry. We suddenly found ourselves unexpectedly having to change our plans. For a while our strengths clashed: Barry - specialist in organization and prevention of the unexpected in patients vs Goldie who specializes in coping with adversity and surprises by going with the flow.

Goldie: I think Barry means he likes preventive medicine versus handling a crisis. We're noticing so much about each other on the trip. I eat corn on the cob with gusto, Barry eats it daintily. I have a photographic memory and everything looks in order to me no matter where I've put it....Barry needs things put away in particular places...he relishes white space....I relish a profusion of cool objects.....Barry likes to settle down at night with a nice WWII movie, I want to meditate and feel the cocoon of darkness....

Barry: Meanwhile, back in Carmel. Being we were frozen in disharmony, Rabbi Leah came to the rescue and suggested we hike the state park Point Lobos, which we did and found it as beautiful as any we had seen anywhere; provided us with a roof over our heads (we slept in her office), cooked us a delicious breakfast and directed us to the Kleins near Santa Cruz for the night.

Their home is an architectural delight. Designed by a former student of Frank Lloyd Wright it obviously bears his influence. Redwood walls, tile and hardwood floors, custom furniture, stained glass windows and set in the countryside near Santa Cruz.

This morning we spent a long time talking to a curator of a gallery about Zimbabwe sculpture. This evening I discussed architecture with our host. I am reminded that art and aesthetics are very important to me - almost a spiritual practice. The sensitivity of the artist, attention to detail, striving for perfection, emotions embodied in the work.

This morning we also visited the aquarium in Monterey. We have visited many including an outstanding one in Cape Town. This one blew us away with many forms of sea life we could never have imagined. In particular, the jelly fish - many different varieties were so graceful and beautiful - like ballet. Jellyfish are not only very functional, they are esthetically beautiful.

Goldie: The jelly fish provided a diaphanous ballet of light and illusion. So alien in appearance that Barry remarked how even sci-fi seems limited in envisioning what beings from other planets might look like.

Barry: If esthetics is integral to nature, why don't we imitate nature in the way we design and build our homes and towns? I suspect Goldie will rebut me about art being a spiritual practice, but I rest my case.

Naturally, we had fish and chips for lunch.

Goldie: What defines a spiritual practice? Perhaps intention is one key element. Seems to me even a religious practice can be devoid of spirituality, depends on the intention. For sure, art can be a spiritual practice...it can also miss the mark, by exploiting its subject, for example.

Goldie: Teaching for Chadeish Yameinu, the Jewish renewal group in Santa Cruz was a wonderful experience. They requested a seminar on davenology - skills for leading spiritually powerful services. We looked at the sequence of prayers in morning services and what effect on the body, soul and mind

each is intended to occasion, so that an integration of nutrients for the soul stream are delivered during the davenning; sort of a spiritual multi-vitamin.

I was surprised to articulate a new thought. One person noted that their morning practice is to take a verse that strikes them and to chant it until they are in a meditative state. Sometimes practitioners of yoga mention that they don't need to know the meaning of the Sanskrit chants, that their teachers say the sound of the words will have their effect any way. So why would one need to understand a Hebrew verse or to chant a particular verse established by the sages for a particular point in a service? There is a real intentional order and synergy among the elements of the service. In my experience there is more benefit possible than that inherent in meditation without the liturgy.

For example, chanting the traditional *modah ani l'fanekhah* upon awakening brings gratitude as one's earliest spiritual practice of the day...the ability to arise in praise rather than negativity. One might see *l'fanekhah* as either meaning "before G*d", or lately I like to think of it as "into the face of G*d." Once one has found the unique revelation of the verse for oneself at a given day in one's life, then we can let go of the meaning and continue chanting without intellectualizing. The body is so designed as to retain and unconsciously integrate the revelationthen the chanting becomes perhaps an awareness of our embeddedness within That Which Is Unfolding.....and we enter into a warm silence, a vessel for the next stage of davenning.

It was such a revelation to me that silence could be safe, holy, warm, loving. Growing up silence in the family often meant a cold break in intimacy, a lost emptiness. The silence after a chant in my experience is often so full of love, a nesting of oneself in The One. Through this I have learned to savor silence at home, sensing and radiating warmth and love.

Those attending the workshop in Santa Cruz looked deeply into each concept, tried on the notions, asked important questions.... felt we were like a great spiritual airplane taking off to a new place together. I am grateful for the time we shared.



Making a Pesc of Oneself

Barry: Driving north along the coast from Santa Cruz, we stopped several times to check out the magnificent scenery. It was bitterly cold with a biting wind. We felt better after hauling out our winter coats. Apparently they are predicting a cool summer. Everyone tells us the climate here is the mildest in the country. I guess they mean the coldest summers and warmest winters.

Goldie: We saw wind surfers huddled in down coats! Locals keep explaining that records of the missionaries who first came here reflect similarly cold weather...I sense the hope that this is normal and not some evidence of a planet out of wack.

Barry: Artichoke territory! So we drove a couple of miles inland to the tiny town of Pescadero to indulge ourselves in artichoke soup, steamed artichoke, fish and warm apricot pie. It isn't as bad as it sounds. At this stage of our journey, we are becoming weight conscious and are splitting meals, so it's just one of everything. The food was delicious and much more of the artichoke is edible and sweet when it's fresh.

Goldie: My most sensuous memory will be when we stopped to try organic strawberries fresh off the vine. For the next few miles while I drove Barry kept gradually feeding me the huge sweet strawberries, bite by bite. Berry nice.

Goldie: We were invited to stay in Piedmont (near Berkeley which is near San Francisco) with Sharon and Elliot Ufberg. I met Sharon at the Project Keshet Conference in Chicago. Her vivacity and intellect drew me to her at once. Turns out she is very active in ORT on a national level.....an important part of our Project Keshet work.

Sharon and Elliott's Shabbat table was ringed with the most interesting people - among them Joe, a former Armenian priest who asked the most profound questions who is married to Molly, a brilliant complex systems analyst. Molly introduced me to the notion of creation as a complex learning system which integrates its experiences deeply over time.

Barry then asked how could Rumi and mystics of parallel cultures get the intrinsic holiness and unity of creation so profoundly back in the 1200's and since then, so few people have been able to understand their concepts. Molly suggested that one can accept that all of humanity won't be functioning in the same paradigm at the same time. There will always be those at the leading edge and those who trail...and all the ingredients of civilization continue to churn and play their role in the ever emerging product. Human development is not linear. Today, for example, children are overly involved in computers and many of their skills are lying dormant or undeveloped.

This started a deep discussion with a genetics counselor at dinner which I hope to continue. She explained that Jewish women don't actually get more breast cancer than other groups. It was just that blood samples from Tay Sachs screenings were available for doing research on women and so the only group that there is exquisitely worked out data on is Ashkenazi women.

Barry: Next day we went to downtown San Francisco to see my daughter's paintings on exhibit at the John Pence Gallery at 750 Post Street. Her name is Juliette Aristides - remember her name, she'll be famous one day. The exhibit was of tromp l'oeil style- paintings that are so realistic they fool the eye.

Goldie: Her work is exquisitely fine.

Barry: Afterwards the sun had come out, so we sat at a sidewalk café with coffee and a New York Times. Heaven. We soaked up the sights and sounds of the city. There was lots of touristy stuff for sale in Chinatown; Goldie claimed she was "jaded" so we didn't buy. Get it?

Goldie: Ran into some good ritual. Gotta love it. This took the form of the "Green Street Mortuary Band", a cluster of Sousa march playing Caucasians, proceeding somberly up the main street of China Town in front of an open car in which two obviously sad Chinese people were holding aloft a framed portrait of a middle-aged Chinese man. Behind them was the hearse, etc. At intervals slips were tossed into the air punctured with symbols (does anyone know what might have been written upon them?).

The funeral cortege stopped in front of a building and the back of the hearse was opened (nothing taken out) and a special melody played, the door was closed and the march continued. I introduced myself to the funeral director who explained that the person's soul would run into their home and a bit later their place of work to say good bye to life on this level of existence.

Barry: There was something quite moving about the scene. Traffic was stopped; pedestrians were looking on and noting his death. It wasn't just business as usual and it seemed to me that he was being honored in his death by the community.

Barry: On the way back up from the waterfront we walked up a steep hill - as Goldie put it: "Just for the hill of it." After a few blocks, we jumped on a passing crowded cable car using a local elder as a guide. He showed us how to climb up on the rear and seeing the four dollars in my hand, tried to show me how I could avoid paying, but the conductor had spotted me.

Goldie: They really do have a Rice-a-Roni commercial on cable cars. Loved hanging off the side, holding onto hat, flying down hills in the wind....and the vista below of the harbor and sail boats with colorful jibs all aloft....glorious!

We also toured a WWII submarine.... Tried to imagine 70 men aboard the thin vessel, the fumes, raging heat and sound of the engines....their sleeping berths were perched above the torpedoes....diving for dear life with a 10 second warning. They had by far the highest casualty rate in the Navy and they were all volunteers.

I remembered being at Pearl Harbor a few years back. Having two sons I felt so for the all mothers and all the sons lost....unconsciously began saying *Kaddish* [prayer said by mourners] softly. Soon realized that among the hundreds gathered around me, quite a few also joined in. Soon throughout the room the Jews had a whispered unity.....*oseh shalom bimromav*....may the One who makes peace above do so upon us....silence.

Barry: Last night we had a hike in the forest above Berkeley with Rabbis Nadia and Victor Gross . They are an interesting couple, unique in that they co-rabbi a congregation. The hike was aborted when we discovered ticks all over our clothes.

Goldie: " Gotta leave, I'm getting ticked off." (Believe me it's endless. Perhaps I'll get some relief if you email her to stop.)

We discussed congregational dynamics over dinner. I know nothing about the subject, but found the conversation very stimulating. Started me thinking about it in Gestalt terms, perhaps the congregation could be viewed as an organism with its own awareness cycle, boundaries, resistances, contact zone. This could be a helpful model for rabbis with regard to their issues with their congregations - setting boundaries, exploring defenses, etc. This probably won't mean much to most people, suffice to say that it's one way to view the individuals in a congregation as a single entity in relationship with the rabbi.

Also thought of what is involved in spiritual counseling, and had an image of holding a mirror to the client. One that is selective in reflecting back the positive while allowing the negative to pass through. This reinforces the positive traits and empowers the individual to confront the issues. How often do we hold up a mirror to our loved ones and partners and reflect back the negative, allowing the positive to pass unrecognized?!

We spoke about Goldie's concept of creating a *minyán* [ten people needed for prayer, here used as ten personal support folks] in one's life and explored the idea of designating certain individuals to being one's support. Someone said this does not always include your partner "Someone you sleep with." It occurred to me that we could rephrase this: "Your partner is someone you are awake with" i.e., someone engaged in conscious living with you.

Lest anyone be concerned I'm getting too religious, I'm reading a book called "Smoking, drinking and screwing" short stories by famous writers on the good life. One way to keep me grounded.



Eh! What's a Nappa?

Goldie: Sniff.....seems ok,let's inhale.....cherries....vanilla...pepper....hay....smoked oak.....where are we?

Ahhh....Napa Valley.....wine country.

Didn't the term palate used to be for oil painting? I remember the day my former mother-in-law put a brush in my hand and offered a set of tubes to me. We painted side by side on the same first canvass...and a new world was born. How many shades of green can comprise a forest, what are the ranges of reds in a rose...what color is a shadow? Cerulean and viridian became familiar terms, burnt and raw umber new ideas. Every glance at life yielded the frisky joy of new ways of looking.

Napa held a bit of that....we've been to Provence and the glorious wine country in South Africa, as well. Yet Napa explains itself so clearly. Most being so new, the wineries are each contemporary works of conscious art...lovely to behold. Exhibits and guides educate one to the nuance of the vintner's art.

A winery wall chart shows major international wine producers: Italy, France, South Africa, U.S.A., Chile, Australia, Russia "RUSSIA?" Barry's voice carries incredulity. "I thought they only drank vodka!?"

We step outside and are seated by our haute couture dressed maitre d' for a meal of much anticipated haute cuisine. The waitperson has a memorably husky voice....we have a choice of five white sparkling Domain wines, including the one from their "reserves" and another designed for the millennium. Figuring the latter as expensive gimmicks we select one fruity and one ultra dry. Thought all champagne tastes alike and is tolerated for social ritual?

My mother reads a menu like some people eat fine food...gradually, savoring the imagined tasting of every dish and then orders a grilled cheese or plain chicken breast. I read like she does but when it comes to ordering.....mmmm. We started with local smoked trout marinated in brandy served over creamy goat cheese and feathery greens with a light honeyed dressing topped with toasted scallion shreds. Oh....oooh...this was the rare time I wished Barry and I weren't sharing one meal for two.

The first of the wines arrives, poured by the white gloved wine steward, her thumb planted in that indentation in the bottom of the bottle and poured with obvious skill. From there the Merlot glazed halibut over large grain Israeli couscous with asparagus and mango chutney appears....it went so fast! The next wine glass arrives, drier, goes down easy... You know...

There was that time in Shargorad, Ukraine. The old Byzantine-style synagogue still stands, walls perhaps 18 feet thick to fortress the Jews, when necessary. I was surprised to see it was freshly whitewashed, almost gleaming. We knock and three pleasant peasants open the door. Golden teeth gleaming in the rare sunlight, wearing red stained aprons and the omnipresent babushkeh (head scarf).....My translator asks if we can tour the synagogue.

"Nyet synogogo...." (It's not a synagogue...or something in Russian to that effect.)

"Nyet?" (No?)

They step back, shafts of light pierce the ancient interior to reveal...vats. Converted to a winery. (Who was it that said "Get thee to a winery?")

They invite us in....we see small boarded windows high above the cavernous space, notice with sadness the recessed area which once hid an ark and then, all the lights go out. Outside is broad day light, inside pure blackness. My heart pounds in my ears...will we be robbed? Is there a war?

A match is struck and a candle flame appears in the hand of one of the workers. He seems unconcerned....all seem unconcerned. They sit down on the wooden floor, lean against the cool stone walls and motion to us to do the same. A jar of reagent strips appears from a pocket as he tests the PH of the vat and nods approvingly. My translator looks at me for my intention, obvious questions don't always cross cultures. "Ask why the lights went out, please." She does.

"They go out every other hour." replies the woman. Instead of volunteering more information she pulls up a ladle, dips into the vat which is embedded in the floor (rows of them dot the room, one could barely see to move between them without falling in) and takes a long, deep sip...offering it around to each of us....I pass.

"Ask her why the lights go out?"

The response comes after a great sigh escapes the man, Nikoli. "Here electricity costs more than people. The wine does most of the work. Every other hour we are paid to sit and drink in silence. It is the best job in town." The stub of candle goes out. Seems there isn't another...we will have to wait for the lights to come back on.

The ladle comes by again. I pass, fearful of sharing germs. The woman cocks her head at me, reaches into another pocket and draws out a glass which she wipes with her apron, motioning for me to dip into the vat on my own. I don't pass. Time does.

We shmooz, sing patriotic songs of which I know not a word but seem to divine instantly.....they bemoan the fact they can't break into the American market with their product.....we sing and reflect on capitalism...my glass keeps finding its way into the plum wine...usually a thimble of shabbos wine does it for me....our signing begins to sound professional...soon they have learned the traditional blessing over wine....their Hebrew sounds better than my Russian....I fancy myself a choral director.....The lights come on, scattered ten watt bulbs feel blinding. All struggle to their feet. I ask the translator to arrange for me to buy some of this great stuff. We can't. They ask me "Where is your bottle?"

You guessed it. Townspeople come to the back door and ring the bell. They bring their own crockery bottle or keg and pay to have it filled. No labels, no bottles, cash on the barrel. I dip my glass in a final toast and pour myself out into the dazzling light of day.

"Can I interest you in a dessert wine?" The wine steward's husky voice jolts me back to Napa reality. "No, thanks, I appear to be high enough." As we get up and walk out into the Domain winery rose gardens, I turn to Barry and say, "Wine in Russia? Did I ever tell you about that day in Shargorad?"



The Big Three

Barry: Up and down, around and around, in ever tightening circles. Accelerate, decelerate, brake; over and over again. Our destination was only fifty miles away but the drive seemed to drag on forever. The sky was blue, the ocean turquoise, the river, a sheer drop a thousand feet below on our left- Emerald green. The color of Goldie's face was something in between - before it turned white. She tried a weak joke, something about turning our VanGo into a Jackson Pollock.

Eventually, our roller coaster drive came to an end. Goldie opened up her eyes and ate a cracker. We were just a few miles from Eureka, it was 7:30 p.m and we would stop for the night. Goldie did some quick research and recommended a B & B in Ferndale, Oregon, a Victorian village just 5 miles off the highway. A quick call revealed that the B & B had rooms available, the cheapest with a detached bath at \$85. We spotted the establishment as we drove in, but decided to continue a little further to see what else might be available, perhaps a place not listed in the AAA book.

Indeed a few blocks further was this beautiful newly restored Victorian inn called The Victorian Inn. Sensing an opportunity for something a little more interesting (no, we haven't learned our lesson yet) we went in.

Goldie: Matt Dillon could have walked by and moseyed up to the long, wooden bar and it wouldn't have surprised me. Here we found out who Black Bart was, you'll recall we ate in a saloon of the same name in Flagstaff and saw reference to him in a cowboy museum in Arizona. Black Bart was a legendary stage coach bandit whose reign extended all the way here.

Barry: The proud hotel owner insisted on showing us every room - each one different and only one was occupied - we chose the least expensive, a charming but small room with a fireplace, the first room. We returned with him to the room only to hear "we'll take it." coming from the open door.....

Goldie: A sweet older couple from Alaska took the room. Got to know them in the lobby, he's being transferred down here to start up an old newspaper pulp processing plant. Careers out here are so different to NYC. Meanwhile after the \$85 dollar room, rates went up to \$120, then \$140 for rooms with lace cloths, elegant drawing room drapes, and Victorian claw footed tubs.

Barry: We were offered our pick of the nicest room in the place for the same price - \$85. Goldie thinks her stage whisper "We can always go to a B & B down the block for \$85" may have greased the process. Resisting his offer of dinner downstairs, we walked a few blocks to check out the competition. Menu looked good - artichokes. Just then an overly greasy teenager came out and paused to tell us "the food here is really good." Smelling a rat I probed him. Seems his uncle is the chef. We returned to the hotel for dinner.

Goldie: Dinner commenced with fried artichoke hearts that melted in the mouth...mmm.

Barry: We strolled through Ferndale village the next day. It was our kind of town; spotless, interesting, authentic and no other tourists. Originally settled by Danish farmers in 1852, it became prosperous with its creameries (locals called the creamery owners' homes "fat palaces".) Interesting how much presence the Danes had in this country. We ate Danish in a Danish village in Nebraska, drove by Danish Solvang in California, now here. (Incidentally we found Capetown a few miles from here. It would have felt like home [Barry's from Cape Town, South Africa] had we been willing to drive a few more winding miles to visit it. It had been a stage coach stop on the coast.)

Goldie: After living in Cape May Country, New Jersey for fifteen years it was hard for me to get excited about seeing more Victoriana. Ferndale redeemed the genre, it is unadulterated by modernity. There are no trolley tours or fake brick-a-brack, no horse and buggies making pretenses at evoking times gone by.

Wandered into a small art supply store to find a cluster of women learning tromp l'oeil painting onto plates and furniture. They each have contacted a different master of this art around the world and imported that person if possible, or his/her input into their circle. Small town doesn't necessarily translate to unsophisticated, we've learned. One woman had been to South Africa and recommended a needle point exhibit in Pretoria. On the other hand, when they asked what I do and I answered "I'm a rabbi." Another woman asks: "Isn't that something Jewish?"

Barry: A short drive brought us to Crescent Beach, the most pristine beach I have ever seen. Even the cemetery was unusual, beautifully stacked up the hillside in little tombs. This triggered us to debate conscious burial practices (we really do talk about stuff like this - doesn't everybody?)

A few days previously Rabbi Victor Gross had suggested a Jewish Renewal cemetery. A place "where one can play poker and howl." I think he was jesting, but why not? Why do cemeteries have to be so dead? Why not create cemeteries or at least memorial gardens in town squares or playgrounds, or cancer parks, places where people will come. Why separate living from dead - its all one continuum anyway. Why is sadness the only emotion permissible?

Instead of spending money on elaborate funerals, could we create a new paradigm where the money is funneled to landscapers, artists, etc. Perhaps even small archives where each person's life story is recorded and one item to remember the individual by is saved, etc. "Conscious deading" I call it. Goldie wasn't won over.

Goldie: Won over? You didn't mention that your model includes cremation. I find for myself and many of those I serve that they don't want to leave this world incinerated like garbage, dispatched as ashes and contributing to global warming and air pollution. I love your ideas about increasing the effectiveness of the mitzvah called *zachor* - sacred memory.

There's another mitzvah, called *kavod ha met*, honoring the physicality of death, which takes the care and transition of the body as sacred. We use *taharah*, for example, gentle washing and preparation of a body for burial by a team chanting psalms. We have *shmirah*, sitting with a body until its burial. This frees the soul in its travels to the next realms of being, knowing others will take over the mitzvah of *shmirat ha-guf* care of the body for it. These final acts of caring are also lingering acts of love organized by those whose mourning is most acute.

As a kid I attended Quaker schools (Friends), the graveyard was one of our playgrounds. Filled with massive blossoming trees and copper beeches, it was a glorious space. We knew the names on every head stone and leaping from our perch on one stone to the next would chat to the occupants. Funerals took place outside our classroom windows; it was a normal part of life. In Europe the women would gather in the cemeteries and chat with each other and to their ancestors while rolling the wax for *Havdallah* ritual candles against the stones in the sunlight.

Barry, what a stimulating thought - bringing renewal to the idea of cemeteries!

Barry (getting warmed up): And it'll be an intentional cemetery! We'll house pPeople of all faiths. Take one of these denuded hills, plant trees instead of tombstones, as the bodies decompose the trees grow bigger. We'll be breaking new ground!

Barry: Back to Ferndale. We wondered through the knickknack stores, ice cream parlor and a museum of kinetic sculpture (home-built human-powered whimsical contraptions that are annually raced on land, sand and in water...shaped like a space ship, huge raccoon, etc.) then tore ourselves away to hit the road.

The Redwood National Forest gave us the opportunity to awe at the tallest trees in the world. We hunted down The Big Tree walking past many very big trees on the way. Quote:

Barry: "What is the big tree anyway?"

Goldie: "Harvard, Yale, and Penn."

I don't know how they know it's the biggest. Like the others, you can't see to the top. 350 plus feet tall, their root systems only extend 10 feet into the ground. They have no diseases and natural predators except man (who predates everything) and if undisturbed they can live to 2000 years. Their cousins, the Giant Sequoias, which live inland, are wider in girth and live up to 3000 years.

Goldie: Local papers and shop windows are filled with controversy and dramatic political action to save redwoods, salmon, pelican...you name it. Meanwhile it feels like every Redwood in the world is being carted down the mountain in endless streams by huge hearse-like eighteen wheelers which we pass white lipped on the curves.

Barry: I told Goldie when I die, plant a Redwood tree and attach a little plaque to it with my name on it. That way I'll be remembered a lot longer and not waste forty square feet of planet. Oops, one day you may have to climb 300 feet to read the inscription.

 CROSS COUNTRY #23 

For Sooth

Barry: Tarry not thou knave, for here is a posting to be read. By my trothe we do labor to create this epistle.

Goldie: The fates have brought us to Ashland, Oregon, home to The Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The names of the fates are Rabbi David Zaslow and his wife Devorah Gordon-Zaslow who thoughtfully allocates her story teller's study to us as a temporary lovely home.

Barry: "How sweet it is," a phrase coined by Willard Scott, applies to this town. Here drivers are so courteous they brake for anyone walking on the sidewalk within ten feet of a curb. Gals at the checkout in the supermarket smile and chat unhurried, people appear relaxed and happy.

Here throw away fliers list practitioners of every type of therapy known to humankind and some that are not. So is the apparent happiness because of all the available therapy? Apparently not.; therapists have forsaken incomes for living in a nice place.

Goldie: Two main features dominate. The town park was designed by the same person who did the park under the Golden Gate Bridge by San Francisco . Here a rapidly cascading stream flows through the length of the city park....the thinnest in width of any park I've seen, it joyfully serves via carefully planned rest stops along the stream with a gazebo here, bench there, playground over there and flowers everywhere.

Barry: Culture abounds. We surrender hours to a fine, private bookstore called Bloomsbury Books . Art galleries and restaurants are in profusion. And then of course there is Shakespeare.

I don't know the origins of it, but in a town near here we had the pleasure of watching the Spam Parade. Perhaps it's done as tongue in cheek or spam in eye to the highbrow stuff.

Goldie:.....kids dressed as singing Spams in cans, the Spam Parade Queen, a Spam Ode Country Band, and a satire on the ubiquitous nature of spam now even being an internet concept....once upon a time I met three brothers on a cruise and asked their line of work of them. Their response: "We de-bone ham so it can go in the can." May their efforts be for a blessing, someone has to do it, even if I won't eat it.

We saw Henry 1V part two last night. Front row seats acquired at the last minute, someone must have traded them for another night ("Always ask for the best!" my Aunt Annie, of blessed memory, would say, "then be prepared to negotiate.") With a star-lit sky for our ceiling, the Elizabethan replica theater framed the passion and excellence of the all-male cast and the producer's interpretation was accessible and powerful. Finally my image of Falstaff has sound and face....self-deprecating humor rich in wisdom and the king's son's quietly uttered "heavy lies the head that bears the crown" rendered forever memorable. Accessible, unadulterated Shakespeare, what a concept!

Barry: They have a free outdoor music and dance show prior to the actual production. It's called The Green Show and changes nightly. We picnicked beside one covering the history of people's music for wartime. The newspaper in our laps read "Kosovo Accord Is Reached." An antiwar protester debates us so furiously that we have the triple experience of watching an old war scene, reading about a current war, and defending our views from a frontal attack.

Goldie: Reb David Zaslow's sizeable congregation's recently acquired building is such a sweet prayer space that he and I sat down together to privately pray *minchah* [the afternoon service]. Working on daily spiritual practices has become a theme on this trip because a community in Seattle has requested teaching on this.

Minchah, the afternoon prayer service had various offerings associated with it during Temple times. Since I am not in the least interested in re-instituting the sacrificial system, my *minchah* question has become: "What do I have to offer in what remains of today?" A useful question at 4 or 5 pm when one's blood sugar is low and a full day has already been put in. It helps that chanting a psalm which opens on the theme of happiness (the Ashrei) is a thrice a day tradition.

A sea-change can be felt in these questing spiritual communities, wherever we find them. I find less interest in their being introduced to meditation and new liturgical music - these have become beloved norms. Most such groups have beautiful, well-established Shabbat services and home practices. Increasingly the interest is on how to expand the renewal of Judaism into one's daily life, and on advancing and enhancing existing skills and practices.

At the Ashland teaching, a woman asked "Could one even make housekeeping into a Jewish spiritual practice?" Some suggested chanting a sacred phrase, or perceiving oneself as a modern-day Levite [caretakers and choir members of the Temple that stood long ago in Jerusalem]. Rabbi Gail Diamond suggested when I left my wasband, (ex-husband) and set up a home without funding for

housekeeping, that I consider my house to be sacred space and to treat each facet as one might the polishing of a Torah's silver crown. That said, it helped some, though housekeeping still isn't my field.

Barry: The next day we visited the old gold mining town of Jacksonville - the entire town has been placed on the national register of historic places. Memorable to us was the Jewish-style deli. Goldie told the waitress she was a rabbi and could she speak to the proprietor. The waitress scurried back, whispered to a lady who came out looking around, and around and was startled to see this little female in a pink hat wave to her, my Goldie. She came over to the table, was given a blessing for prosperity by said female rabbi, and walked off totally disoriented.

Next door was Sachs Dry Goods - specializing in hunting and Christian religious message t-shirts. Not a Jewish presence here.

We checked out the cemetery which is 150 years old and has sections for all religions as well as Oddfellows and Freemasons. I'm really into conscious cemeterying now.

Someone who attended Goldie's teaching invited us to visit their glass art studio in nearby Medford, Oregon. The founding artist, Avinoam, grew up in Alaska, longing for and so exploring the qualities of light. Together he and his wife Shari fashion Jewish ritual objects out of fused or blown glass.

Goldie: If you could choose a new last name, what would it be? This couple chose *Zohar* - the name of a foundational mystical text, rooted in the transmission of light. We exchanged gifts....from me to Shari, an edition of the journal "Bridges" on the subject of Jewish women artists. They presented us with a piece perfectly attuned to their name, a *challah* [ritual bread] plate colorized to follow the Kabbalistic color scheme originally designed by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi for the B'nai Or *tallit* (prayer shawl).

I will cherish this plate of many colors and the memory of the bustling hive of creativity in their warehouse studio. Hebrew letters being painstakingly cut out of glass over here....sheets of glorious colors melting into each other over there.

The challah plate's vivid iridescent colors are a reminder of the power of color as a portal for meditation. For those who have or have had vision, color can be a satisfying meditation alternative to sitting or chanting. We are all variously kinesthetically-abled. I'm hoping to create a spiritual art studio as part of The Academy's NYC Center for Jewish Meditation and Spiritual Practice, anyone have space?

Barry: By now the chill that had been blanketing the west coast is starting to leave and it is becoming uncomfortably hot. This makes it easier to decide on our next stop - Crater Lake, elevation 7000 ft and still under ten feet of snow.

Addenda: Among the many responses we have received have been some helpful corrections and information.

1. The restaurant in Santa Barbara's correct name is Casanova.

2. In answer to our query regarding the Chinese funeral we witnessed, Simcha Raphael, author of the most fascinating and excellent *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, notes that the Chinese funeral practice of strewing into the air strips of paper with symbols cut into them might mean: "that the pieces of paper are a writ of pardon, permitting the soul of the deceased to enter Heaven. Interestingly, it parallels a line in Sephardic burial liturgy about the soul of the dead being receiving a "pinkas"[permission slip is probably a good translation].

 CROSS COUNTRY #24 

Forks in the Road

Goldie: On the way to Crater Lake Barry turns to me and says, "I wonder if we should have driven straight to Portland. We could have attended the Native American mask making demonstration tonight, taken a highway instead of these winding mountainous roads. What do you think, Goldie?"

My response -- swift and automatic - was from my repertoire of personal philosophy: "Once I take a fork in the road, I don't look back on the road untaken." Subject closed and I return to my laptop and manuscript writing of this story from an adventure in Israel:

"Her signature sound," murmurs my guide and friend, a doctoral student named Steve Dinero. The heat rolled off of dunes in its own rhythm and I foolishly wish for a desert wind. We are walking to a Bedouin camp and a woman he wants me to meet there. I see nothing but oceanic waves of sand.

"We should have brought more water, a return ticket for the bus, how do you know this is the direction, how will we find the road again?" Nattering reveals my growing concerns.

"Listen, it's her song. Goldie, I'm not crazy.....listen for the rhythm.....bonk, donk, bonk.....bonk, donk, donk, bonk.....bonk, donk, bonk....."

"You're imagining thi.....I hear it. Or I think I hear it....bonk, donk, bonk....bonk, donk, donk, bonk.....they must be over there! What kind of instrument is it?"

"You'll see." he replies.

His strong profile set in the direction of the sound, my be-hatted shadow bobbing with the effort to keep up; together we stride deeper into the desert. Mirage puddles tease my horizon line only to be replaced by dots of movement, white wanderings against the golden sand. Sheep.

Still the strange sound.....Bonk, donk, bonk....bonk, donk, donk, bonk....bonk, donk, bonk.

Now the tents become visible as well as two brown shapes against the sky. I ask about them. He laughs: "The camels. They are status symbols, expensive for them to keep and really useless now that they have jeeps."

"Let me tell you more about the woman I have brought you to meet. Her first husband died. Her second beat her so she left him. This is unheard of with the Bedouin. They say a Bedouin woman can never divorce her husband. She went on to form her own "shig", a traditional hospitality center focused around her campfire. She even has her own tent. You two will be a real pair of semitic feminists."

Only ten years apart in age from me, she looks like she could be my grandmother. Darting eyes show above the elaborate face covering to which are attached beads, bullets, coins and charms. Later I will be gifted with one and discover it is very heavy, needing the whole head for support at different points.

Her name is Fadaeia. Out comes a rush of uniquely fluid guttural Arabic, I almost understand the intent from context and Hebrew cognates, though it is the curiosity in her eyes that speaks loudest. Translation: "She has asked how long it took you to get here."

"Twelve hours."

"Such a long walk!" she exclaims. I hasten to tell her about the airplane and distances to America and bring a tennis ball out of my pocket to serve as a globe.

His hand squeezes my arm in warning, arresting my intentions swiftly.

"Prime directive," whispers Steve who is doing research on the sedentarization of the Bedouin for his doctoral thesis in urban planning.

"This isn't Star Trek", I responded defiantly and incredulously.

"We try not to wreck their innocence excessively." he responds. "O.K.?"

Settling in for the night, I marvel at the small revelations of the day; children wandering barefooted among jagged tin can lids carelessly tossed by Bedouin unromantic about the environment. No diapers, an open air drip dry system is in use. Her grandchild of 3 months is being lulled in a burlap saddle bag draped over a donkey which wanders freely about the campsite. Squealing in delight, the little one watches events with big eyes, the burlap occasionally oozing an emission which dries spontaneously in the intense heat.

The cool, calm morning offers endless blue sky and we enjoy coffee to the sound of her "instrument." The pestle dancing against the mortar:

Bonk, donk, bonk.....bonk, donk, donk, donk, bonk.....bonk, donk, bonk.

A breeze has begun and the tent seems to dance lightly with her tune. She's dropped her veil, we are accepted as more than guests, he has become a family friend.

"She has questions for you." For me? What could she possibly want to know about me?

"O.K., sure."

"Do you have children from your first marriage? Why did you leave your husband?"

Who cares for your children while you are here?"

I respond by asking if she would answer the similar questions about herself, meanwhile pulling out a photo of my two beautiful sons, Adam and Mark.

Her eyes seem to wax compassionate and a woman-sharing grief shapes her face.

"How sad, Allah has only blessed you with two children. The same for me, my husband never forgave me for it."

"Oh! How unfair! For me it was conscious, contraception, you know."

Again the warning hand on my arm, a translation of my comment is rendered as something like "this is grief women can surely share and know."

I turn to him, angry and annoyed hissing: "Why are you corrupting my response?"

"Shhhhh.....they don't know about that, it's against the Shariya (Muslim ethical code) to use contraceptives."

I begin a melancholic internal reflection on my two Caesaerian sections, in this nomadic culture I would surely have died of childbirth without recourse. "Ask her what happens if a pregnant woman comes due and the midwife can't get the baby to come out."

He asks, his body language giving away discomfort with being caught in women's talk.

Her response: "Oh course, we get her to the main road, travel into Be'er Sheva, the nearby city, go to the hospital and have a C Section. What would you do?" She even audibly uses the word C-Section in her Arabic response.

Mutely, I lift my shirt to show the C-section scars.

"Ahhhh." Her vowelish understanding is universal.

Repressing laughter at the absurdity of modern medicine allowed, but talk of air travel not; the conversation takes a serious turn as the Green Patrol becomes our topic. Bedouin are no longer allowed to wander in the Middle East. Virtually every country is forcibly sedentarizing them.....oblivious to boundaries, following ancient routes ingrained by forebears, their flocks wreck havoc with modernity, trampling fences and fields, in some regions tripping land mines....some families are known for heavy trafficking in drugs.

Bedouin are in the way of regional economic development. Towns are being built for them; advanced education being offered, free immunizations. They will be "properly" cared for.

Fadaeia is a rebel who will not give up all her ancestral ways. The desert is huge and she is part of the tribes who are still on the run. Even when forced into the new towns, as soon as backs are turned, out come the tents for some families. She points to our tracks disappearing in the wind...."It is not so hard to disappear in a desert." I reflect internally on the powers of radar and aerial surveillance.

Steve tells me they are given two story houses but don't use the second floor, "it is too uncomfortable and alien to them. They use the toilets as pots to grow herbs. The "shig" structure isn't recognized by the housing set ups, their forms of socialization are completely disrupted. They feel set too close together and the youth fight, there's no work because they can't keep flocks or trade."

I think of Indian reservations, will a casino to provide employment be next? The children run among the sheep and donkey....they seem somewhat like herd animals, left to wander, perhaps only getting responsibilities should they survive long enough to be of value.

Earlier at a tour of regional health facilities a doctor tells me he wants to shake the Bedouin men. "They won't pay for fees for fresh water hook ups in the towns. The women carry the water so the men see no reason to pay for getting it. Dysentery kills many of the children." He asks if I could stay to work with the women; organize them to change their husbands' minds.

We walk outside, Fadaeia and I. A distance away from the tents she digs up a root for me, it tastes like a form of seedless cucumber, succulent, sweet. Not so far away archaeologists and anthropologists are cataloguing civilizations past....."a people once dwelled here who worked with iron...copper, the stables were over there...." Serious funds are set aside to preserve King Solomon's mines, horse stalls..."

Are there no rights for an anachronism, just museumification? Before my very eyes another indigenous people is being terminated by modernity.

Over coffee and pita made fresh before our eyes over an open fire she tells of her plans to protest. She will pitch a tent in Jerusalem in front of the Prime Minister's home. "Who better than Jews, she asks, "to understand the meaning of preserving one's ancestral lands and ways of life?"

On the road home I ask Steve: "How can we help her?" No answer.

"You will use her life for a doctoral thesis and just document? These are real people, you have an obligation!"

He couldn't then see my point, he is just an observer.

And the sad thing is, looking back to that day ten years past, so was I.

Footnote: Went back to find her not long ago. No one knows where she went; a few remember her appearance in front of the Prime Minister's house. Even among the Bedouin, no one seems to remember her name.

This story has continued to haunt me after all these years. The absurdity of not being allowed to taint the purity of their culture by talking about contraception and airplanes while the government is far more radically destroying their way of life.

The ethics remain very unclear to me.....lobby for her freedom to roam? What about the burgeoning kibbutzim nearby and danger to Fadeia and family of tripping over mines near the borders...borders they barely feel and don't recognize? Teach her daughter about contraception?.....she probably quietly knows and isn't it my obligation to respect the Shariya as their choice? Rally supporters to at least gather some more land so the Bedouin can move about somewhat? Is a "reservation" really a better life than accommodating fully to modernity? I still don't know. I just don't know. But mainly I am bothered that I did nothing.

We are still driving. Ahead of us looms Mount Mazama, Oregon; snow capped and magnificent. Returning to my laptop, I read this story to Barry, my trusty spiritual partner.

Barry: "So let's look at the options available to you at that time. You had a choice. You could have stayed and worked pro-actively with the Bedouin, or returned home, finished your final semester of rabbinical school, rejoined your children, and completed the legal work on your divorce. Am I correct?"

Goldie: Y...es.

Barry: And you've thought about this for the past ten years?

Goldie: I guess you could say that.....a mitzvah undone seems to burn within the soul.

Barry: (Now smiling) And when you take a fork in the road, you never look back? About an hour later, we found ourselves hiking the trail alongside the Rogue River with its 410,000 gallons per minute rushing through a narrow gorge. Coming to a fork in the path, Barry stops and says: "Imagine Fadeia is standing on the right hand fork. Speak to her. What do you want to say?"

I begin to ask what has happened in her life these ten years, to ask for forgiveness for my inaction...he gently tugs me down the other fork, she gets further away, the conversation disrupted by events. He lets us move back toward her only to then be tugged back the other way....towards resolving life's other emphases at that point in time over a decade ago, a painful first marriage, young children, work...rabbinical studies....

My friend Louise Vanett always says "Don't should all over yourself or anyone else."

Barry says: "You try not to use the term "should," but in effect you "should" all over yourself on a regular basis. A person of G*d can be more humble, more tolerant of being human, more forgiving of others and self.

Goldie, you did do a mitzvah that day. You were a compassionate listener. It's time to let it go....graciously integrate your humanness with your rigorous mitzvah expectations."

The residual issue Barry has revealed is not so much forgiveness of self for miss-stepping (a form of *teshuvah*) as it is the need for greater *shiflut* (humility). "Shiflut" is the quality which Hassidic masters teach is the real source of spiritual integrity, the knowledge of how limited we really are. In an earlier post I criticized a colleague for excess zeal in pressing others to do mitzvot....how true it is, what some therapists say, that what troubles us most about others is often what remains to be transformed within own's own self.

Barry places a small dead branch into my hand, attached to it are intricate lace lichens, the tip is curved like a finger. "This can be a 'yad' [pointer] for our Torah." he says.

Goldie: The Torah of our lives.



Art or Soul?

Barry: Crater Lake, G*d as the ultimate landscape artist.

The experience of seeing it was that of a post card magnified to cover my entire visual field. The green trees contrasted with the white snow and grey rocks. The lake is blue, flat, an almost perfect mirror reflecting the clouds, the mountains and the snow. And the entire area was blanketed in silence.

There was poetry in that landscape and spirituality and artistry.

The story of Crater Lake began half a million years ago when magma started spewing out of the earth. The volcano reached 12,000 feet then 7000 years ago it erupted and imploded. The explosion was 42 times greater than the recent one of Mt. Saint Helens. The resultant Mount Mazama is now 8000 feet high i.e. the mountain blew off one third of its height with a resulting crater that is about 6 miles in diameter.

The crater gradually filled with water and is now a lake, the surface of which is 1000 feet below the rim. The area is blessed with an average snowfall of 44 feet a year. This year they had twice as much. As a result the drive around the rim is open only from July to October. Likewise the lodge - all four stories of it, is buried by the snowfall, and even now in June, some rooms are still covered.

Those are the statistics. For me, I don't see the landscape of the universe as merely G*d's handiwork. I see it as a manifestation of the Beloved. So I see some art - where the artist has transmitted his or her humanity, spark, creativity, whatever one calls it - as a manifestation of his/her Humanity; something to be respected for the continuum of spirit and Creator that it is. Not to be worshiped - just as I wouldn't worship a rock or lake.

My ideas are half baked but are being triggered by all the beauty I have seen, both natural and human made.

Goldie and I had a debate a few months ago. Walking through an exhibit of Picasso art that had been flown to this country, I turned to her and said: "Imagine the loss to humanity if the plane had crashed and all this art had been lost."

Goldie's response was predictable: "and I wouldn't exchange all the art on the plane for the life of the pilot."

Naturally, I followed up with: "Well, what if it was all of Picasso's art or all the Mozart works that went down?"

Goldie: "Would you give up your life if that could save his art?"

Barry: "I would. After all, I'm going to die sooner or later anyway."

Goldie: "To me that's idolatry, making art into a god. In just a few thousand years of humanity there have been many outstanding artists".

Barry: "Art is an extension of the human spirit, a creation that lives beyond the grave."
The debate continues to simmer.

Barry: Our hosts in Portland, Oregon are Sara and Fred Harwin, both artists. Sara shared a favorite book of paintings with me. It is of stunningly realistic paintings of the human body by Alex Grey, showing every artery, vein, lymphatic, internal organs, as well as electromagnetic fields and auras surrounding the body. The artist is attempting to create a spiritual experience in the viewer; something more than a sensory or emotional experience.

Goldie: The pictures illustrate precisely what I experience when doing meditation. It has recently become possible (through the space program) to study the human body without the effect of the earth's magnetic field. Magnetic fields on the body have become apparent through these studies....revealing the Kabbalists' experience of a "River of Light" as our embodied reality.

Grey's art takes the emerging awareness of capabilities and systems and receptors that humans have and renders them visible to us.....artist as prophet, transducing the present and future through his soul onto the canvas.

Barry: We then looked at several books (Sara has a large library) of art by the painter Chuck Close. He paints huge portraits. As a youth he was learning-disabled and labeled stupid and lazy. Well into his career as a realist painter, he had a blockage of a spinal artery and became partially paralyzed. He now paints with a brush strapped to his arm and successfully changed his style to one of more abstract, but equally impressive art; anything but lazy and stupid.

Goldie: Often humans paint together, on the canvass with the One.

Under your feet notice a change in texture. The stones have gone from smooth to round...the path curves left then right and again gradually to a temple-like gateway. Gateways prepare us for a shift of spirit.

Look, someone is weeding the moss within your range of sight. Yes, patiently with tweezers weeding the moss! Each movement of his arm is part of a meditation. Notice the bamboo gate is shaped like the arm of a kimono. Here white azaleas are set to suggest the cascade of a waterfall, over there roof tiles serve as edging evoking ripples on a lake.

In Japanese gardens something is termed a rock until it is deliberately placed and then it becomes a stone. I could stay for a thousand years in such a garden....wandering amongst the feathery low trees, steams with with koi fish, the only striking points of color which guide us in their currents through each of the gates of the garden. Five and half acres, five dedicated gardeners carry on the work of the master from Japan who fashioned this canvass of harmony.

The tea house beckons, transported from Japan and so carefully placed....gates within gates of subtle garden lead to its entrance. Gone to the next world, friend, contemporary and scholar, Rabbi Seth Brody, his very memory is a blessing. We would often walk beside falling waters, his way of being - warmly silent...should I ask for his thoughts, almost always he would share a garden scene from the Jewish mystical traditions of such magnificence, levels within levels, waterfalls for which one must watch, and gates leading to gates, leading to The One. He would have loved this garden, almost as much as the Gan Eden [Garden of Eden] which he has doubtless attained.

Pour yourself into a new space now where red, peach, orange, white, even violet and black rejoice in traditional forms and then play with creative possibility all around you. Where to look first? At a single petal, the plant, the profusion? Portland's civic rose gardens extend from formal Elizabethan gardens all the way to tennis courts with climbing rose bushes on their enclosures. Forms and formats I'd never dreamed of appear in this show....colors so buttery and intense or variegated that the infinitude exploded on me and petals float through my consciousness even now.

"As above, so below." said our sages. So many palates of possibility...who creates at least one new rose and goes on to Gan Eden, restores a bit of Gan Eden right here among the living. Sara has brought her digital camera along. The possibilities of the technology captivate us - new tool and new palate.

We who are part of the palate of the one, created perhaps to help magnify and multiply the creativity. Such a glorious gift it often is to be alive and becoming discerning apprentices in the studio of The One.

Barry: So, we drove with Fred and Sara Harwin on the old scenic highway to the Columbia River Gorge. The road was built in 1913 and follows the Oregon Trail. We stopped at several waterfalls ending up at the 600 foot Multnomah Falls.

Goldie: Becoming the water, I enter free fall, imaginary arms spread wide over the mountain's side, sprung outward by the outcropping of rock, tickled by the change in terrain and not at all disturbed to break into rivulets heading to divergent goals....at one in the One. Feel so rested and well-misted, like a beloved plant.

Goldie: Do you sense that we are gorging on nature? This fall we're moving to NYC and these memories will be nutrients for the experience. (P.S. We'll need an apartment, please pass the word.)

Barry: Lunch was at the lodge next to the falls. Before even ordering, I suggested we share our worst restaurant service stories. The Cosmos responded by us waiting two hours to have our meal arrive. The kitchen manager was appropriately apologetic and waived our bill. Fred gave the waitress a big tip, and all was well.

Goldie: My worst was when as a teen....wearing pink lace mini-skirted dress, hair teased high, hoped for boyfriend seated across from me at some bar mitzvah or other....the waitress comes by and begins to lower her tray....a juicy steak decides to make a break for it, deflects off my lacquered beehive hairdo, slides down my face, a dash on the bodice and lands in my lap. Her comment: "Don't worry honey, you ordered fish. Can I get you another napkin?" Now that was poise.

Barry: What do roses, bungee jumping, war ships, junk food have in common? Damned if I know. But this is how the annual Rose Festival is celebrated here in Portland. This bungee works in reverse. The lunatics are catapulted up a few hundred feet, then they spin up and down and around. I stand back hoping not to have junk food rain down on me. Never saw it happen - a tribute to the effectiveness of the gastro-esophageal sphincter; which brings dinner to mind.

Goldie: Dinner restores palate to its rightful use. "oBA," selected by Sara and Fred is madly alive Mediterranean cuisine with Sephardi flair. We shared halibut crusted with garlic and toasted pumpkin seeds and sweet salmon marinated in cilantro and lime, beside peppery corn meal and coconut rice, trussed in a banana leaf beside a lake of just not enough black beans.

Margueritas? But of course.

Goldie: Now the ultimate independent bookstore; Powell's - world's largest new and used bookstore. They give you a map upon entering (another one of those couple dichotomies - Barry does maps, I do narrative directions)...he found everything he was looking for. I introduced hovering singles to each other in the huge, well-categorized Judaica section.

Barry: Our host Fred Harwin is a medical illustrator, he also creates prosthetic eyes. His images of the eye include every capillary on the conjunctiva. I stare into his renderings of the iris and am reminded of Crater Lake.

Goldie: And you are a physician, Barry!

Barry: We weren't taught to appreciate the human body - its magnificent artistry and design. Perhaps they were afraid we would see it as artists do and not just as a complex machine to be worked on.

Goldie: Fred showed us his office. We reviewed photos of adults and children born with sightless, overly small eyes...or eyes destroyed by injury or illness. We saw the "after" photos. It was impossible to distinguish the prosthetic eye from the natural.

We observed how he makes the eyes - from impressions, two castings, fittings, hand painting the iris and pupil, glazing...and more we didn't even retain. In the palm of my hand the finished project is the size of a small shell, concave on the inside, a thing of great beauty looking up at me. This too is another new type of canvass, yielding the aesthetics of prosthetics.

Fred spoke of his ways of working...A person receiving a new eye has to learn to move his/her head consciously to help the eye appear to follow the direction of their interest or speech since the range of motion of the eye is limited.

Fred is not only an exquisite craftsman. He is a healer. Many who see him are devastated by their loss. Fred spends hours with each recipient helping them to re-orient how they use their body and "see" themselves. For many a huge shift occurs in self-esteem.

Barry: Alas human nature being what it is, some patients are disappointed because they expect the prosthetic eye to see. HMO's are on his back to take short cuts and discount his fees. Seeing what he does, I find myself becoming angry when I hear this. Fred's primary field for many years was as a medical illustrator of great renown. His sabbatical included a cross-country year-long trip with stops at fourteen medical centers to learn about how to make such prosthetics.

Goldie: Back at the Harwin household, Sara is busily preparing for the Aleph Kallah, a festival of Jewish renewal. Her tall *kippot* (scull caps) are legendary at the renewal retreat center, Elat Chayyim in the Northeast. Sara's work is that of the fine artist, her designs are filled with joy, dance, continuity, fluidity and an elegant specificity of line and medium. She also makes silk and fabric and custom *tallitot* (prayer shawls).

Often I am asked why I wear a *kippah* or a hat all of the time, at this point in my life. For me it indicates that I am in a conscious relationship with G*d as a Jew, open also to public scrutiny as a Jew.

When my son Adam was small a reporter came to his day school. She asked the orthodox head master why only the boys were wearing head coverings. He replied that it is to remind them of the mitzvot, offering the traditionalist spin that girls are inherently holier and don't need such reminders. My son was quoted in the newspaper as saying: "Girls aren't holier than boys, they're people, just like us!" He then continued, "I thought the purpose of a *kippah* is to replace with a reminder of holiness what got cut off!" Makes more sense than most explanations. Sara has another take. On Shabbat morning we pray "Yismach Moshe", this prayer speaks of the "crown of glory You placed upon his head when he stood before You on Mount Sinai."

This spiritual radiance she experiences as the source of the Jewish impulse to crown the head with a *kippah*, as a symbol of that transcendent moment; works for me. Today I'm wearing a kippah made with my sons. It has tiny rocks forming a path and feathers we gathered upon it....a crown in honor of the Artist of this glorious day.

Barry: So, Oregon has been a sensual experience. The creativity of nature and humankind: the collaboration between the two as in the hybridization of roses carefully designed Japanese gardens,

and rose gardens, expertly prepared food. And finally the beautifully designed human body - captured by artists Chuck Close, Alex Grey, Sara and Fred Harwin.

Addendum: Barry: Pleased to see that some people are actually still reading our postings. How do I know? Every now and then I throw out an intentional mistake like "How sweet it is" being a Willard Scott instead of Jackie Gleason trademark.

Thanks to those who wrote to point that out.



Practicing Good Spousekeeping

Goldie: Current feelings include ecstasy that I have flown east this week to see my sons and parents; excitement to head this week's Board of Admissions meetings which will determine the precious incoming class at The Academy for Jewish Religion. And frankly, I miss the people we've gotten to know along the way on our cross country trip.

Barry and I will report to you from our separate locations this week - he's in Seattle with his daughter Juliette and the inevitably gorgeous grandchildren. I'll rejoin him there on the 28th.

Before heading east, I was privileged to give a teaching for a local congregation, Eitz Or of Seattle. Their young rabbi, David Wolfe-Blank, beloved friend, colleague and phenomenal innovator and teacher, died in a tragic car accident almost a year ago. The teaching was dedicated to his memory.

The most important spiritual practices, as my friend and co-worker Rabbi Shohama Wiener teaches, are gratitude and forgiveness. Barry has taken on saying the *modeh ani l'fanekhah* prayer as his new practice for this trip. This is the practice of waking up with praise for the Creator, in gratitude for a new day of life. Just before I left he said: "Come onto the porch with me, let's do 'modeh' together." Guy sure knows how to get to a rabbi.

Our little grand daughter Natalia is uncommonly forthcoming with comments of appreciation.....including her sprightly interjections throughout the day of "Know what Mommy? I LOVE You!" Each time she does it she acts as though she is rediscovering that this is indeed the case.

I first learned the value of positive spirituality the hard way. There is a spiritual crisis that attends some of life's traumatic moments for some of us. It is a crisis of meaning and identity, we cease to feel recognizable to ourselves and G*d may seem eclipsed, inaccessible or in retrospect, to have been a hopeful illusion.

I remember feeling like a cartoon character whose several sheets of transparencies had gotten out of alignment - I didn't fit together inside anymore....after an initial burst of life energy at getting free from a marriage gone toxic, I tailspun into an acute depression. Couldn't even pick up a cup and move it from one side of my plate to another. Losses upon losses, all unanticipated, were mounting up as the institutions and patterns that had governed my life each let go like ropes breaking off a ship in a dock during a storm.

The Viennese psychotherapist to whom I took myself, wondering if institutionalization was in order, he...well he chuckled. "Zo, little rabbi, it is good news. You have not the endogenous depression, you have the reactive depression."

Me: "Doctor, what does that mean!?"

Doctor: "My dear, it means you earned it."

He looked at me over his unlit pipe, goatee twitching and wrote two prescriptions. "In Jewish tradition we are told to keep one piece of paper in one pocket which reads 'I am nothing but dust and ashes.' In the other one that reads 'The whole world was created for me.'" (Yeah, I know, I know that bit.) His blue eyes bear down on me, "Here is a prescription for Prozac for one pocket and Zanax for the other. If you fill them, you will come see me weekly, ya? For medical supervision, ya? \$125 per session, ya?" (Oooff! Eeek! Auck! Expensive!)

"Or, perhaps you will try a remedy which is also in our tradition, that of finding one hundred blessings in every day. When you torment yourself with certain thoughts, around and around, begin to notice this that you are doing to yourself. Then, interrupt the thoughts by asking, "How can I bless this day? What can I bless about today?" Perhaps even something right in front of you - a flower, a kindness, a discovery on the news, the fact of butterflies.

Find a hundred blessings in each day. And, should this work, maybe give a little *tzedakah* (donation) somewhere in my name in honor of your accomplishment and savings to your pocket book."

His rare wisdom in helping me at the level of soul shaped my days. We never even met again. My friend Shefa Gold taught me how to use meditation to strengthen this approach to blessing. Color began to reenter each moment with each blessing, as though the blessing functioned like a magic wand, restoring my color vision and joie de vivre. Energy began to dawn anew, what some eastern traditions calls the "Kundalini awakening." Thankfully, I had many competent guides to help me integrate the glorious nature of such a time on the sine wave of life.

Barry: (who has read on e-mail some of what Goldie intends to post.)

Goldie's reminder about 100 blessings brings to mind an episode in Cape Town , South Africa, earlier this year.

She and I were sitting in an outdoor restaurant in Camps Bay, South Africa. It was a balmy evening. The sky was a pageant, the ocean calm with the lapping of small waves, and the restaurant filled with beautiful people having fun, many of them tourists from all over the world. We were happy to be there, and I smiled when I thought of the winter weather we had left behind at home.

A bomb had gone off in the Caledon Square police station that day. No doubt folks at home would be reading about it and wondering if we were OK. No one would have reported that it had been a great day for the beach, or that 10,000 tourists had had a great day of sightseeing and shopping.

They only report the bad news.

Isn't that the way we view life? We think of the one finger that has the splinter in it and take for granted the other nine. This is an issue I struggle with all the time. Perhaps counting blessings will be a reminder of all the positives in my life.

Goldie: If I close my eyes it feels like Cape Town out on our deck tonight, the Cape Doctor is blowing all the way to Reading, PA. (Cape Doctor is not a term for my beloved Barry; it is what South African locals call the amazing, shifting wind which purifies the air delightfully.)

Too often this year I've met individuals who have been damaged by irresponsible clergy, shamans, gurus, therapists, shrinks. Increasingly there seem to be some of those who label themselves as "alternative practitioners", "shamans", "spiritual counselors" who have minimal training and receive no supervision. Scary. It takes a lot of supervision and skill to learn how to discriminate, for example, whether someone is having a spiritual breakthrough or a manic-depressive episode, or both. And even if the former, takes a lot of skill to help someone have a positive time of it.

Guess "Practicing Safe Spirituality" is going to be a necessary manuscript to finish. Trying to create

principles for noticing if something isn't quite kosher with the person to whom one is entrusting professional contact with one's soul, principles for evaluating the safety of a group. With all the millennial *meshuganosis* afoot it can be dangerous to be too trusting, or more likely, it's always been a problem.

Meanwhile, guess who spent most of the day in that most sacred of endeavors? Reb Yours Truly at home in Reading, PA washing, ironing, weeding, cleaning the fridge....with three passionately interested-in-getting-all-the-attention-for-themselves pussy cats all over me. Rabbi David Stein wrote to say that there is much holiness in housekeeping - for example changing the dishes for Passover. Ahhh....sweet how a bit of perspective can be of help; at least it's not Pesach yet!

Still, I liked practicing good spousekeeping much, much better. Barry - I miss you!

Lotsa love and blessings,
Your Goldfish



Estate of Resistance

Characters:

Dino – my son in law
Natalia – my granddaughter
Billy – their houseguest
Barry – the hero

Action:

We stroll nonchalantly into the house on the corner described in a flyer as: "Classic 1908 sun – filled home surround by beautiful mature gardens, and updated while retaining the original charm."

The entire lot is 4750 sq ft. In the absence of Goldie, and in the family tradition, I whisper to Dino: "Not a lot of lot." This reminds me of the Pennsylvania Dutch woman back home who said on doing her wash: "The All is all but all" meaning the detergent was almost used up.

The single tiny bathroom is devoid of anything on the counter except a vase containing flowers. Likewise the kitchen is almost filled by one bottle of wine resting on the counter. The two bedrooms upstairs share a single walk-in closet. The flyer says this: "could make an easy addition for a second bathroom."

Wondering why no one has thought of doing this in 91 years, I turn to the agent hovering downstairs and ask: "Where will they have their closet?" He replies something to the effect of "on Mars." I agree with him.

Later Dino tells me he had said: "Armoire." I want to return to ask how they would get it up the narrow stairway but think better of it. Asking price: \$329,000. We have arrived in Seattle.

In other words we have arrived at our destination, basically the end of the driving portion of our trip. Why Seattle? Because of Natalia – our golden haired, 3 year old granddaughter and Jason her 7 month old brother. Of course there are other reasons such as Juliette my beloved daughter, Dino, cousins Margaret and Derrick. (Now if anyone asks me: "Would you exchange Natalia or Jason for all the Picasso's?" the answer is obvious.) On our arrival Natalia hugged me tightly and had to be gently pried off after a few minutes. Juliette had prepared a delicious lunch of baked asparagus and cheese

soufflé, olive bread, salad and cheeses.

Goldie (emailing Barry on her brief Seattle recollections):

Despite mounting anxiety at leaving Barry for the longest period in months, today included one richly fascinating excursion. We visited locks where boats are transitioned between salt water and fresh water bodies which are at different sea levels. Perhaps Barry can explain the technical process....for me it was fascination enough to watch several boats floated into a lock, packed together like people into an elevator, and to see them lowered beneath us, to continue on into the harbor.

Unique to this site is a project which, oddly enough, unites in common cause both fish eaters and vegetarians. Since the locks are placed into the path of essential salmon life cycle routes, environmentalists have achieved a compromise which reserves one whole side of the water way for the fishes' laborious upstream commute. Their passage is facilitated by an area called the salmon ladder, where they can connect with the reverse current unfettered by the eddies of commerce.

Underground windows allow us to view the sleek fish who are just now turning from green to their name-sake color.....by going against the current the water becomes like steps for them, rather than a propellant, a tool for going upwards....only knowing they are designed for it gives me more curiosity than compassion.

On the other side, by the locks, sprinklers run when ships are not passing through so as to ward off the sea gulls who hover to nab any salmon taking this side route, rendered excessively vulnerable by the waters suddenly made shallow. We are there when the sprinklers cease and watch countless baby salmon fulfill their place in the food chain prematurely.

Barry: That evening, Goldie gave her usual 110 % at a workshop and the following day she left to take care of business in the east coast leaving me to do the important stuff. So, without wasting any time, I visited Boeing Field Air Museum on the way back from the airport. This is as interesting as the SAC museum in Nebraska with more emphasis on commercial flight. In terms of flying, I'm the equivalent of a teetotaler yet even I was turned onto flying – almost.

Where would you go to find a huge statue of Lenin from the former Soviet block, a defunct rocket from the cold war, a two ton cement troll lurking under a bridge amongst other things. Why, at the annual Fremont Solstice Parade.

Fremont used to be run down – but it has turned and now calls itself the center of the universe. It's a fun-loving funky arty neighborhood. The parade is a satiric half – assed, tongue in cheek affair. This year there was an issue whether the police would allow the nude bicycle streakers to appear, so of course they had pseudo-cops chasing pseudo-streakers. They poked fun at the incomplete stadium – the roof of which is incomplete and doesn't work. They spoofed the weather and politicians.

Nudity was brief, the republic survived, and no police appeared.

Nice to have my own pad and not crowd the kids. A member of the local Jewish renewal community, Linda, hosted us the first two nights, and as luck would have it, left town for ten days to visit relatives. So I'm taking care of her cat Lucky and the houseplants. It feels good having the same bedroom night after night! Lucky wasn't to be seen for the first two days, preferring to hide under the bed. Then suddenly a shift occurred and I couldn't keep him off my face. We now sleep together. So Goldfish has been replaced by cat.

I took my daughter out on a date. We went to Denny Regrade. It used to be called Denny Hill till genius a century ago decided to regrade and flatten the hill destroying what could have been a neighborhood with a spectacular view of the waterfront. We both became a little tipsy on cocktails and had an excellent dinner. We headed for coffee and desert at Sit and Spin but there were at least forty people waiting in line to get in. This is a Laundromat / coffee

shop / restaurant / bar / game room – a clever and creative concept in taking a mundane task to a higher level. A beehive of activity, but no one, I noted, was doing any laundry.

The main park in Seattle is called Green Lake Park. "Green" because the engineers lowered the lake seven feet and didn't realize that the water couldn't run out, so it stagnated. (They seem to have a thing about lowering lakes and hills.) Seattle through some wonderful foresight by its citizens a century ago now has hundreds of parks.

Natalia took us to the aquarium. This was the third one I have visited in the past few months, and each time I have been amazed by the ingenious and often bizarre ways that fishes have adapted to various conditions. We did the aquarium thing because of the weather. On our travels we've encountered spring, winter, intense heat of summer, spring again, and now winter. It's gray, drizzly, cold and I'm assured by Juliette that winter does not get any worse than this.

The real world is intruding. Vinnie is up for sale. House in Reading is being put up for sale. I am beginning to look at what I'll be doing in the fall.

In the year and a half since we have been married we have traveled to three continents, attended numerous conferences and workshops, I have closed my practice, Goldie has left her congregation, become dean of a seminary, sold her house and moved to Reading. In August she will be traveling to the Ukraine. Since Goldie's been offered a promotion at The Academy for Jewish Religion, now we are contemplating moving to New York.

It's been quite a ride folks!

Goldie: Perhaps we can put an ad in the newspaper: FOR SALE: AN ORIGINAL VANGO.

Addendum:

Goldie: We received a number of heartfelt comments from readers of this travelog regarding the matter of one hundred blessings. Felt like a shower of blessings coming at us, wow! This has also caused me to reflect back on that encounter with the Viennese psychiatrist. There was another part that was uniquely helpful that went something like this:

Psychiatrist: "Zo, my little rabbi, the reactive depression is a therapeutic phenomenon, ya. It will help you burn through the anger and hurt of this time."

Goldie: I came to think of reactive depression as a smoldering, gradual release of toxins.....a slow form of burning the *shmutz* (Yiddish for dirt) we seek out and address around the "house" of the "soul" before Pesach. Burning off the shmutz from my life, deeper and deeper layers was a way of decomposing my former marriage, so that the decayed matters from disappointments, losses and discontents, to my surprise, became fossil fuel for building a new kind of life. I've also noticed that depression burned off my resistance to needed personal change, once the anger and hurt had a good long prior time on the altar.

As Barbara, one of our readers, notes, the nice thing about finding one hundred blessings is that this allows the depression its due, without requiring our constant suffering or guilt at indulging in our own wounds. After all, there is a nice Hassidic saying which applies overtly to the physical realm that goes: "A small hole in the body, a big hole in the soul."

Meanwhile NYC looks and feels great to me. I pray the coming year will be as wonderful as its potential appears to be.

 CROSS COUNTRY #28 

Healing Work

Here in Seattle, my cousin Margaret Chasen is a teacher who has developed a program for children with serious developmental delay problems. This program called Options, involves placing these kids in their own class in a first rate school. Unlike the usual situation, the children are not isolated from society. The entire student body is involved in creating a community for these kids.

Margaret showed me her annual report - five pages long, filled with details of activities and field trips, including one to England. The program has had a major impact not only on the kids themselves, but also their families, the other children in the school, and the teachers. At the same time, it has lessened the children's dependency on professionals such as therapists, neurologists, etc. She has received several national awards for her innovative work.

Margaret spoke with passion, her face radiated as she described what she had created. A few weeks ago, she quit her job. The administration had doubled the tuition on these kids, and in other ways undermined the work she had done.

Within a week of her resignation, because of her reputation, she was hired by an excellent school district. She will now be teaching normal children English. This is of little consolation to her. She remains filled with profound sadness for her kids and a sense of loss that this groundbreaking work will come to an end.

I shared with her my experiences working as a family physician for a corporation for four years. I too ultimately quit because of atrocious management and the way the practice was undermined. I too, spoke about the impact of my work extending beyond the patients to their families, friends, staff, and medical community. My practice was also a radical departure from the usual, since it involved elements of total quality improvement, traditional therapy, gestalt psychotherapy, and mind body medicine.

Margaret spoke about healing her students; I spoke about healing my patients. For her, teaching was more than instilling facts and skills. Medicine for me was more than curing the immediate illness. She described a case of a disabled child. I described a case of an eighty year old widow. We agreed that we did not place a value judgment on the life we were working with. We discovered a great overlap in what we each had been doing, and neither will be doing now. (If any one has access to Medical Economics, my story is being published in July.)

Some time ago, we were having dinner with a group of friends. In the background, I overheard Goldie telling someone: "You are doing really holy work." I turned to her and asked what work she was talking about. She replied: "He designs guidance systems for missiles." I flipped: "If that's holy work, I wonder what isn't!" was my retort.

It took a lot of processing till I figured out that it doesn't necessarily take a "holy" person to do holy work. It has everything to do with intention. Our friend is working on missiles that will defend us from attack.

So medicine remains focused on the battle over money while the rest of the world moves on. Last night I watched a TV show and saw an electrical engineer "cure" people by running his hands over their photographs. A non-physician from Canada was "curing" cancer by injecting some concoction at several hundred dollars a pop. He kept no records or statistics. Why not?

On the other hand, there is much organized medicine can learn from complementary practitioners. In general we are resistant. Why? Perhaps it's because it is much safer to fight the same old battles than to look at ourselves, see where we have taken the wrong turn in the road, heal ourselves and move forward. So the public is left unprotected, to fend for itself and sort out quackery from ethical care. Goldie talks about practicing "safe spirituality." I'm suggesting the concept of "safe healing."

I spoke to a highly regarded general surgeon here in Seattle. His income has plummeted as have those of most physicians here, and he is starting a computer company. Physician morale in this lovely, but expensive city is terrible. Nor will physicians tolerate any discussion about issues of personal morale, spirituality, complementary medicine, etc.

In yesterday's New York Times, I read that the Justice Department has approved the acquisition of Prudential health insurance by Aetna. Already a major player in determining how healthcare is practiced; Aetna is about to become the leading managed-care company. I have had dealings with Aetna over the years. There is a great deal I can write about but won't.

In today's news, the AMA approves a move to become a bargaining entity for physicians, basically a union. Instead of finding out where we went wrong, reformatting, becoming healers with our own code of ethics – not that of the managed care companies – we are engaging in a battle that will help our incomes and nothing else.

I refused to join the AMA. Considering their huge budget, I always thought that it did very little except act as a lobbying group for greedy physicians. It missed many opportunities to act proactively to deal with the issues of an overly expensive health care system. When pressured to join by the local state society, I resigned and created my own organization – The Physician Interactive Group.

I see neither organization as solving the healthcare problem. Essentially, the one is trying to maintain physicians' incomes, the other cut them. Anyone who doubts this point of view, imagine walking into the boardroom of either and asking their philosophy of medicine as holy work.

Few doubt our obligation to fight for our constitution. I believe that just as sacred is our need to fight to retain spiritual integrity in those who teach our children, and help us when we are ill. Today, I could have spent the day working for some corporation. I could have seen thirty or forty patients. Instead I helped my daughter clean house and organize cabinets. Which did I prefer doing? No contest!

Goldie is enroute to meet Barry for the Alaska leg of our trip and promises to write soon!



The Barber of Seattle

Barry on the subject of: RAIN

Ah, the "if only's." I've counseled many people over the years about "if only's." Lately I've been flooded by them -

If only it wasn't so cloudy you could see the incredible mountain ranges.
If only it wasn't so cold you could swim in the lake.
If only it wasn't raining we could go to the park.

You may notice a that a common thread runs through these comments based on the fact that it's been drizzling or pouring virtually non stop for the past week.

So my daughter Juliette who moved here 6 months ago, protests vigorously: "But Dad, this is so unusual. The weather here is normally terrific and sunny." I'm tempted to believe her except for three reasons that give me pause.

1. She is the same person who for fourteen years has protested vigorously that she did not take on our obnoxious neighbor. After he moved in, he took this non-descript, inconspicuous wooden fence and painted it fluorescent white. One day he arrived home to find it gone.

Simultaneously, another neighbor found a fence artfully arranged on his driveway. Two and two made Juliette. She denied it vigorously, assuming a particularly deadpan expression. I am quite proud of her ingenuity, perhaps she'll own up one day.

2. At lunch today, I asked our waitress when she thought the rain would stop. I must have touched a nerve. She turned to me, glared, and spat out: "Never!"

3. Headlines in the Herald today: "Skies spur chorus of 'Rain, rain go away.' They went on to report that a local outdoor hot dog vendor's business was sagging because there were no customers. Someone called Sunrise travel agency, booked a ticket to Reno and left today. He said he was afraid of rusting. Interestingly, they reported that rainfall was about average.

What really puzzles me is why I would come across a store that sells only sunglasses.

Anyway, we drive about 50 miles into the Cascade Mountains, to a place called "Index". Even in the mountains, we can't see the mountains. Index has twice the rainfall of Seattle. In other words it rains all the time. It seems to me that we are in a cloud, even though we're not that high. We hike the forest alongside a swift flowing river of mint green white water. The force of the water is very powerful and two years ago a little girl was swept to her death in seconds when she fell in. I'm amazed that salmon have the strength to swim upstream.

We are in fern and moss heaven. The ground is covered by moss. So are the limbs and bark of the trees, also the stones which obviously have not rolled in a long time.

We are soaked. Seattle is like a desert compared to this; clearly we have here a case of the glass being half empty rather than half full.

MORE SEATTLE

The Barbershop

In a working class neighborhood which means that houses here sell for under \$400,000 (my definition.) Vinny the van needs a wash and Barry needs a haircut. Vinny loses.

The barbershop is ancient. The 5 seats are constructed of porcelain, stainless steel and leather. On the mirrors are pasted the names Ken, Jim and Bob. I don't know if Jim and Bob are alive or dead but they aren't here.

Ken looks like an ex-marine and the man sitting in the chair has one of those military ¼ inch all round haircuts. Ken hasn't begun yet!

Ken: "I think a #2."

Guy in chair: "Yep, a #2."

Ken changes the head on the clipper, presumably to a number 2. He proceeds to lower the length of the hair to about an 1/8th of an inch lawnmower style. The next guy looks like an overweight ex-wrestler. He is bald except for a slither of gray hair around, and just touching his ears.

Ken: "I think just clean it up."

Guy #2 in chair: "Yep."

Ken clips away about 1 gram of hair and his customer looks vastly improved. I look for a way to escape. I have just realized the difference between a barber and hairstylist and I haven't been to a barber since my childhood. Too late; my turn.

Ken looks at me with my 2 month crop with some distaste. I expect him to call me to attention and reprimand me. Instead he says: "Pretty long, hey?"

Barry: "Yep."

Ken: "Take it down all round?"

Barry: "Actually just a trim, my wife likes it long." (That's right, blame Goldie.)

Ten minutes later I pay my \$8.25 and feeling air hitting parts of my neck that haven't seen daylight (not that there's much in Seattle) in years, I leave freshly shorn.



Transitions

Goldie: If life is indeed like a sine wave, then much of my trip east was like sliding up and down the curves and then below the water line. My fifteen year old son, Adam, provided much joy in securing a board position in his United Synagogue Youth group region. We were able to spend a rare long weekend together before I escorted him to the bus which will take him on a six and a half week tour of America with the same organization (the same tour my parents sent me on as a teen.) It was a "with and without" experience. A tad embarrassing that he was the only kid WITH spiked hair and mirrored shades (sunglasses) and the only kid arriving WITHOUT *tefillin* [prayer straps] or a *kippah* [head covering] in his suitcase. (No, I wasn't the parent presiding over packing....but still, he is a "rabbi's kid". Guess he might as well be a shoemaker's son.)

Presiding over the Board of Admissions meetings at The Academy for Jewish Religion is always intense. Hundreds of inquiries, piles of applications, days of interviews and we will ultimately select a tiny cadre of exceptional people for admission to training for rabbinical and cantorial ordination. This has to be the most evolved for the moment of all the seminaries, given the focus on scholarship, skills, pluralism and spirituality. It was good to be back, wonderful actually.

Hence, a major transition will be selling our home (Barry helped design it and has lived there almost since he immigrated to America from South Africa.) It is ringed with meditation gardens and fish ponds, has soaring ceilings, hot tub, sauna and sunset views of the lake....in Reading, Pa. Anyone want to trade a one bedroom apartment in NYC for a gorgeous home? The market values are comparable. (Eek!)

So, the hard parts of the trip east were my dear friend Rabbi Judy Kummer's sweet father dying, young, in his 60's. Also I just facilitated a difficult "get" (Jewish divorce) for former congregants who have become dear friends. Then there was the life-shifting shock of having my own father come home from picking up my youngest son at the shore where he lives with my wasband, enter the house and collapse into my arms incoherent, shaking, and severely ill. I've witnessed many people going through the shift into parenting one's parent(s). Now the moccasins are my own.

How long to listen respectfully? When to insist on immediate action? How much of the information he's giving in his fevered state is accurate? The medical history, do I even know the correct answers so I can spot migrations in the story as he tells it? My mom had a stroke years ago and he cares for her himself.....where is her medicine? How much? When? Who insures the house, repairs the alarm,

mows the lawn, is the plumber, where are the car keys? They have functioned independently forever; will again G*d willing, yet the moment reveals many unknowns.

My "on the threshold of bar mitzvah" son, Mark, who has not seen me for two months stays with the sweet, gentle child-like Grandma while I rush his beloved grandfather to the hospital. He brings her fluids, urges her not to become dehydrated, helps her prepare for bed, and diverts her from even beginning to comprehend what is happening. He thinks up things to do to be helpful, I want to award him for valor in the face of terror - this is harder than any bar mitzvah project.

Who would have guessed the well-spring of love, compassion and sorrow and fear and sadness and shock that attends such a first viewing of the road ahead? Who? Many, many of you would know, too well, already.

Damn.....nuts, foey - I can rail at the Source for the inevitable. Is there a blessing for one's parents' old age and progressive infirmity? When I got my first gray hairs (in my twenties) I blanched, then blessed: *m'shaneh itim*...."the One who changes the times", *u'mahaleaf et ha zmanim*, and changes over the seasons."

So here goes. Thank You for the blessing that I happened to be home for just this week, that day, that moment that my dad came through the door. If I hadn't been there, my mom couldn't have called for help, she's incapable...it would have been a disaster. Thank you for synchronicity. Thank You for the fact that the antibiotics worked, that he's doing better, was coherent when I called him from the port. Thank You for letting me speak with my sister, who is with them now and staying in touch while I take Mark off to Alaska for his Bar Mitzvah trip. Thank you for giving me a chance to say things that could have gone unspoken.

I have the kind of parents who are self-less. My father once canceled his dental office hours after my divorce, so he could watch my boys who were home sick with the flu and that way I wouldn't have to miss a day of classes in rabbinical school. I will never forget his quality of persistence against odds (come on Daddy...use it now!). Once we were in the Florida Everglades, he had always wanted to go on an airboat and see the gators. In his seventies and bearing a shattered leg from WWII, he couldn't walk the steep slope down to the boat. Turn around and go home? Not him. He dropped to the ground and crawled the 25 feet to the boat and rolled over the edge, pulled himself into a seat and beamed with joy and amazement the whole ride. Onlookers were shocked into silence and then cheered for him!

JoJo Perilstein recently had us on her Philadelphia radio show (Barry and I) to talk about the use of ritual for personal healing. I had emailed a phrase that came up for us during that show to my friend who lost her dad. "Shiva is like a dark tunnel lined with velvet gloves. As the days and weeks go by, some light becomes visible and it becomes revealed that there are also faces, the loving faces of family and friends who have cared for us." Question: Is embedded in every funeral also a rehearsal in the hearts of those who attend for the future loss of those who are most precious to us?

The integration of the loss of a loved one into our lives is really holy work. I've come to look upon a life as a very dramatic tapestry....many colors and patterns weave in and out along the way. The colors tend to change intensity and shade with time, as the loss evolves into a sacred memory. Loss becomes enshrined in our Memory Tapestry, under the best of psychological circumstances, as "a great challenge or difficulty which I survived or even overcame", instead of "woe, behold the great trauma(s) which befell me in life."

How interesting to look back on the black threads of divorce, the hot red strands of shattered weeping only to see that they are now mingled with the ultramarine blue of dangerous, high, navigable rivers which one rafted and survived! To see those rivers watering strong new green leafy live-likeness which emerged from the black lagoon of depression...to look back through the days of demonization (when you decide it's not safe to stay and the other's behavior appears rabid, terrifying.....were they really totally like that? Some of us wonder in retrospect.) We demonize them as part of the necessary world

view to break out of the cocoon that is suffocating us....to grow, although we can't judge if the spiritual opportunity cost will exceed the benefit....we will never really know.)

Then the day comes, when the good times can be remembered. Bury those photos from during your marriage at the bottom of a big chest, I tell people, don't destroy all of them....they too are part of the Torah of your life. No less significant than a memorable sweet sixteen or starring role in a college play, photo of the baby's ultrasound, video of your c-section, are the moments of our lives, including marriage(s).....as the scroll turns, these are the days of our lives.

Facilitating a *get* giving, Jewish divorce ritual for preparing and handing over the divorce document, is always a source of anticipatory anxiety for me. Often I am doing this for people I know, respect and love - each of them. As their rabbi, I am the appointed midwife for their souls' dis-entwining, removing the *kiddushin*, the holiness which sanctified them as for each other alone, and am restoring them to *hol*, the everyday and in its own way equally challenging "hol"iness of being single.

It says in the Talmud that when there is a divorce, the heavens are crying...yet divorce is sanctioned and supported where fire in the home life makes peace impossible. Even the Torah (Deuteronomy) legislates that divorce is a holy option. That said, I wouldn't wish it on anyone...the pain is beyond what one can imagine at the point of initiation even if the growth can be proportional to the pain. It is hard work being reformatted in the wilderness, which is where leaving puts us. Attaining the promised land of our dreams requires us to spend years consciously evolving out of the patterns of our Egypt times.

Alaska? We are about to dock for the first time at Wrangel...hopefully we can return to our rhythms of time in nature, culture and sharing them with you. For me it was a very hard ten days...but, look outside: fishing boats abound, islands everywhere covered with dark forest green trees, a curious blue mist is everywhere. Petroglyphs and totems await us...and my son Mark ; he's actually trying new foods on the ship.

Spoke to my dad yesterday, the antibiotics are working their magic and he's due home tomorrow.

Blessed is The One Who Changes the Seasons.

 CROSS COUNTRY #31 

Master of the Universe

Barry: Yesterday I was introduced to the Master of the Universe (Explorer); an inconspicuous looking man considering his lofty position. He wears a mustache that makes it impossible to tell if he is smiling - important since he has to smile when posing with 750 people at his cocktail party.

My first impression, when walking onboard was that of grayness, ill health, and concern for the poor ship's doctor who probably is doing this for a free "vacation." Between AARP and Elderhostel, the mean age must be about 84. Outside, the skies are overcast and gray. We are sailing through clouds, endlessly. They have graylight (my term) till 11pm.

Leaving Vancouver on the inland waterway, we are sailing to Wrangell, first port on this two week Alaskan cruise.

The scenery outside (the little we can see) is still striking. Mountains on either side, snow capped, seemingly never ending forests of evergreen trees intermittently broken up by waterfalls. Occasional fishing boat, otherwise no sign of human presence. After the congestion of Seattle, San Francisco Bay area, Phoenix and other places on our journey, I have a sense of relief that humans have not overwhelmed the environment everywhere on the planet.

Opening a book of short stories by Jack London, I read: "Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth bank, where a dim and little-traveled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland." Yes, gray. All shades of gray. I have just spent 12 days in Seattle where a typical weather report was "Rain this morning leading to scattered showers this afternoon. Isolated showers tomorrow." Subtle distinctions elude me. All I know is that I will probably never see the sky again. Goldie says: "De Skies are in Disguise." I'm not unhappy. I'm just being the weather. I'm gray.

Goldie: We have downsized from Minnie Vinnie into the stateroom closet we now inhabit (which is probably the size of our future NY City apartment if we find one) Adding a thirteen year old to the equation of our new marriage and having him sleep on a shelf over our bed should qualify us for either the intimacy Olympics or sainthood.

This is billed as an environmental education cruise, which is why we selected it as my son Mark's bar mitzvah present (the big day is Oct. 16). The ship is....well, it's oldish, has seven decks, very much made of iron and holds 700 folks. It's dwarfed by the other cruise ships, which is good because we get to go into narrow side channels to see wildlife and unique geological formations...into lots of places the big casino boats can't fit. We've been to bird watching, geology, biology, history and dulcimer talks so far. We are assigned to a lifeboat which alleges to hold 150 people. (Women and children really are asked to go first.)

Barry: I didn't hear Goldie, the feminist protest.

Goldie: Mark has already gotten into trouble for posting notes indicating that Viagra samples are available in some random room, which thrilled neither the occupant nor the management. He has also dubbed the steepest staircase: Viagra Falls. On the other hand, being gregarious and loving, he's adopted a handful of grandmother types onboard already, they've issued blanket forgiveness.

Barry: He has also attracted a 12 year old female who goes by the name of Crystal. Mark is acting real cool and feigning disinterest. Crystal is going to find herself tossed overboard if she keeps calling our cabin. She has woken me up twice today. Mark of course sleeps through her calls.

Next Day - Wrangell, Alaska

Barry: We have struck an inverted oasis! The clouds parted revealing a glimpse of sky, then they dissipated into a day bathed in gloriously intense sunshine. Even the old folks don't look so old. Lest you think I'm exaggerating, they have been broadcasting steadily for the ship's doctor and the cruise director told Goldie she may have to do last rites or come up with something for two passengers.

So the day was spent sightseeing, viewing petroglyphs (rock carvings thousands of years old) on a beach, checking out totem poles, and hiking a rain forest. Learned the noble savages demonstrated their wealth by the number of slaves they sacrificed on building a new clan house. Ritual included a live slave crushed to death under each corner post. I have a problem with the sacrificial system whether it's a red heifer or a slave.

Goldie: The native people's totem poles are different here, flat backed with huge three dimensional faces of humans and full-size animal shapes upon them. From bottom to the top each tells a tale of an adventure, usually involving great bravery and someone's death. They have "mockery totems," another facet to the fairly brutal Tlingit culture. Whatever your misdeed, it was carved in a stacked, ritually encoded caricature of the episode and then posted in front of your home until you made restitution or fled of shame.

The hearth of the Tlingit tribal homes was square and large...several different fires with different

stews and brews would be cooking. They didn't have fixed eating times; rather folks could come in and graze as they pleased. (Works for me.) A Tlingit woman with a doctorate in anthropology addressed us at one point. Her male colleague pointed out how important the arrival of women in the social sciences has proven, his example being our ability to study areas of tribal life that are not open to the presence of men...while useful, I hope we contribute more than that!

Made pastoral calls to two rooms....one person who has been beeped that their kidney transplant (they've been waiting 2 years) is ready, they'll be airlifted tomorrow. Another looks to be dying of end-stage emphysema and will be also taken off the ship tomorrow. Both had essentially the same comment, they're joyful to have lived to fulfill their dream of coming to Alaska. Earns, I believe, the same afterlife credits as having seen the Alps.

My mom says that when she was little she remembers that a parent would always wrap a child sick with scarlet fever or polio in his *tallit*, hold them while pacing the floor and pray. So when I visit someone who is ill, if it's ok with them, I spread my *tallit* over them and let prayer come through with or for them, depending upon the circumstances. This time the person who will be getting the transplant gathered the fringes together, help them up to heaven and kissed them, and then kissed me.

It's a beautiful day in Juneau, the capital of Alaska.

Barry: We went to sleep about 1 am last night. Watched a very lovely movie The Mambo Kings while Mark indulged in a shipboard chocolate buffet and played scrabble. This morning we were up at 5am having been tipped by the biologist on board that we would certainly see whales in the channel coming into Juneau (we didn't.) It was fun watching the meshuggenes on vacation out on deck when they could be sleeping.

Goldie: On deck at 5:30 a.m. with all the bird watchers, scopes focused for spouting whales. The air has an unfamiliar light sweetness; it's something simple...purity. The temperature is rising past the promised 55 degrees Fahrenheit; the sky is cloudless and blue. Morning prayers pour through in Reb Nachman's sense: A person who does not spend an hour each day in nature has not fully prayed.

Barry: No whales, though we were treated to blue skies and scenery that took our breath away. Goldie said we were having a whale of a time. Eventually we saw a blow of a whale calf and this was our call for breakfast and decaf (get it?) A short nap then we hopped a bus tour of Juneau and the local glacier. We had forsaken the excursion offered onboard which would have offered us a lot less tour for double the money. Our guide Mike, is a young guy who seems to be having his own whale of a time. Example: On seeing Arctic Terns he tells us about the terns that feasted on marijuana - no tern was left unstoned. Etc. Actually, these amazing tiny white birds that were dive bombing for fish all around us, migrate 15,000 miles - from Antarctica to Alaska.

"What a day, what a day!" our guide keeps yelling. He is filled with the joys of spring and remarks on every attractive single female walking past as we drive to the glacier. Apparently unmarried good looking women are an endangered species here. Not so the American bald eagle. We see many nesting and flying by. Coincidentally, I believe Clinton signed a proclamation today taking them off the endangered list.

Back to Mike. He is wound up because it rains 25 days out of the month and there isn't a cloud in the sky. This entire area of Alaska is situated in a rainforest area. A question in the local tourist brochure says it all: "Does it always rain in Juneau? Answer. No, sometimes it snows." And blows, with 100 mile an hour winds through downtown. And avalanches. In 1984 the town was buried by one. So we are not ready to move here yet, despite it being the most beautiful city I have seen besides Cape Town.

Juneau has a frontier, free and easy quality about it. Thirty thousand people, half of them government employees. Totally cut off by road from anywhere, the only way to get in or out is by plane or boat. Mike tells us that if a car is stolen it's a misdemeanor

with a \$50 fine. If the ferry is in town, it becomes a felony since the vehicles can be taken across borders. Penalty is then 7 years in jail!

It's light from 2.30 am till 11.30pm. Even without Crystal calling it's hard to sleep, being so beautiful outside. Mark has been particularly cute. He is doing his best to expand his menu. He uses his napkin to wipe the sauces off his food. Tonight he offered to (wink, wink) to stay out late so we get some sleep (wink, wink.)

Read about salmon: "They battle currents, fling themselves at waterfalls, thread their way around obstructions, dodge bears, butting and biting each other until finally, exhausted by the struggle, they reach the gravel spawning beds where they were born. Once there, males fight other males for the right to fertilize a female's eggs. They spawn, and then, the cycle completed, they die. It's all part of nature." I think of we humans - how we struggle with careers, relationships, develop skills, knowledge and wisdom at last. Then, when we are equipped for life, we die.

 CROSS COUNTRY #32 

Yukon Do It

Goldie (sotto voce): Ugh...Barry said this trail is steep for a few minutes then levels off...twenty minutes straight uphill, to see a lake...talk about fool's gold.

Goldie (inner imaginative voice) Just have to keep going, for the sake of the family, keep their faces in front of me. How can the incline be so steep? How do you kill your horse when it can't take you another step farther? Some abandon theirs. I used my shechting knife....is there a blessing for mercy? Bones showing, back sagging, my last dollar went for her feed..."First care for the animals," my father always said, "the tradition requires it." 2000 pounds of pack, the Canadian government requires it, a year's provisions to go on the rush.

Don't look down in the snow, at the animals - some still moving, their bodies form a bridge across the endless rocks, ice and snow....keep walking. The gold is real. I hear it washing into my pan in my dreams, a fortune waiting for us to just pick it up.100,000 of us started out. Stampederers they call us. 30,000 remain on this trek, most turned back, many dead along the way. Have to keep going. Oh! No! Old Klem just jettisoned his fiddle, he won't last. Yukon do it. That's my refrain, when Sarah saw I couldn't live knowing I'd failed her, she finally agreed, Yukon do it.

Goldie (sotto voce): How did any of them make it and why? Was it avarice or need? I can't even breathe; midlife out-of-shape woman....Look at Mark, leaping over tree roots like it's a game. Tourist bureau rep says, twenty minutes to the top. Why do they always hire people who have never done the things they suggest to others?

Goldie (inner imaginative voice): Some have begun to eat their shoe leather. The tephillin in my bag can't have such a fate, they were my grandfather's. Am I the only Jew on this path? I've heard Jews from Lithuania are even in South Africa, peddlers heading into the bleakest hot, lost places. Outshoorn was one town's name. Master of the Universe, I'd trade this cold for even that. Turn back? I have no money for return passage...turning back means working for the railroad being built on these same torturous passes to Dawson....then a year's wages to get home, home with nothing.

There's my buddy, Solomon Nordstrom, he swears he'll take back a fortune, open up a store and stay put forever after this hell for fools. There's a camp ahead, \$5 for a pound of tomatoes, they say, \$2.50 for a cucumber. Also has a comfort station, one of those places that has everyone pushing themselves the extra bit they didn't think they had in 'em, "The House of Negotiable Affection." I'll die before such a fate befalls my Sarah or little Rachel.

Goldie (sotto voce): Fifty minutes, straight uphill. Does he think I'm like that Rabbi Howard Cohen who leads Jewish outward bound type stuff? Where's a helicopter when you need it?

Oh G*d, Mark's on a branch over there creeping across that waterfall...don't shout, wait, trust....pheww!!

Goldie: (inner imaginative voice) A spring thaw's coming they say, waterfalls every few feet, eagles nesting, moose calves that are easier prey if you can get by the mamma. Seven, I have seven waiting hearts and mouths back home, hungry and hopeful. Sarah feeds them on what little the farm can still produce besides dust. Yukon do it, Yukon do it. Only Yukon do it

Goldie: (Audible voice) Barry! You didn't have to double back; of course I'll make it. This strong young feminist isn't a quitter. Never mind, you say. Not much of a view, you say? Let's just head back? Auuugh!

Barry: They rushed to build a railway to the Klondike. Save people and animals going on the Klondike death march. It took only two years to blast the mountain for hundreds of miles and lay the line. Never mind, the gold rush was already over. Today they use fifteen miles of the one hundred fifty mile line to show tourists the area.

Skagway, Alaska.

Barry: How do you spell relief in Alaska? It's like this: Aah, the ship is air conditioned.

We went to Alaska to get some decent weather, after a stint in Seattle. A few days ago it was 92 degrees. Today it also felt that way. What's all this preoccupation with weather? You may ask. In this part of the world, they don't hide the fact that it rains twenty five days a month. They boast that it's their "liquid sunshine" and throw out statistics that talk about annual snowfall and rain in the three figures - "two hundred inches of rain a year" and "one hundred feet of snow a year except this year it was two hundred" and so forth. The Carribean, this isn't.

Barry: By now you've gathered that today we drove up to the mountain pass in Canada where a hundred years ago, our forefathers battled starvation, drowning in the ocean, snow and ice, freezing and avalanches, and raging rapids, and highway robbery, and venereal disease, to strike it rich in the Klondike gold rush. Only about 7000 actually made it far enough to hunt for gold, only a handful managed to hold onto their wealth. (Nordstrom brought back \$2800, opened a shoe store which today is a chain of high priced department stores.)

Reminds me of how much I hate to be part of the pack - like driving to Cape Cod in summer, or lining up at the new restaurant in town. They made a big deal about us taking our passports since we were crossing the border. It's true we crossed a few miles from the middle of nowhere in America to the middle of nowhere in Canada. We didn't have to show anyone anything and there was a sign at the border to the effect that if there wasn't a border guard, to report to a video camera and answer some questions. Someone needs to tell the cruise line we're not visiting North Korea.

Since Skagway (means sky-way) is kind of touristy - the statistics tell it all - 900 residents and 300,000 visitors. The principle "industry" in these parts is fishing (in serious decline everywhere it seems - what do people eat these days?) - we head out of town. Haines is quaint, real in a Northern exposure way. It's about 15 miles by boat from Skagway and about 300 miles by road. We had an unmemorable afternoon sightseeing, but a learning experience nevertheless. I'm reminded that bus tours are not for me.

Goldie: On the boat back from Haines one of our guides yesterday explains that her Caucasian American husband has been adopted into her Tlingit tribe through normal custom. From the mother flows descent. There are two kinds of Tlingit, Eagle and Raven. She is Eagle from her mother (Eskimo father). In taking a husband, he must become Raven and so that tribe has found a family to adopt

him and teach him their ways. No one can marry someone from their own side of a tribe. Ancient rules protect the genetic integrity of the tribe, requiring death for those who would defy this practice.

I'm fascinated by this approach to what is, well.....intermarriage. Instead of her family having the responsibility for his acculturation, he must be adopted into the tribe by a more objective, independent family which will teach him the traditions.....a family that is still his, even should he and his original wife divorce. He has been given a button blanket with the adopting family's version of the Raven upon it.

Our guide says she maintains strong ties to Eskimo culture also, yet sees her children as carry on the Eagle traditions of the Tlingit, which she repeats, come through the mother. As I type we are passing slopes carved by the rocks within glaciers, the carvings have the pattern found within the Raven's wing on the button robes...an elegant integration of nature and art. Next year, this same week, her people have invited all native peoples to send their best dancers to Alaska for a festival which occurs every other year.....the native people's of Alaska (Tlingit, Athabascan , Eskimo, and a few others) know their migrations south created the 49 other nations, as they call them, Navaho, etc. These peoples are seen as the calves of the Alaskan native peoples, being called home for a great dance.

"Do your people dance their love and connection to nature?" She asks me. "It is a great healing for peoples to dance this way..."

Barry: We started our journey talking about Native American culture. It's fitting that we end finding the tribe with the most advanced culture. They had fish hooks designed to catch Halibut at their prime size - 30 - 50 pounds. Their suits of armor were better than the westerners' and so on.

Our day was concluded by us watching a fireworks display held over the harbor since it is *erev* (evening of) July 4th. Picture the scene. Our ship is docked in front of a mountain. Across the harbor they are firing off rockets of all types. The bangs echo behind us like cannons; very impressive. Sadly, at 11pm it's still daylight.

Mark has found some friends and is rarely to be seen. Crystal is still after him, ignoring a "Do not disturb" sign and knocking on my door while I was trying to nap. The ship is gearing up for a festive Fourth of July. Gorgeous outside, smoke gone, and about a dozen whales frolicking nearby. Salmon is ubiquitous - present in some form at every meal.

This morning our waiter said the Alaskan (Salmon, cream cheese and capers) omelet wasn't available because of lack of salmon. The appetizer, however, was smoked salmon. "Never mind," say I, "How about giving me the appetizer surrounded by egg?." No problem, I had my Alaskan. The British at my table looked perplexed at South African ingenuity.

I am feeling spooked being in Alaska. It's so high up. Things look normal in town, yet this is wild rugged country. It's light almost all the time. It's hot yet we're surrounded by snow capped mountains. I'm a little disoriented. What a country!

 Cross Country #33 

The Ice Land Cometh

Goldie: Look straight ahead! Through the helicopter window...that forbidding, impossibly blue-white, craggy wall, lined with rocks, silt and dirt churned into patterns like a madman's chocolate swirl cake, that is the birth place of icebergs, the end of a glacier.

Yesterday, we stood atop Glacier Thiel, did my son Mark and I. We were waiting for the return trip helicopter that was overdue, shivering as the evening winds blew hot then cool across the layers of clothes drenched from our upward climb. We contemplated putting our spiked crampons back onto the

fiberglass boots they had supplied us. ("Mom, crampons?! I thought they were called.....". "Mark! Never mind.") Perhaps we should be opening the emergency bag and assembling the never-yet-seen tent. I shuddered in embarrassment at thought of the *minyán* by now surely gathered for a randomly set *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Friday night service.). "Where is that woman rabbi they listed in the bulletin?" some probably were saying. I knew in my heart someone would step forward to at least light candles and say *ha-motzi* [the blessing] over the *challah*.

Beneath us the living process of the planet could be felt, seen, heard, and explored. A hundred cubic feet of snow compact down to form one foot of glacial ice, so solid that it is technically classed as a mineral. This is not regular refrigerator ice. It is a liquid mineral....try to imagine it....a glowing crystalline concoction perfused with the happy light blue hue of a bunny's blanket in a children's book.

"Is the human concept for plumbing systems based on this?" Mark asks, watching rivulets of melt find tiny crevices caused by the wind patterns. Crevices become channels, then tunnels roaring deep within the glacier....emerging as powerful plumes of water and silt, pouring through creaking cracks into the bay. We fill our water bottles and drink gleefully (at least we won't die of thirst up here.) It is all moving, churning, plates of ice and rock and silt, a liquid sculpture machine, moving downward a few dozen feet per century. The wind causes 70% of the melting, our glaciologist guide informs us. Global warming? Not the primary cause, research shows this pattern started 150 to 250 years before the industrial era.

Every well-honed instinct we learned as down hill skiers proves counter-productive for descending a glacier. No edging of boot against hillside helps..... fierce flat-footed stomping is called for, our "ice axe" becomes a staff maintained for balance in the uphill hand. I see the guide bite her lip as Mark leaps from mogul to mogul....they warn us not to fall lest we slide with no coefficient of friction great enough to stop potentially miles of descent. She sees he is sure footed and her glance moves to the courageous senior in our group, bizarrely enough...me.

I lean over the edge of a deep sink hole, only to find myself hoisted aloft from behind by the belt of the harness threaded between my legs, "straddle it, if you want to experience it" intones my guide; sounds good to me.

"When will it wipe us out?" Mark asks eyes huge as we clamber up to a perfect hundred foot high ice arch beside a lake upon the glacier. We are all surprised to be surprised by the obvious answer, "Humans survive the ice ages...remember, we were here before most of them, the last being some 3000 years ago....ice only covers part of the earth and even then we put on our furs and walked across with the woolly mammoths just ahead of us.

The helicopter came; we were two hours late getting back for Shabbat. No one had lit candles or made *ha motzi*...though the cruise director said a few dozen people had shown up.

Barry: Embarrassing too for your's truly, since I had to tell them the rabbi was out helicoptering.

Glacial ice is under so much pressure that it has a different structure to regular ice - hence the blueness. And there is life on and in, glaciers. Small worms that live off algae! Glaciers move and carve away the mountains. This is easily seen when traveling up the fjords by boat. As a glacier recedes, plant life appears eventually ending in mature forest about 300 years later.

I am still trying to figure out what this is all about. I think it's a case of being exposed to waterfalls, volcanos, earthquakes, glaciers - all present in Alaska, all forces at work that we can actually see changing the landscape. Violence is integral to all of these. And mystery.

Goldie: Mark's friends have adopted me, they're so bored with two days at sea that they came over and asked me to explain Judaism. Now, that's boredom.

Kid One: "I'm half Jewish, half Catholic. Can't really tell the difference, except I think Jews don't accept Jesus."

Kid Two: "I don't believe people should say they're two things at once. You can't really do anything that way, you end up being nothing. I'm Christian."

Kid Three: "We're all Jewish and I don't know anything about it. That's doing nothing too."

Kid Four (my son Mark): "Well I'm all Jewish and I know everything about it and I don't want to hear about it all over again, let's just play Monopoly."

Next, I went down to visit my beloved hubbatzin in the cabin. He was sprawled out, feverish and feeling near death in the cabin. He warns me that if I touch him, we'll be playing Necropoly. Here I am writing to you all, which at the moment is my own monopoly. Barry's thinking a lot about death these days, since he has a cold. Doctors! Now he's going on about the cemetery thing again. He has some new idea, a really grave undertaking. Can't tell you what it is, because it's like the invention of the Big MacPlotz. And it's a plot you'll want to follow. Meanwhile, if he doesn't go back to the cabin and get some rest, he's gonna become DeadDoc.com.

Barry: Article in USA Today - "Going to Alaska. Pack flu medication."



Calf is Better than None

Barry: So here we are on deck and it's dry and hot and the air is filled with smoke, since out in the Yukon, forests are on fire and the wind is blowing this way. We are far further north than Goldie's first glacier adventure; we have entered the narrow channel into Glacier Bay National Park.

Goldie: Seconds ago we witnessed an iceberg calving off from a glacier. Around us brown seals float oblivious to the big moment, they are hitchhiking out on the iceberg formed moments before ours was. Puffins abound, curiously stubby black birds with white heads and short tucanesque beaks of yellow and orange. A brown bear lolls to the left of the glacier beside the first stand of trees to emerge on the newly revealed landscape.

Mark's bar mitzvah bible portion is Noah; he is learning a few lines each day. Much like in that story, here nature's forces are at work, changing the landscape before our very eyes. New life is emerging all around us; mosses, small wild strawberry bushes and other quick-rooting air-borne arrivals. There are lots of ravens in Alaska, no doves have manifested yet. The bay, Glacier Bay, is so new that it is forming while we rock in it, just another tiny ark-like ship in the cosmic womb.

Barry: This is a national park one can access only by ship, or plane. Two women park rangers come aboard, climbing a long rope ladder from their tiny skiff up the steep sides of our ship. They live here; one young woman has lived here for 16 years, since finishing college.

We learn of how in 1879 John Muir ventured north with the objective of finding glaciers to prove that California's Yosemite Valley had been shaped by ice (preposterous notion, so it was thought). He proved that theory here. Joe and Liz Ibok were here for 30 summers, built a cabin at the face of a glacier, garden, staked and registered three gold claims, but made only enough to pay for expenses. One year they made a profit, \$13. James Todd Housecroft, built his home on the outer coast of Glacier Bay, the only resident along the 80 mile rugged coast line. He left once a year to go to Juneau to get groceries and newspapers....read his newspapers, one each morning - one day to the year late.

Goldie: They say he would roast himself a huge goose and bake 14 types of fruit pies, always prepared for anyone who would happen by. A plaque (1939) for him reads: "Near this spot, a pioneer

made his home for 20 years, kindness and generosity made him endeared to those who came to this beautiful bay." This has to be the ultimate place for the mitzvah of *hachnassat orchim* (welcoming of guests.)

Mark has noticed that Noah was *tamim b'dorotav* - simply perfect in his ways because *hithalekh et ha Elohim*...he walked toward G*d. (Gen. 6:9) Abraham is told to *hithalekh lifanai*, to walk in front of G*d in order to *heyay tamim*, to become perfected. (Gen. 17:1) You might say to really be in G*d's face about what he thought was just, to provide leadership for G*dliness is the role humanity is given after the flood disaster. G*d, humans and the world have changed after what they've been through.

Noah, Mark points out, didn't protest the destruction of humanity ...while Abraham pushed and lobbied for the survival of a whole community. Elderly plant biologist William Skinner Cooper studied and loved this area, and he got President Coolidge to push Congress to make it a National Monument. Mark suggested that Cooper was a leadership type of man like Abraham, pushing for survival of the planet, rather than accepting a limited focus on personal survival like Noah.

Barry: The human ability to take some environmental leadership is very much in evidence. President Clinton has just taken the American Eagle off of the endangered species list, thousands now populate Alaska, enough to restore their numbers with time.

Goldie: Eagles are everywhere....treetops, telephone poles, their huge nests dramatic additions to the horizon. Yesterday, on Haines Island we visited an eagle preservation and research center. The farthest reaches of the earth are filled with mitzvah-centered beings who preserve everything imaginable, with increasing success. "A lot of good things are happening environmentally" is the watch word from each researcher who has greeted us on this trip and also during our recent stay in South Africa. In previous years travels the environmental news was always depressing....what a joy it is to hear so many tales of progress.

The Noah portion also gives a reason for destruction of the earth: *hamas* - is the Biblical word for rampant violence. At breakfast today I'm sitting with couples from Ireland and England who are going at it with religious politics. A third couple begins to reflect on their lobbying efforts during the McCarthy era, how frightening it was to help open their congressman's mail and see all the hate and support for the narrow views. The congressman was opposed to McCarthy but couldn't say so in his own office, some of the staff might be in cahoots with McCarthy. I find this bit of personal history fascinating....one of the many advantages of traveling amongst elders, but the religious factions at the table keep warring. My coping strategy is to zoom out and imagine myself swinging from the Hubble telescope - filled with awe at the great unfolding, uttering a blessing under my breath.

"Sorry, what did you say?" inquires the English woman. I reply: "From out here on the ship all our claims to truth seem so improbable. We can all travel together here, paying a fortune to witness the Tlingit and Athabascan peoples, marvel at their traditions, applaud their fierce commitment to continuity, while celebrating their differences. Can we begin to accept that our own Protestant, Catholic or Jewish customs are a simple cultural comfort to us in our limited humanness and stop claiming to own the truth?"

The couples look at each other in silence. "I'm sorry," whispers one woman. "Me too," responds her counterpart. Out the window waves upon waves carry our ark even further north. The violence begins again not so long after the Noah story....can we notice it is given to us to do better?

 CROSS COUNTRY #35 

Russian to Icon Say Where

Goldie: A little to the right, now the left....hold it! No, not a photo op - it's Enchantment Bay . We are surrounded by perhaps more than hundreds of icebergs, shimmering blue and turquoise in between patches of fog. We are told a huge glacier stands behind the fog....we wait and wait, watching an alleged brown bear frolicking on the distant beach...watching and worrying as our ship begins to feel quite small in contrast to the increasingly dense icy waters and fog soup. The Captain concedes to nature and pulls us out to sea where the pitching and tossing of the ship could be compared to a cradle being rocked by a sadist.

Barry: One of the many strange aspects about this part of the world is the micro climates that exist here. So one town can be hot and dry, the next frigid and icy, the next be in a temperate rain forest, even though they are within a few hundred miles of one another.

Barry: Yesterday we went out onto Resurrection Bay to see the wildlife. We drove all around the ocean and eventually did see most things but they were very few in number- puffins, sea lions, one whale. At one point the naturalist said: "Rumor has it that an ermine-type animal was sighted here." In hindsight, feeling sick (many of us on the ship have the Alaskan flu) doesn't excuse my retort: "I didn't come to see rumors."

Goldie: The funny thing about that tour was that it takes passengers to a "wilderness lodge." This brand new lodge, easily accessible to the boat, has a modern kitchen which feeds 300 and a gift shop. We'd been suckered, thoroughly.

Barry: The tour also provided an "All you can eat salmon bake." The half starved cruise passengers, perhaps forgetting we get salmon three times a day on board, whooped with joy on hearing this.

Most striking was the wild and rugged mountains all around us. We came to an area of dead trees where the island had dropped 6 feet after the last earthquake in 1964. This was this same earthquake that produced a tidal wave that swamped and destroyed Valdez. This rendered visiting Valdez unremarkable, it is a new, tiny, rebuilt industrial town.

Goldie: Fifty percent of America's earthquakes take place in Alaska each year. Mark's Torah portion is hauntingly present everywhere we turn. In the tsunami which hit Valdez we are told that over thirty people were wiped out including eleven children who were playing when the wave hit. Mark has become angry at Noah for not arguing with G*d for the survival of the world and angry at G*d for being even more comprehensively vicious than people.

For his CyBar Mitzvah web site Mark has added a quiz section titled "You Don't NOAH thing." We'll let you know when the site is posted at reclaimingjudaism.org in a few weeks.

Barry: Back to Resurrection Bay. Did a little research and discovered that one mountain range on our left originated in the ocean floor in Oregon, another on our right in China. They know this because of fossils found in this mountain match those found in China/Afghanistan. Here, two huge plates are colliding, and the evidence is dramatically visible all around us. "Awesome" is used a lot over here to describe the mountains around us.

Yesterday, Mark and Goldie went white water rafting. He does roller coasters, planes and helicopters with no fear but for some reason felt unsafe going rafting. He came over to me for a big goodbye hug. I asked him to leave me his watch. We celebrated his safe return home with a game of blackjack.

Goldie: What a thrill to take my son on his first white water adventure , albeit only two hours long. It proves we could become native Alaskans, in that we were masochistic enough to grab front seats in the raft and thus get drenched in freezing water from Class Three rapids. If the gentle rapids don't impress you, the rock promontories will. Our river guide swirled us down backwards so we could watch the thousands of feet long waterfalls along the way.

Drenched proved to be predictive. Today we are in Ketchikan, a town which boasts that it rains here every day. Barry wore the ultimate protection, his raincoat left over from his tour of duty over thirty years ago in the South African army. Somehow the torrential rain soaked through.

Barry: Goldie wore a drably colored rain poncho with a horribly unique rubbery odor. It was draped over her backpack, giving her a hump. Mark declared that since she had a hump and smelled she must be a camel. The presence of so much water makes that unlikely.

Goldie: Despite the rain, we follow the salmon creek which runs through the town with a perfect park entwined with it. An offshoot leads to what is labeled "Married Man's Way", where a winding wooden walkway leads past the salmon ladder to overlook the "reeshroosh"ing river. One of my best friend's screen name is and forever forward I will hear Alaska's rivers singing their cascades in the musical, accurate Hebrew name....*reeshroosh*...pure onomatopoeia.

Goldie: Ketchikan is a place to cross off your must visit in this life time list. I'm convinced the whole town must be owned by the cruise lines. It pours all day here; locals shrug and walk as though it's not happening. By comparison forty days and forty nights of rain would be minimalist.

Barry: I loved it. It's quaint, it's the rainiest place in America (200 inches a year), we were exploring on our own, and it was fun watching the poor tourists pretending to have fun.

Goldie: Six huge ships have pulled in, which is almost 10,000 tourists and the town seems to be composed almost entirely of extremely expensive jewelry stores and galleries. Except for a collection of totem poles and a fish ladder, there's not much to do except shop....which we didn't.

Mark made his own fun by running up the huge staircases at the end of many Alaskan streets...these lead to the homes of locals. Les Miserables was played by a cluster of tourists who were met at their ship by a kayak outfitter, no doubt they paid at least \$50 for the absurd privilege of kayaking among the ships....hence, I suppose, the Yiddish expression "gey kayak af'n yam."

Here, as in most places in the world, the museum bears a sign with the expression "before the missionaries came, local peoples would....." I remember in the Philippines marveling at an entire tree trunk, almost 40 feet high that had been hollowed out and made into a drum. The sign above it read: "Used in Islamic rituals before Catholic missionaries came and taught the true way." Here in Ketchikan, we view 180 year-old funerary totems, which held a compartment for burial, while the casing told the story of the person's life. The sign says this was customary "before the missionaries came and taught proper practices."

One guide kept quoting the local Presbyterian minister, and then he told us he was quoting the only Presbyterian minister. The missionaries had locked the natives into the schools and beat them unless they spoke English and professed true faith. This in contrast to the Russian missionaries (Eastern Orthodox) who brought the bible translated into local dialects and supported the continuity of the local culture in a new religious context.

The Russian influence on this region has been huge....perhaps most reflected in the omnipresent samovars in area museums and some homes. Yesterday in Sitka we peeked into a tiny yet lovely icon-adorned church and then attended a Russian folk dance recital. Thirty years ago the women of the town thought to deepen their community by the enterprise of such a recital for tourists. Today thirty women participate and they have a repertoire of 35 dances. Ridiculed by the men at first for their idea, today they turn down men who want to join.....too late! Mark protested the reverse discrimination, and I agree with him.

A woman came up to me in the library today to ask if I was ordained. She just completed a three year deacon training program with her husband in Minnesota. The heart-broken look on her face told me the story before she did. Her husband was allowed to be ordained but she was only given a lay pastoral title. I suggested that she band together with the full fifty percent of women in her tradition

and that they form their own Woman Church and self-ordain and then let men who are not prejudiced join them.

It's only about twenty-eight years since the first woman rabbi - out of a people that number themselves existing at least 5700 years! And now over fifty percent of all seminaries except for the orthodox ones are comprised of women candidates.

 Cross Country #36 

Make Rumi for Shabbos

Goldie: A highlight of this part of the adventure was our meeting with Stacy, who lives outside of Anchorage. She's been reading our postings on the Renew-Jew list and wrote to arrange to meet us in Seward....she drove three hours to get to us. A former Los Angeles resident with Jewish renewal connections in San Francisco, she's been living outside of Anchorage for four years.....and she is passionate about the joy of living in Alaska.

Stacy describes the radical freedoms of still frontier-like Alaska to us, advancing our already keen sense of the scenic splendor, and emphasizing the sane spacing between humans, and the gloriously fresh air. We see the town of Seward so differently through her eyes. She points to the mountains, one huge one in particular...it is the site of an annual straight up-hill run....the participants slide down on their heels afterward. She winds us around behind the town to a pristine beach with idiosyncratically slung together beach houses...wild flowers abound, two eagles hover. What's not to like?

We have come to know that people don't seek us out across vast distances to serve as our local tour guides. In every country and city to which we travel there are those who have Stacy's passionate question. How do I bring meaningful spirituality into my synagogue or church? Often I spend hours consulting on this....a subject too lengthy for this travelogue.

I remember when Barry discovered the Sufi poet Rumi's words "Wake up, wake up, don't go back to sleep" written around the same time as the thirteenth century Jewish mystics wrote *hitoh'r'r'ri hitoh'r'r'ri may'afar kumi* - "wake your self up, wake yourself up...get up from the dust!" There is such passion and aliveness to spiritual awakening, its wise application is another story.

Here in our tiny ark on the rolling, expanding seas beside the receding glaciers and rising waters we find the seed of society incubating. The Noah story says the species entered the ark in pairs and emerged as families. Through our internet postings and travels a virtual spiritual family has emerged. For me it feels like we, all of us who are privileged to awaken, are the *p'nai eyleem* - the many unifying aspects/faces of G*d within the ever-unfolding and multiplying potential of creation. A kindness and hopefulness comes with this awakening, a love for all life forms and faiths.

Mark found his kernel of faith at the end of the Noah story. He observed that G*d describes human nature as inherently bad and then commits never to destroy creation again, placing a rainbow in the sky as a symbol of this commitment. "If G*d can learn not to be violent and we are created in G*d's image," says Mark, "then this gives me hope that humans can do the same."

Mostly I believe that too. Brutal quotas are reported to have been required of Russians posted here during the tsars for the harvesting of furs without regard for the maintenance of species. Accusations of improprieties fly from each group toward every group. Stacy tells us the cleanup from the Exxon Valdez disaster was both comprehensive and at some ultimate level cosmetic.....lift up a rock nearby she says, you'll find the oil sodden with oil. I did, she is sadly correct.

I promise to send Stacy mystical texts about light, where could Hanukkah - the festival of lights - be more relevant than cloaked in the Alaskan winter darkness? She can invite friends to bring objects which speak to the power of inner and outer light in their lives....their menorahs will light up many kinds of darkness. I love the glow in her eyes, her ideas and questions; she is a natural leader for hopeful souls.

The cruise director came by to ask if my son would like to chant his Torah portion in the talent show. We've been practicing in the lounges and some of the passengers are caught up in the process by now.

Onboard ship, we make Shabbos with an open invitation to a half hour service. Barry reports that the Bahai only offer a fifteen minute service once each day at their huge temple in Chicago....so I want to rise to the ship's schedule challenge of brief and meaningful spirituality.

Some thirty five folks show up.....by the time we get started there are twenty five minutes left.....lots of Jewish geography happening....a former director of Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, when it was known as B'nai Or, Leslie Kreithen (sp?) turns out to be onboard, members of every kind of shul and many people who were born Jewish and don't know a thing about it beyond that. Quite a few Christians come, including one of my son's new friends, a fundamentalist who often speaks of Satan.

We lit candles to Juliette Spitzer's beautiful "Gather in the light, gather in the warmth, gather in the peace of Shabbos", expanded into our five levels of the soul through a guided visualization, did a traditional and then Carlbach melody for *L'cha Dodi*...noticed our bride-like state of mind for this adventure, chanted a traditional borchu, followed with Rabbi Geelah Rayzl Raphael's "evening, the evenings, evening the frayed edges of our lives, *maariv aravim, ameyn*" and moved on to the idea of loving and listening embedded in the *shema* and *v'ahavta*.

Each person was invited to share one way in which they have felt blessed by something new on this trip.....a rainbow of delights emerged, including their pleasure at having a personal role in this Shabbat service experience. Then quiet time to find the prayer of one's heart for the *amidah*, (silent devotion) completing it by calling out the countries to which we especially send peace - *oseh shalom* and committing to a mitzvah centered life with the *aleynu*.

Many called out names of family members for the *Kaddish* memorial prayer segment, later I learned that most had not been to a service since childhood and this was a very important *Kaddish* for them to choose. We closed with *Kiddush* [a special holy day blessing] over the wine, a *ha motzi* over the delicious sweet *challah* baked on board specially for us and closed with *shalom aleichem*.....we have become a sweet community to each other in the halls, a ship board *minyana*.

Barry: I haven't had much to say in this posting. I hate beginnings and I dread endings. I don't like comings and I dislike goings even more; strange confession for someone with so much change and travel in his life. I have learned to compensate to some extent by foregoing short vacations. Still, there is always the day of reckoning. This major leg of our journey is coming to an end; soon it will be goodbye to Juliette and family in Seattle, then home to sort out house, finances, New York.

So I'm back to feeling a little gray with one ray of sunshine being the Aleph Kallah where we'll be meeting friends old and new. Maybe, surrounded by our friends, we can have a closing ritual to this incredible chapter in our lives.

 Cross Country #37 

Victoria Goes to the Brave

What if your most important possessions were

your names,
your song,
your dances
and your masks?

These would be the inheritance which passes on and are remembered when you are gone.

Victoria, British Columbia is one of our last ports. In the Natural History Museum an exhibit on the Western Coastal Nuu-chah-nulth tribes wakes me up in new ways. It is an exhibit on?uusimch ("?" is a written phonetic symbol for their language.) Pachi, a middle-aged member of that people tells me about their traditions as manifested in his life. Looking back on the moment, maybe I assumed he was a docent, maybe he was just there on a visit.

The reverential manner in which he caresses his father's masks, tells much. Lifting the red and green and white raptor head carving onto his own, he becomes the story of an agile scout, covering miles and miles filled with adventures that must result in sighting food for the tribe. The dance is a powerful transmission of the skills of a scout. No one lingers, so I zoom in to learn more from him.

"What masks do you wear from your life? How is your song made? Why are all the inheritances plural except for a person's song? You said names? When and how do you get your names?" I'm working on my program of Jewish-meditation-based High Holiday services to be held at Kripalu. Coming to know the participants in deep ways is important. I feel sad at the thought of how few of us are equipped with such accessible names, dances, masks.... and tell me dear reader, what is your song? In our culture when you ask a couple "what is your song?" think of what the answer is!

Pachi tells me about the crafting of his song during adolescence. How to do this is an art communicated by a mentor in the village and a source of much *nachas* (pleasure/pride) for the family and tribe. There must be an economy of words, a splendor and startling of it's individuality and yet conformity with the metaphors of tradition. It reflects an integration of values and self awareness. This will be sung at your puberty feast, marriage ceremony, times of unique accomplishment, perhaps softly by your mother should the shaman have to come when you are ill and at your death...at your death when your names will all be spoken, your dances danced with your masks telling the stories of your life.

Later I look at my son Mark who in two weeks has learned the ancient notes for Torah *trope* and is chanting at that moment not just his bar mitzvah Torah portion, but random chapters with great glee and curiosity; but what of his own song? Why am I not helping him to lovingly craft such a legacy....to know himself in that way?

Pachi interprets rabbi as "shaman". He asks if I am training my son to follow me. Has he begun to learn how to bridge the power of the ancestors for the tribe? I am asked. Does he know the chants? At what age will I teach him how to discern where the power of the tribe's intention is and how to shift it for their own good?

Meet up with Barry and Mark and head off to deposit Barry for his afternoon nap in the park.

Barry: I read somewhere recently that it's normal circadian rhythm to feel sleepy after lunch. Since then I can't seem to stay awake in the afternoon.

Victoria is a culture shock. It's a bit of maritime sadistic behavior to get us acclimatized to the wilds of Alaska then to dump us in this ultra cute bastion of English properness. Actually I have several gripes about the cruise. They ran the cruise by the book, so technically I can't find fault on any specific issue. It has more to do with the dreaded S word - spirituality or intentionality. The meals were clearly served with institutional briskness and monotony. There was no effort made to create an

interconnection between people so the human factor was absent. The lectures were boring. So I will be very happy to exit the ship and be my own person.

This is a very lovely town and the weather uncharacteristically sunny and warm. Unlike Goldie, I was delighted to leave the museum and be in the sun.

Goldie: The son of the Uncle Percy (the eldest of the Bubs and he has quickly become very precious to me), Danny Bub, cheerfully scoops us up for a tour of the island and warm South African hospitality at his place. He's a professor of neuropsychology and we have a phenomenal range of overlapping interests. His research is unique, he asks for referrals of persons who have had strokes so that he can study the locus of "meaning" in the brain and various deficits resulting from strokes. He explained to us how by speaking with doctors who have Alzheimers Disease, he can learn where in the brain their knowledge was lodged by whether the terms have been lost in comparison to everyday language.

Barry: After our visit with Danny, we re-board the ship. Even though it's only one hour away, the ship travels all night out into the ocean and docks the next morning. I call the travel agent and order a rental car since Vinnie has been sold. Though I'm happy to disembark, I'm nervous at the thought of returning to reality. Still, that's life.



ReMarkably Challenging Intimacy

or Barry and Goldie find themselves in unromantic situations

Barry: The SurfRider Oceanfront Resort is perched on the cliffs about two miles north of Depoe Bay Oregon. Our room faces the ocean, and leads directly onto a lawn, with steps leading down to the beach a hundred feet below. In the distance are dozens of fishing boats and on the rocks to the left, about 30 sea lions are easily visible with our binoculars. There isn't a cloud in the sky. The temperature is a comfortable 75 degrees. Unlike our previous hotel this resort is not in our book "The best places to kiss in the Northwest."

Romantic, except that I am with Mark, Goldie's 13 year old son. This is about step father - son bonding and showing Mark a different way of traveling. For him, travel means visiting relatives in Florida or going skiing in Colorado or Vermont. For me travel is about experiences. Over the past three days, we've been to Mount St. Helens and seen the still smoking volcano from as close as one can - just 6 miles, surrounded by thousands of dead tree trunks blown over by the eruption. We walked on the top of a dam hastily built to contain the flow of slush and logs and then we both fell asleep watching a movie of the big bang at the Visitor's Center.

Here on the coast of Oregon, the impressive rock formations on the beaches are from lava flows originating hundreds of miles away. About 70 miles away offshore, is a major fault. There are warning notices advising us to take cover in the event of an earthquake, then to run like hell uphill to avoid the Tsunami that would follow. I think about weird signs I have seen elsewhere. In the Kruger National Park in South Africa near the Mozambique border there was a sign in our bedroom: "In event of armed insurrection take cover under the bed."

Evidence of volcanic activity abounds. Yesterday the radio reported that there was a 3.1 earthquake in Portland about 100 miles away. Today we walked on a beach composed of millions of black round stones the size of tennis or golf balls - the result of volcanic activity. Then, we climb a monster of a sand dune and the kid does somersaults down it.

Mark is a sharp kid. We debate perpetual motion machines and philosophy. I show him how to analyze dreams and teach him to research deals on hotel rooms. He asks me about the stupidest invention

ever created. "A solar flashlight." he tells me. Later I actually see one. It has a battery and isn't so stupid after all!

Stopping for lunch in Newport we choose a spot overlooking the harbor where they are offloading and cleaning tubs of freshly caught fish. My appetite whetted, I order a fish grill and am surprised to see the thinnest, minuscule overcooked pieces of long dead fish that cannot even be revived by loads of tartar sauce. "What's this" I ask of the waitress. With a straight face she tells me how difficult it is to get fresh fish these days.

Tired of junk food and bad meals at restaurants, and wanting to enjoy the ambience of our veranda with its view, we stop for Chinese take out. A meal is about \$7 - reasonable I think. I then see soup is \$7.50! What's that all about? We brainstorm then decide that people call for takeout, get asked if they want Wonton soup, and say: "Why not." They then get hit with the surcharge. We skip this place and stock up with food at the supermarket. Later, we heat up our precooked chicken supper in the fireplace of our hotel room using a piece of drift wood as a skewer.

So Mark is getting a different kind of education and for the first time, I'm beginning to know and understand him. I wish we have a few more days alone together but the Kallah beckons. We say goodbye to the beautiful coast and I silently resolve to return within a year or two.

Goldie: Once again Barry and I part ways for a brief interval. We're experienced enough to realize that three months in a combination of mini-van and cruise ship cabin is quite a bit of compressed intimacy. White space is also good. This intentional five day break feels very well timed.

We've been married almost a year and three quarters and I recall with renewed amazement how one ritual (wedding) instantly added to my kin four new brother and sister-in-laws, three children, two grandchildren, a mother-in-law and umpteen cousins and nieces and nephews -in-law. I feel young and fortunate to be a grandmother at the age of 44.

I feel teary watching Barry discover the joy of relationship with my father and mother, as well as both of my sons. Reclaiming the spirituality of family in the age of the dispersed nuclear family feels so compelling to me. When I went through divorce I was mostly conscious of letting go of a husband and didn't realize all of the systems that are disrupted in one's life....couples one hung out with, the anger and distancing of in-laws and their children, etc. I have noticed among lesbian friends that they often maintain close family-like relationships with former lovers and the families of former partners. This reframed my attitude on the matter. One of my favorite events this past year was making Passover *seder* with Barry's exwife Fran, their kids, my kids, her partner Frank, some mutual friends.....new kinds of families are emerging, also holy.

Before marrying Barry, I entered another type of enduring relationship, a "committed friendship." My friend Tzepples, a.k.a. Karen Nevins-Goldman, and I formed an agreement that if ever anything that could rupture our friendship would arise between us, that we would stay present and work it out. When once in our decade together this happened, the clause was invoked and we are closer than ever. Often I have reflected on the security the simple act of commitment can engender.

While the rain has its place on stage and beach I'm imagining that Mark and Barry are having the incredible gift of private time together. It seems to me that Barry is a rare step-dad to take on five days alone with his new wife's thirteen year old son. While he and Mark are prowling the byways of Oregon, I will meet my buddy Shefa Gold at the Oregonian coastal paradise between the towns of Yachats and Florence for a few days of girl talk, rest and relaxation before joining a teachers' weekend for the upcoming Kallah.

Two days into this adventure I call Barry on the cell phone to check in. He's on a mountain with Mark, they are having a great time. "Hang on," he says....then I hear, "oops, Mark, grab onto that bank...over there, ...don't worry you'll dry." I try to imagine he's fallen into a very small stream and

not a raging river...not to think about soggy sneakers, his only pair. Then I hear peals of laughter: "Mom. We're fine, having a GREAT time."

Ohhhhhhh...without me?

 Cross Country #39 

Promise Kippas

Barry: Or a tale in which Mark studies Noah, Barry is flooded with insights, and Goldie has butterflies in her stomach.

Goldie: Where can you awaken at 7 a.m. to the sound of six to eight hundred people chanting the *Shema* outside your bedroom window? And go to sleep to the sound of frenetic drumming at times alternating with passionate Chassidic song? Where does every other person ask: Are you the Barry and Goldie who have been sending out the spiritual travelogue on the internet?

Barry: Very affirming feeling having a total stranger light up in recognition when he meets us... ...a virtual family has evolved from these postings.

Goldie: We have arrived at the ALEPH Kallah, a festival of Jewish spirituality being held at the Oregon State University campus in Corvallis, Oregon. In high school we learned the term "oxymoron" and were then assigned to create a list of ten examples. My list started with "Jewish Spirituality", "woman rabbi" and I think, "tasty tofu".....proves my family's motto: "Almost all things change." Seekers and innovators of Jewish spirituality have arrived here, mostly from North America....a few from other continents, too. Rabbi Jack Gabriel quips to us during orientation in a huge tent that this is a week of Jewish "re-*shtetl*ment."

Barry: I'm not sure whether to feel energized or exhausted. Returning from a two-week cruise with strangers, we are now flooded by hundreds of people we know well and many more who know us. I had heard that the Kallah is intense. Nothing could have prepared me for this experience - being excited but sleep deprived, and not wanting to miss anything.

The very first evening I was drawn into an optional connecting time workshop on mid-life transition. We pair off and harass each other by persistently asking: "What do you want?" then immediately after the reply asking again: "Well, what do you want?" On and on we go till we are forced to dig deeply into ourselves.

Perfect. This was the question haunting me all the way across the USA.

Then follows a typical day:

The morning starts off at 7 a.m. with six separate services being held on the lawn outside our bedroom. I am already awake, the sound of singing drifts in through the bedroom window. Outside one group will be holding a traditional service, another, a creative service. A small group are standing on their heads and presumably meditating. Others do yoga combined with prayer. The sounds of singing, chanting, drumming and praying bombard us from all directions.

Breakfast is followed by a three hour workshop, which for me, is one on creating ritual objects. I was drawn to this because I didn't want to do anything too intense. Ha! The first day we were asked to draw a Star of David representing what Judaism means to us. A 10 year-old explained hers. It was an elaborate design which included a cross (her father is Jewish), her brother (who is very religious) a

smiley face symbolizing Jewish joy and a sad face symbolizing Jewish tragedy. In the presence of her mother she expresses a desire to have more Jewish involvement in her life.

What I discovered about myself is that even though my self image of not being a good painter is probably correct, I do have a sense of esthetics and design. It's the first time I've been in a craft class since primary school. I'm not working, not generating an income; I'm stringing beads with teenagers! Next door the choir is chanting haunting melodies. I love it and I'm excited at the thought of continuing to study crafts in New York. During the week several of the participants have come up to thank me for being here, they point out that I am the only man in the class. I was surprised - I hadn't noticed.

My afternoon class is with Anne Brener on "Care of the Care Giver." We discuss mourning and since it is the week of Tisha B'Av - the fast day commemorating the destruction of the temples build by Kings David and then Solomon, we talk about mourning the loss of these Temples. I feel an urge to say that if there is one thing I have learned this journey, it is that nothing is permanent. Mountains, seas, lakes, glaciers - all come and go; even the planet, sun and universe. So why should the Temple last forever?

Someone responds that this should not stop us mourning our losses. Another person who is a priest (married to a Jewess) remarks that we should not discount the spirituality of beautiful buildings and religious objects, and not forget to remain grounded and physically in contact with these.

So this leads me to wonder if the answer for me is to love and respect art, beauty and architecture, mourn losing them when the time comes, and move on. We are selling our gorgeous house - in some ways my temple - and that is the nature of temples and houses and everything else.

Later Goldie explains that Tisha B'Av is about mourning our exiles; from Jerusalem, from self, from safe and supportive co-existence with other nations, from relationship with G*d. It is a time of considering all the consequences of being driven out of our homes, families torn apart, remembering many of the tragedies of the Jewish people. (Goldie: The end of Bar Kochba revolt, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Polish and Russian pogroms, etc, Many horrible moments within these were timed to this date, the 9th. Of Av)

So in a sense, this is on-going low grade mourning, not the type you do once then get over your loss. Intrinsic to Judaism will always be an element of mourning. Around us people have blue and red threads in their prayer shawl fringes; I imagine one could have a black thread running through as well.

We step out from the evening service and Goldie does a free translation of Lamentations to a small group of us. She creates an image of the tragedy strikingly like that of Kosovo with our people streaming out of the city while aggressors mock us and G*d does not respond with help. Now I not only understand the tragedy, I begin to feel it. Then I rejoin the service in the tent, in semi darkness, link arms with the others and chant, allowing the feelings to take root.

Goldie: That word from the story of Noah jumps out at me again: *hamas*....all encompassing violence - devastation of everything, it appears in Lamentations in the emphatic infinitive absolute verb form, the action is attributed to G*d, to the *melech*, "ruling," *Yud Hay Vav Hay G*d* aspect. Simultaneously, the presence, interpersonal, caring, Shechinah aspect of G*d is walking out as a mourner with Her people. The text has a Schindler's list type moment, where the plural verbs become feminine singular....one tragic young despoiled girl walks off the page as pure bitterness or it could be She *is* the Shechinah, mourning for her children.

A spiritual question implicit in Tisha B'Av becomes how is the Shechinah in exile now, in our lives, communities, countries, actions? How do we recreate the intent of the etymology of the word Jerusalem - which could be seen as "y'ru/ eer"=city, "shalem"=complete, whole, fulfilled, at peace?

My morning class is on dance *midrash*, movement-based interpretation of Torah with master teacher Liz Lerman. In three weeks I'll be in the Ukraine working with Jewish women and the movement skills she has taught me will be powerful tools to help transcend the spiritual language barrier

We are preparing to dance a section of *Eichah*, the Book of Lamentations, which is read on Tisha b'Av. Liz asks us to write out our worst nightmare, or invent a worst nightmare scenario. We then place these paragraphs on the floor around the room. We wander among them reading, and capturing key phrases which can be expressed in a movement.

I see someone wrote about a car wreck, rolling over and over in the vehicle out of control, it reminds me of what happened to beloved former congregants of mine.....I begin to roll on the floor feeling terror. Another writes of being trapped in freezing cold on a camping trip, their words rack my body with shivers. Another writes of being a Jew asking everyone to help her in her village during the war and they act as though they can not see her....I wander the room begging the invisible villagers for help....the woman beside enacts a miscarriage caused by assault.

We then take these movements - rolling out of control, shaking, begging and many more and share them in small groups and turn them into a choreography of terror, performing the sequence as a group. Then we receive our copy of Lamentations....a degree of understanding of the tragedy sets in, we become the mourners streaming out of Jerusalem, our daughters ravaged, our guts spilling out, our faith a torment.....then we dance the movements to lines from the text.....I chant some of it in the haunting traditional melody. We become Tisha B'av.

Barry: Goldie did fine except for accidentally swallowing a moth a few minutes after starting the fast. By now it's 10.30 pm. We have reserved the video player. Our friend Rabbi Michael Goldberger has brought a video for us from Germany. He is the rabbi of a 6000 member congregation in Dusseldorf. We had met him there in November when he was about to officiate at the dedication of the first new Torah specifically written for a community in postwar Germany, for his community. It is going to be a big event - dignitaries, media, the Chief Rabbi of Israel.

The day of our arrival, a fax arrived from the chief rabbi of Israel backing out of his commitment to come for the ceremony. Apparently he opted for attending a holocaust memorial in nearby Berlin over celebrating the restoration of Judaism in Dusseldorf. His absence would be a painful loss for the community. We brain stormed with Michael and he realized the opportunity this represented for his community to celebrate their own resourcefulness and self empowerment, rather than a dependency on Israel for identity. This is the video of that ceremony.

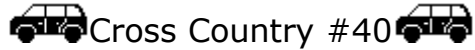
The cantor was from Basel and he sang with great power and skill. Instead of the Chief Rabbi, we saw the President of Germany, and the national TV in Germany that night played footage not of Holocaust memorials, but of people singing and dancing in the aisles of a synagogue holding the new Torah. By now there is a small group watching with us. We are all taken with the experience of watching a real live modern day drama of how a community can revive and renew itself, particularly since we are watching it on Tisha B'Av.

Goldie: The next day our process deepens. As the day lengthens the topic of comfort begins to emerge. Liz Lerman has a brilliant way of encouraging us to find redemption in our ability to support one another. During a gorgeous *niggun* played by Rabbi David Shneyer, she has all of us walk slowly out of the tent, bending over at random every few yards....feeling the weariness of the fast and lingering images of horror. Each of us who sees someone so bent over, reaches over and gently and lovingly helps them to resume their walk in a standing position. Powerful comforting is happening on a vast scale.

As we gather over eight hundred strong in a circle, the mind boggles at the continuing existence of the Jewish people in the face of all those cycles of destruction. One gets it that we have a purpose

important enough to be sustained against all odds within Creation. We are invited to wipe a tear from each other's cheeks, seemingly many are experiencing a mounting energy of hope that we can get humanity to another level, and through us G*d will get there as well.

Barry: Goldie thinks you, the reader, may find all this too intense. If so, you have the picture.



What Kallah Is Your Parachute?

SHABBAT, SHABBAT! SHABBAT, SHABBAT! SHABBAT, SHABBAT, SHABBAT, SHABBAT!

Pre-ramble:

Barry: I grew up in a home about 100 yards from the synagogue. We lived in Maitland, a low middle class neighborhood in Cape Town South Africa. The services were beyond boring. As exercises in torture they were quite successful. The prayers were rapidly mumbled with an occasional intelligible word of Hebrew and I don't ever remember if I ever heard English used in prayer. The adults gossiped and discussed business, and we kids talked incessantly. Occasionally we slipped out of services and went to "Bub's circle" - the cul de sac in front of our house where we played soccer and cricket.

It was very hard to rustle up a willing *minyán*. Being one of five sons, once I had my bar mitzvah, there would come a knock at the door and I or my brothers would be shanghaied - pressed into service as it were. So I learned to hide.

On coming to America, I discovered Conservative Judaism. Now the services were still as boring, but in English.

As for the rest of Shabbat, it was chicken soup with eggs, chopped liver, chicken fat, chicken and anything else that would inevitably shorten the life span of the Jewish male.

Other than going to shul (Yiddish for synagogue), we were expected to do nothing, except walk to the local movie theater to watch a matinee. Don't worry; it doesn't make sense to me either.

What does all this have to do with Shabbat at the Kallah? Nothing and everything. If the above situation is toxic, what is the opposite of toxic?
Nourishing?????

Goldie: Truth to tell, I've never been to a Kallah before...assorted life challenges always got in the way of well laid plans. Accordingly, don't expect comparisons with previous years. This was just the best Kallah ever, so far as I'm concerned. One auditory meaning of Kallah is "bride." I felt like a bride approaching this Shabbat - eyes shiny with anticipation at experiencing something new and special....another "first time."

Preparation:

Goldie: Everyone selected the alternative pre-shabbat ritual immersion, *mikveh*, approach of their choice (river, swimming pool, or shower). I missed the group *mikveh* in order to give a rebbe-style counseling session to someone who wanted to help with a block about the *mitzvah* of "loving G*d with all your heart, all your soul and all your might", as is indicated in Deuteronomy. It's challenging to find time to do everything needed at a Kallah.

At home Barry and I use our hot tub as a *mikveh*. For me *mikveh* is a cosmic womb ritual, allowing us to let go of the cares of the week with each dunk, releasing any shmutz which has accrued to our souls. Happily I recalled a story of one Hassid [Jewish religious sect member] who, when faced with missing *mikveh*, had his students surround him in a circle. He then joyfully declared them to be his *mikveh*, dancing up and down in the spiritual currents there-in and reciting the *mikveh* blessings. So Barry and friends agreed readily to surround me and we proceeded to emulate the story. With each immersion I turned to face another member of the circle and emerged radiantly purified and ready to glide into Shabbos.

The procession: From the "mikveh" we turned toward the sound of a Hebrew madrigal coming from a *huppah* (wedding canopy) in the distance. Every Kallah participant was streaming toward the *huppah*, most dressed in flowing white garb....the flame of our souls aroused in anticipation of meeting The Beloved.

The Shabbat committee created a beautifully planned stroll across campus for us. We walked under the *huppah* and entered a new universe where we pass signs bearing clever, sweet and wise sayings, pass softly rhythmic dumbek players, ten feet later a flutist, another fifteen feet to teams of chanticleers, then greeters, one spot beside a flower garden has a sign reading something to the effect of: "pause hear and listen to the silence that comes after death...."(or something like that) After the pause we begin to sing back sweet *niggunim* to those who greet us.

The week's process has led many of us to our higher selves. A *rebbetzin*, (male rabbi's wife) once told me that when seeking a mate to go for someone who:

1) Brings out the best in you and 2) who you love to be with, and 3) whoeers and celebrates you for who you are. Perhaps this applies to finding a religious or any kind of community as well.

Barry: The procession has an Elizabethan quality for me, like being in a Shakespearean play. I am also reminded of the time in Phoenix when I walked through a park lined with affirmations for people afflicted with cancer. This walk is affirming and uplifting. I am also reminded to pause in my rush to a destination (in this case Shabbos) and to make the journey there, special.

Friday night service:

Goldie: Mark keeps marveling and saying "how will I remember all the ideas for my bar mitzvah!" Davennen (prayer service) is a best hits of Jewish renewal experience, where like pearls strung together, so are the melodies and voices of Hannah Tiferet, Yitz Husbands-Hankin, Jack Gabriel, Linda Hirschorn, David Zaslou, Deborah Zaslou weaving a story-telling...Daniel Siegel's artful hand in creating the new renewal style prayerbook can be felt in each moment....and many many more of our dear friends and colleagues appear and are involved. Each takes a turn at doing a piece.

Shabbat morning Barry, Mark and I select the service led by a former boyfriend of mine, Rabbi Shawn Zevit and my Kallah teacher Liz Lerman. Shawn and I are at that nice point that comes after a few years of good boundaries to allow for healing....a friendship connection becomes possible that has all the good qualities to it and no residual pain or longing. Shawn can lead for me any time; his service was like liquid silk upon the soul. He has been developing his own melodies and renditions of the liturgy....teamed with Liz's subtle support of group movement we become a Shabbat organism.

Goldie: Shawn's style is a smooth weaving through sound and gentle voice-over guidance, commencing with meeting us in the lobby. We begin to follow our rabbi-troubador up and down the aisles of the massive auditorium....Liz guides us to become separate strands - weaving and chantsinging our way up and down the rows, becoming a work of kinetic heart.

Barry: As we pass each other serpentigously in the aisles, we claim the vast auditorium as our sacred space, regrouping on the stage. They skillfully transform us from being individuals in a small lobby to a congregation where all the world is both a stage and a shul. We don't just walk into an auditorium,

by the time we settle down on the stage, we have dedicated a temple and having made eye contact with the people we have passed, we are bonded as a community.

Goldie: Mark is nestled between us like a baby bird. He is both cuddly and profound, an improbable pre-teen combination. The words by Howard Thurman that Shawn has selected move truths through us: "Open unto me strength for my weakness, open unto me courage for my fears, open unto me, Your heart for my heart.....Barry and I find our eyes and souls meeting in the pure intentions, we turn to Mark and include him. Love happens.

Then love deepens into community. Into the center a tender soul is asked to stand, a sculpture of humanness, each of us are invited to join with her, become part of a sculpture of connection....gently we each move forward to the melody with Rabbi Rami Shapiro's unforgettable rendition of the traditional Jewish prayer, the *ahavah rabba*: "We are loved by an unending love...." at the end we are all linked and touched.

The Torah portion has Moses asking for the decree to be overturned, for him to be allowed to enter the Promised Land. We are invited to become Moses in dialogue with G*d: "I have earned this, worked my whole life for it, how can you hold me back?" "They will mess up, I have to lead them through this last little bit!".....and G*d: "A new generation has to take over now, give them space to evolve, you have earned your rest." "You have begun adding to my words, who authorized you to slaughter the Midianite women and children.... it is time for new leadership."

What a feeling, to work your whole life for something and then realize you....ahhh, many a scientist and researcher must have done so....got part way there, tasted the hoped for result on the tip of their consciousness...

The service continues and we come to the place of *Kaddish*. We have many mourners, when a woman voices her mourning for the death of her five year old niece, I too step forward, as friends of mine lost their five year old niece to drowning earlier in the week. Liz helps us speak grief through movement, I imagine the two children becoming friends on the other side....the image is so powerful it may have indeed been happening.

We close with a sequence of hand movements that have been building during the week...a chain of recollections of each step of this spiritual adventure....fingers cupped overhead as a candle flame, holding an imaginary large tallit and swishing it on over our heads, wiping a tear from a neighbor's cheek.....to think I'd called it a festival.

Barry: What I see happening in Jewish renewal is an opening up, a contact with all aspects of self....our sense of joy, of sadness, creativity and spontaneity. For those who have been physically abused, touch becomes safe (Goldie: today's renewal teachers sign agreements regarding physical and sexual continence, we agree not to solicit or enter into any romantic relationships with participants during retreats; doesn't always work, alas) - for those who feel emotional about something it become safe to make contact with and express that emotion.

People who are strong enough to face up to their woundedness, which we all have, take risks and in their emergence into the light, have this exuberance of creativity and spirituality. Based on my knowledge of Gestalt, this is a perfect prescription for healing and the end result is intense contact between people and formation of a spiritual community.

Compare this to a typical service where people sit in aisles, are told what to say or sing, when to stand and when to sit. In Jewish renewal people can sit when they want to sit, stand if they have a need to stand, dance in the aisles if feeling the desire to dance. Ultimately, even the aisles have disappeared and services can be held anywhere.

When women adopted the practice of prayer shawls they introduced a variety of colors and fabrics and this has led to an outpouring of artistic creativity in wearable Judaica. Likewise freedom from the shackles of traditional melodies and services, has led to a flood of creativity in music and dance.

Touring this country and visiting many aquariums and gardens and seeing nature in its profusion of shapes and colorsit feels right that G*d would feel at home with us, and far from being disrespectful it is totally respectful and honoring of that ultimate Role Model.

Goldie: I experience this also at the level of the healing of our people post-Holocaust and multiple prior exiles, traumatic stress syndrome. This is a time of taking on awareness of the shadow side of G*d and humans. Jewish renewal has excelled at restoring joyful spirituality to Judaism, yet spiritual maturity requires the conscious integration of the challenges in our lives, not simply their transcendence or deflection. Ultimately those who survive hard times turn their traumas into fossil fuel for liberation.....a process called "geulah" in Judaism.

Shabbos afternoon:

Goldie: I remember walking with Reb Zalman when I worked at ALEPH, advocating bringing equal focus on the matter of the shadow side of G*d and humanity....it's part of why I selected the subject of the *mitzvot* (sacred acts of consciousness) to teach. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz describes a *mitvah* as having two stages: 1) Awareness of the presence of G*d as one enters into the action and 2) the revelation that occurs through doing the *mitvah*.

Trying to understand this with a student whom Barry and I counsel together, we ask her to imagine we are a couple coming to a soup kitchen where she is volunteering. She is to walk towards us while having a dialogue with G*d, asking for support, to be a channel for Shechinah energy, to carry the intention of the *melech* - Organizing Principle of the Universe. When she reaches us she is luminous, richly supported by the Source and our hearts open to let her help us, through her act she is re-connecting us to life. This is different than doing a mitzvah just because it is there....channelling connection to The One through an action is powerful spirituality.

Barry: I have the opportunity to go spend Shabbat afternoon on Oregon coast with a friend, but decline needing to process the morning's events as well as join Goldie in her planned counselling session. I initially use a Gestalt technique to create a level of awareness of her needs. Goldie's method takes the process to a deeper level and all three of us are altered by the experience.

The concert:

We have been in the midst of a group of enormously talented people. A professional magician, MC.'s an evening concert that includes many recording artists. By now we are exhausted and saturated and relieved to find an early Havdallah happening.

Goldie: Transitioning into the week needs a ritual. The traditional one involves lighting a braided candle - symbolizing the interweaving of those who have made up our community this Shabbos; a cup of wine for joy; and sweet smelling spices, that we might carry an olfactory memory and access it during the week.

Barry: Near me is sitting a man in Orthodox dress. He has provided the myrtle for the many little sweet smelling sachets and spent over a hundred hours volunteering in the book store. He started off doing this because he is a fellow Jew living in the community doing a *mitzvah*. By the end of the Kallah he turns down a good Shabbos handshake in favor of a hug.

 Cross Country #41 

Raising Spirits

Barry: Last day at the Kallah, I am feeling this lump in my throat and feeling that it will not take much to bring tears to my eyes. I had come here to accompany Goldie. I thought I'd hang out, attend a workshop or two and meet up with some friends. So what in fact happened was that I found myself surrounded and filled with love and spirituality. I'm finding myself altered by the process, a stream of awarenesses having filled my brain to the brim.

Goldie: One of ALEPH's directors, Susan Saxe, has described Kallah as a Brigadoon. I feel the mists beginning to swirl up, oh...or is it tears? It has been real nice not changing housing so often, incredible to step outside and see so many kindred spirits. And, it's enough...tugging on my consciousness is preparing to teach at The Academy this fall, finding a place to live for us in NYC (help!!), writing a meditation-based High Holiday prayer book for my retreats at Kripalu, setting up my new project- the NYC Center for Jewish Meditation and Spiritual Practice, and most imminently, readying bi-lingual materials and my team for work in the Ukraine in two weeks. Hardest of all will be releasing my son back to his dad and not seeing him again for a month.....feels unbearable right now.

Barry: It's time to disconnect from this place of safety and love and from a journey of three months that has taken us far beyond our initial goals. I find myself saying goodbye to the same people three, four, five times, so decide it is time to leave even though the closing circle hasn't disbanded yet. Also, I'm anxious to find a place to stay for our last night before our flight home from Seattle. As usual Goldie wants a special place and the options I tried in Seattle were sold out.

We drive north on I - 5 with Goldie doing research in "The Best Places to Kiss in the Northwest." Our friend Fred suggested that we think of Tacoma and she finds a listing for a bed and breakfast that sounds intriguing. She calls on the cell phone and in her sweetest voice explains we are looking for an exceptional place for the last night of this three month journey.

Goldie: They offer a \$350 room, \$275 room, a \$250 room.....as I am about to say no thank you, I ask if she might have something modest and affordable with a bed for my teenage son. It's a Sunday night, usually B & B's have lots of empties at the end of weekends, maybe she'll reflect on that. It works! We settle on \$150.

Barry: Feeling greatly relieved, I suggest we do a check in. Mark as usual surprises me with the depth of his insights; he even requests a whole posting to do by himself (see #42). Goldie and I are the same wave length - sad, happy, and mellow.

Goldie: Heading north I felt the tug of passing the exit of the new friends we had made in Portland. We needed lunch so I suggested a stop at the sweetly developed waterfront area, large tents appear to be set up there - could be a festival! (You know about me and festivals.)

Barry: It's the largest gathering of Independent Brewers, the Oregon Brewers Festival I think I'm on another planet watching thousands of people parading around carrying beer mugs - all interconnected in their love of beer. We are tickled to find ourselves here in a place where peoples' spirits are shifted by spirits. I am already feeling better as the beer dissolves away the lump and I smell adventure in the air. Goldie also gets into the spirit of things. She asks for a photograph or as she puts it: "A mug shot."

Goldie: My pregnant friend is planning to cast her abdomen in plaster at nine months. Looking around at the beer festival, I feel myself surrounded by a cast of bellies.

Barry: Having kept Mark in torment over the prospect of sharing another tiny room (like on the cruise ship) with us, we arrive at Thornewood Castle. It is a genuine castle built between 1908 and 1911 by Chester Thorne one of the founders of the Port of Tacoma The huge solid oak doors, staircase, oak paneling, etc. were taken from a 15th century mansion in England. The brick was imported from Wales and the priceless ancient stained glass from the collection of an English duke. All this was shipped on three ships commissioned to transport it around Cape Horn to the Pacific Northwest. The

54 room mansion has 28 bedrooms and 22 baths now filled with period art and furniture by its present owner who is an antique dealer.

Mark: But all this didn't matter, once I beat him. (We were playing with the beautiful old chess set...crystal set in pewter.)

Barry: Juliette my daughter, Dino, Natalia and Jason soon arrive from Seattle for a good bye evening. We show them to our "room" - a suite which covered a whole wing, a master bedroom for us, a lake-view and private room for Mark, a Victorian bathroom large enough for a NYC apartment.

Mark: They arrive just after I beat Barry at chess.

Goldie: Then I fulfil a fantasy. Taking my three year old step-granddaughter Natalia by the hand, her golden curls and flowered dress swirling as we run, we come to the old stone wall with its portal. "Do you know what this is Natalia?' Her long lashes lift and luminous blue eyes look from the portal to me, "The Secret Garden, Goh-die!?"

She is correct; the owners could not resist constructing this secret garden. Before the others catch up we wander among Purple Allium which tower above her, gold, orange and pink Tiger Lilies, carefully situated rose bushes and more, more, MORE! A tiny fountain and pond grace the center, of course. My family enters and I know from Barry's face the magic continues to move forward with us in time.

Mark: Afterwards, I show them where I beat Barry at chess.

Barry: We all go out for dinner to Shenanigans on the Tachoma waterfront. Eating vegetarian food has lowered the steak level in Mark's and my blood stream, we set out to cure the problem. Goldie takes seven month-old step grandson-Jason up onto her shoulders for a tour of the place so his momma can get a few bites in. It feels like one glorious family as we eat and talk and play with each other and watch the sky change colors as the sun sets. Wow.

Mark: Wow, I really creamed him in that game of chess



Thoughts from Mark

Expressing feelings:

After my mom tells her deep thoughts and I'm to follow up with my own, it's like she has just put \$100 into tzedakah and I have 25 cents in my hand.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

At the end of the cruise and the Kallah I was expecting a big goodbye closure but the other kids didn't understand that, so it never happened.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

At the end of dinner, little Natalia was going "tickle, tickle, tickle" and tickling everybody. I wanted dessert so I told her to say "dessert, dessert, dessert" while tickling everybody. And she did that...

I then laid out a scene.

She's in kindergarten playing in a sandbox and a little boy starts tickling her. She goes home and tells her parents, "Mommy, Daddy, I was playing in the sandbox with a boy and he desserted me!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Have you ever noticed how people are always conveniently the age needed to get in discounted, or so

on? I mean, how many people do you think tell the guy at the ticket booth that their 15 year old kid is 14.....when kids 14 and under are free?

On this trip, I have posed as many ages. I am usually never my actual age, 13.

Using the whirl pool in Oregon - 14 (so able to swim without adult)

Aquarium in Alaska - 10 (free if 10 or under)

Alaskan Cruise Ship - 12 (half price)

Plane ticket to Seattle - 52 (used Barry's plane ticket to get to Seattle. Can you guess how old Barry is?)

Science museum - 11 (half price)

Ironically, at a beer festival in Oregon I was able to be my regular age - 13.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Since we went from the Kallah and happened into a beer festival we decided to retain a little spirituality by singing a traditional Shabbat song: *me pee ale, me pee ale*.....

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Poetic Justice?

While walking on a beach, I was trying to bridge a gap. I jumped and landed with my right foot in the water. My shoes were wet. Instead of spending the rest of the day in damp shoes and trying not to wet them any further, I jumped into a pool of water a little above ankle high, drenching my shoes (and pants, and socks....) and ending the need of a sense of cautiousness when I was around wet areas.

Oh, the outcome was that I had to wear dress shoes for the next two days and my shoes had to go into the dryer, causing them to get even scroungier.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Thought mom was the only one who could throw in a pun at the right (or wrong) moment?

Well, I have had a few of my own.

Just to wet your appetite:

Barry: The hotdogs are very expensive, would you rather have a bagel?

Mark: No... but I was thinking. What if they were to set up a sweepstakes, and the award could be – winebago (win a bagel)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

It seems weird to me how my great long one month trip is just one decent-sized chapter in Mom and Barry's 3 month cross country trip.



~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Flying home, I look out the window. On top of the left wing it reads: Do not walk outside this area.....

Think about it.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Later,
Mark

 Cross Country #43 

Sanctuary Much

Dear Family, Friends and Virtual Community:

We invite your participation in a closing ritual for this accidental spiritual travelog. It is a Jewish tradition to hold a *siyyum*, a summary teaching upon the completion of the study of a text. One shares something of what has been learned, loved, questioned, or changed as a result of their reading.

We ask that you send us a comment, reflection, insight, possibly a blessing that we can keep as the final chapter of this journey. If you prefer that we keep your note private, please indicate that. Meanwhile we are taking a week or so formulate our own closing thoughts.

We're writing you this note from our home in Reading, Pennsylvania (at least til we find an apartment in New York City). Re-entry has had its ironies, including Goldie's fancy fairly new red hot sports car having alternator problems upon arrival in Philadelphia and Barry crossing paths with Johnny Cochran in the bathroom at the repair garage.

A therapist once said Goldie's life would be turned down as the plot for a soap opera on the grounds of implausibility. We are all witnesses to that.

Love and blessings, Barry and Goldie

 Cross Country #44 

Re: N Tree

Goldie: Our home looks like a Martha Stewart episode; every inch that was lovingly crafted over the years is now polished in hopes of sale. Our three cats are frolicking with scraps of fabric that hit the floor from my work at making a bar mitzvah tallit (prayer shawl) for Mark from earlier today.

Re-entry has been hard, harder than any I could have imagined. Have been dashing from appointment to appointment, viewing exorbitant tiny apartments in NYC in blistering hundred degree heat; and sitting in my non-air-conditioned office, carefully reviewing infinite memos and details for the new term at the Academy (our largest incoming class ever, culled from over 280 interested parties).

Most challenging has been witnessing Barry's meditation gardens around our home being devastated by the drought in this region. Like ancient corpses the numerous carefully selected species fall to dust under our attempts to offer them a few drops of precious water.

Barry: Hardest for me was staying up all night with you tearing the house apart looking for your missing passport (only to find out, the next day, that Project Keshar hadn't returned it to us yet because it was delayed at the Ukrainian Embassy.)

Goldie: Ohhh, would rather be back on the road.....hard to refrain from reverie, to stay present to the present. During the cross country trip I met my friend Rabbi Shefa Gold for a few days. Perched on the Oregon coast, she and I would pause for morning meditation. The winds were blowing strong and we nestled into the cleft of a rock for protection, a stunning launching pad for our respective devotions. The low tide rock formations are homes to tidal pools rich in star fish and anemones; just beside us was also a river meeting the sea, chatting its ode to joy beside us.

A phrase from Genesis ruach *YHVH m'rahefet al p'nai ha mayim* arises in my thoughts. (*"The breath or wind of G*d flutters on the face of the water"*). Look with me into the tidal pool. What do you see on the face of the waters? Who do you see? What does it mean to be created in the image of G*d? What was G*d's reflection on the face of those waters?

Trapped; captivated by a thought. Don't want the trip to be ended. GRUMBLE! Did I ever tell you about Suzanne? There we were in Capital Reef National Park with me struggling up hill and coming towards me with a cane, like an apparition, was this long-silver-haired crone....light dancing off her head like Michaelangelo's depiction of rays of light on his Moses statue.

Had this ancient limping woman actually climbed to the top?! Expecting nothing short of prophesy from her, I asked: "Hail Holy Woman, what have you found above?" She responded "Je ne parle pas Anglais." ("I don't speak English.")....Ah, but I do speak some French. Some day, ask me for the rest of the story.

Barry: I'll tell you. It was hot. Goldie had a good reason to quit and "escort" this elderly lady with arthritic knees down the mountain. I was amazed how they spoke like old friends. Apparently this woman and her frail husband have been exploring the world. Unable to climb at all, he was waiting for her below in their van.

Goldie: Meanwhile, I've just gotta stay present to housekeeping, packing up our lives to move to NYC, leaving for the Ukraine this week, leading High Holy Days at Kripalu, endless downsizing of our "things" in anticipation of a smaller environment. GOTTA DANCE is my break through thought....what about all that spirituality one can find in housekeeping? Can I walk my talk? I like to believe that meditation builds life skills, leads to equanimity....Ah, no one said it would be easy to stay with the discipline of it.

Thomas Keating describes meditation as the depths of a river and each thought is like a boat that is going by. Sometimes you get onto one of those thought boats, and pretty soon you are two miles down the river before you notice. So you get off the boat and return to the depths of the river. A new layer of depth is added to the strength of the meditation by softly sacrificing the thought and returning to the surrender of the meditation.

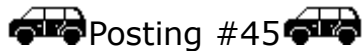
Shefa Gold offers an image "make yourself smooth enough so that there isn't a barbed place on the heart that a thought could get caught." Worry doesn't heal or create; rather it wears down the fabric of a soul. I love her expression "make yourself smooth" - what a delightful challenge to translate that from meditation into everyday life.

Mark was so tickled by readers' many notes to him about his posting. We found his comments to be a fascinating mirror. When my sons were much smaller they would sometimes role-play being their different relatives. Often I would wonder what they would say if they role-played their mom and dad. What a wonderful mirror a child's thoughts can be for those around.

FYI, Mark has created a model bar/bat mitzvah web site, check it out: He's willing (for a modest fee of course!) to help other kids create a similar site, based around their own lives and parshiot. He'd love your feedback and perhaps you'll link your site to his if you have one. Visit reclaimingjudaism.org for details.

There is one particularly great thing about tomorrow, my other son Adam (age 15) returns from his six weeks traveling cross country with USY on Wheels. Rumor has it he shaved for the first time on this trip! How I long to hug him and hear him. I know the proper blessing for a close shave ("gomel" - for a narrow escape from danger or returning from a long trip, hmmm). Is there a blessing for a first shave?

Barry: Enough! I am ready for a formal ritual, one that invites the participation of all who read this. That will be our next and final posting - # 45.



Closing Ritual

Goldie: Has there ever been a ritual performed on the Internet? We've been giving a lot of thought to the steps of a proper ritual, there are numerous models from which one could select.

Barry: Slow down, shouldn't we discuss why we are having a ritual in the first place?

"Go for it," you say.

"OK, I will."

Almost a year ago I held a closing ritual when I was forced to leave my practice. I found it to be a remarkable healing tool to acknowledge the significance of the event, the transition to another phase and to acknowledge the people affected by the transition. In the case of the practice, I was surprised and affirmed by the strong feelings expressed by my staff and patients. In turn I was able to express feelings of respect and love for them. I felt that we left the ritual feeling healed even though the practice was dead.

Ha! An aha moment. This is similar to healing a patient even though the patient dies. Healing and death are not exclusive.

So our cross country adventure, our escape into living in the present, our living with a virtual community, our graduation from "majoring in minors" to majoring in majors has come to an end.

"Why? I ask myself repeatedly as I go through another rite of passage - that of finding an apartment in New York. Are these principles not ones to live with forever? I smell the scent of unfinished business here. A ritual may help bring closure and point the direction for the future.

Right now I am sitting in my in-laws' home in New Jersey. My father-in-law is reading a very sweet note written to Adam by a friend on his cross country USY tour. It's 11.30 am. Adam is still asleep on the couch in the adjoining living room - totally oblivious to the music, the talking and the ritual. Goldie is checking e-mails on the other computer in the dining room; a scene of domestic bliss. Shouldn't Goldie be in on this?

Her sitting reviewing e-mails IS part of the ritual.

"Barry, Barry you got to see this!" She calls and laughs at the same time. Here is one of the numerous messages from readers that appear on the screen, this one appears in bright red letters:

Re: Barry's Threat to Abandon Us

NO! You mustn't leave us wondering about all the loose ends! We PROTEST! MORE MORE MORE! Seriously, I have enjoyed these posts of your journals so much and I would love to know about the trip to the Ukraine and the move to NYC and your endeavors there.

*With much love and gratitude,
Annie Treadwell*

So, if you can play some sweet gentle music, and like me take a few deep breaths.

Welcome to our closing ritual.

In our favorite poem by Rumi, "The Guest House", he asks us to treat all our thoughts as honored guests - whether they are good or bad, happy or sad. We don't know where our thoughts come from or where they go to. We need and welcome them all.

So we welcome all of you, whether our encounter was intense, or brief, by hug or by email, with an affirmation or a correction.

If we have offended anyone by these postings we apologize. At no time did we intend to offend. We recognized the risk of being honest and open and at times provocative. This has been a truly spiritual journey for us.

Barry: What determines its spirituality? For me, it was knowing that I was writing not only for myself, but for and with Goldie, and the readers who turned out to be traveling vicariously with us. And as any exercise in spiritual practice, this has given me awarenesses, fulfillment, connections to others, myself and Nature that I would never have otherwise had.

It took a great deal of work being on the road, writing at night after a day of sight- seeing, finding e-mail connections and so forth. It never became a chore. It has energized me, made me feel alive and useful.

So I want to thank you for being present, writing to us as many of you have, sharing your homes, welcoming us in person as some of you have - even in the case of Stacy who drove six hours round trip in Alaska for a few hours of meeting. Thank you all just for being there. Our journey west could have taken us away from people and community. Instead it brought us community, an expanding minyan for our lives.

I do want to tell you that your ideas, reflections and blessings have planted seeds in my head, ones that will one day germinate and be harvested.

Goldie: What Barry said goes for me too! The next stage of a ritual often involves a form of re-telling. After a journey or experience each retelling is really a reframing from one's new vantage points in space, spirit, and time. In my case, such tellings often evolve into stories - events grounded in truth which feel almost mythical as they become stream-lined for telling. Here is a first attempt at that:

Barry, a family physician with thirty years of experience, leaves the turmoil of managed care and takes a three month cross-country drive, a dream of a life-time....away from scheduled appointments, pressure - wanderlust, freedom...

Goldie, a rabbi and teacher of Jewish spirituality, risks taking an unpaid sabbatical from her post at a seminary to travel with her new husband in order to focus on her priority of nurturing this relationship.

He, a doctor, career in turmoil

She, a rabbi, career on fast track

He, longs for the open road

She, hates driving

He, loves maps

She, prefers directions

He, loves white space and broad expanses

She, loves to be surrounded with projects and memorabilia from her life

He, loves planning

She, loves spontaneity

His goal: To be present to the moment, experience the glory of North America

Her goal: To be present to the relationship, create a solid foundation for their future

They leave their huge home and head west in their aging minivan called VanGo. He brings along binoculars, zoom lenses and a box of maps and touring books. She brings along cell phone, lap top computer, printer and a box of rabbinic books.

Goldie and Barry begin to send regular e-mails about their adventures to a few close friends and family. Unbeknownst to them, when switching from a local e-mail provider to AOL, every person on Goldie and Barry's many lists have begun receiving the travel journals. They send out a mass apology for what could be considered spamming (pardon the unkosher expression), only to be inundated with requests to be kept on the list of what one reader calls "the delightful spiritual travelog."

Initially conceived as a personal record of their journey, Barry and Goldie begin to receive over a hundred notes from people traveling vicariously with them from all over the world. They receive invites to stay with strangers who are reading the postings....friends from all over also offer hospitality. A virtual community emerges of people responding from their highest selves.

Remember decks of flip cards? The kind where you have a figure drawn slightly differently on each one and by flipping through them a little scene occurs? Here's one for our journey.

1. We went from home in Reading, PA to the warm South African hospitality of friends in the coal-mining town of Pottsville to
2. the underground fires of abandoned Centralia, PA to
3. a statue of Whistler's mother in Ashland, PA (where Vinnie stalls) to
4. exploring the family tree with the Schultz's in Warren, Ohio to
5. Barry's post-grad training course on shame at the Cleveland Gestalt Institute and
6. walking the lake front of Chicago after Goldie's deep shabbat with amazing women at the Project Keshet conference to
7. the value of long showers to scientists at the Fermi Lab linear accelerator in Illinois to
8. reclining against a nuclear missile and stealth bomber at the SAC museum in Nebraska to
9. skirting tornados on I-80 only to be struck by coincidence in meeting Barry's daughter's in-laws who also were going cross country in their bus to
10. Barry's beef about "dead stock" over a huge steak in Des Moines to
11. eer! Realizing half the planet seemed to be getting our postings to
12. discovering the meaning of the loving and listening in Denver to
13. soaking with Jan and Steve in Glenwood Hot Springs to
14. being stunned into meditation by the beauty of Arches, Bryce, and Capitol Reef National Parks in Utah to
15. pondering the discovery of Pluto at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, AZ to
16. a seven course breakfast b&b in ghost town Jerome, AZ to
17. Goldie's exploration of spirituality for leadership with the Vancouver renewal community to
18. Barry's discovery of bad art and a unique healing park in Phoenix to
19. an improbable circus at the level of soul in Las Vegas to
20. the eye-full feast of side-walk pastel paintings in Santa Barbara to
21. celebrating Shabbat wonderfully with new and old friends and family everywhere to
22. deriving great nachas (parental pleasure) from viewing Barry's daughter Juliette's paintings in a major gallery in San Francisco, Shabbat with Sharon Ufberg and clan, accidentally attending part of a Chinese funeral to
23. teaching on the deep spiritual structure of Jewish prayer in Santa Cruz to
24. hot-tubbing with Rabbi Leah Novick at Esalen overlooking the ocean cliffs of Big Sur to
25. wine-tasting in Napa causing flashbacks to the Ukraine to
26. defining the "big tree" in Redwood National Forest to
27. dying of Victorian perfection in Ferndale to
28. sooth-ing Shakespeare and teaching for Reb David Zaslow in Ashland, OR to
29. reflecting beside Crater Lake to
30. rose and Zen gardens and eye-balling life with Sara and Fred Harwin in Portland to
31. becoming waterfalls throughout Oregon to
32. parenting and grand parenting and dodging rain in Seattle to
33. climbing a glacier with Mark in Alaska to

34. seeing American eagles everywhere in Alaska to
35. each of us gaining ten pounds from all the eating to
36. Mark creating on board the cruise ship to
37. learning what's really important from a shaman in Victoria to
38. the Kallah gathering of Jewish renewalists in Corvallis, OR to
39. a beer festival in Portland, OR then overnight in a castle in Tacoma to
40. coming home to family and cats in Cherry Hill, NJ and Reading, PA.

Pheww....that's only some twenty percent of it all, ONLY YOU know the rest of the story.

We've received over 80 pages representing maybe 200 e-mail responses and notes from readers.

Barry: We are leaving a large home that was designed to sleep innumerable people - but rarely did, and going to a tiny (but very nice and centrally located) apartment in New York City designed to sleep two - and which I hope will often sleep more. As I write these words, I am reminded of my beloved grandparents with their tiny apartment in Sea Point South Africa, where I and my forty or so cousins spent innumerable weekends and holidays and which was never empty.

We so enjoyed coming to you. We now invite you to come to us.

Enriched by your blessings, we are ready to recite our version and interpretation of the Jewish blessing for returning from a long trip:

N'varekh et M'kor HaHayim, haGomel l'khayaveem tovot, Sheh-gmalanu kal tov selah . "Let us bless the Source of Life, the bestower of goodness upon the undeserving, that has bestowed upon even us every possible goodness!"

Goldie: At the end of a regular ritual what happens? A *seudah shel mitzvah*, i.e., a celebratory meal.

So after a virtual ritual what happens? I guess we all go out for a byte!

Love and blessings forever, Barry and Goldie

On the Road Again: EUROPE



Fife-Cycle Celebration

We are, dear friends, on the road again and crossing Europe this time. We've arrived in France after a week in Ireland, which we'll cover in the next posting.

Barry: If a word processor could record sounds, you would be hearing cars zipping through narrow medieval streets with horns blaring, people shouting out windows with joy, the chirping of innumerable birds, and a flutist playing classical music at the end of the square.

If a word processor could record sights, you would be seeing hordes of teenagers walking through the medieval square, a beautiful moon-lit night gleaming off the freshly scrubbed gargoyles atop the Cathedral Notre Dame in Roen, which sits just yards beyond the bench where we are seated.

Add to this a generalized background cacophony of exuberant French people celebrating their Euro Cup soccer victory over the Italians.

Goldie: A motor cycle is roaring through this cobble-stoned pedestrian only square...Ohhhh...The cycle has flipped; looks like they are alright, only shaken. They had on protective clothing, the police cruise by and do not stop....youths in clown wigs run by with multi-colored flaming tapers in their hands...the police again, concerned the cyclists' fall was caused by a taxi running a top sign....here come the cars again, horns blaring, teens on the roof of a zig-zagging van are waving french flags.....

Barry: I'm not too sure about the prospects for European unity with nationalism this strong....

Mark: Could it be that it is not mainly based on nationalism, as much as adolescents having the chance to make a scene and disregarding any disturbing the peace policies.

Goldie: Many have shofar-like horns which they are hooting, small groups break into cheers, and are now dancing, a gleeful hand-thrusting-into-the-air-dance, cars have teens sitting in the trunks, six, no, nine of them crammed in are streaming by...the police pass again, looking on complacently at the scene....my husband Barry and son Mark are following the crowd north...there is a destination happening....part of me worries, part is thrilled that my son and his stepfather are heading toward adventure together...

Barry: The flutist has packed up and left, the sweet sounds he was making were drowned by the din. I wonder, through which of the windows facing the square did Monet sit when he painted more than thirty versions of the cathedral?

Goldie: Whoah....a teen steps in from behind and sits beside me, asking if he can "embrasse toi" - kiss me?!

"Journaliste?" He asks.

"Comme si, comme ca," I answer, "more or less"....or as close as my residual high school French can muster.

In the distance where Barry and Mark have headed the crowd noises amplify.... The square itself is emptying a bit, as though the whole city has tilted its contents toward the distant sea.

The Cathedral's numerous and huge bells begin to peal, many tons of bells....beautiful, powerful, almost deafening.....not unusual for me to feel my life has often been lived in the shadow of the Church. To confront this in some way, in the fall I begin a doctorate at New York Theological, a Christian seminary which has a special track for those of all religions who head or have had major leadership roles in religious institutions. I have so much to learn.

You must forgive me as I pause recording events as they are happening now, for I feel myself drifting back in time, the shouting throngs in the distance could also be from the year 1000 CE, when this Notre Dame was first built...Drums are approaching, the crowds unifying their shouts...flags, where do all the flags come from? As a girl 12, 13, for years I dreamt dreams I believed belonged to Joan of Arc....flames around my feet, heat lapping up to my ears and an unremitting conviction that what I had to do needed to be done, to pursue peace and advocate freedom....not that I've ever realized those goals.

She did, Joan of Arc. I have a brochure here about her life....she was born on, whoah, January 6, 1412. EEK, my birthday is January 6, sometimes synchronicity is so spooky. Northern France was occupied by the English. At age 13 (!) Joan believes G*d has called her to help the French king and free her beloved town of Orleans from occupation.

Three years later she obtains the governor's help, is issued a uniform and meets with the king who gives her charge of a small army and she succeeds in liberating the city. Teenage Joan is at the coronation of Charles VII at Reims. She is captured and sold to the English in 1430 and brought to trial at a church tribunal...the trial is slow; she has no lawyer or advocate.

She refuses to recant, a final condemnation is pronounced and the church hands her over to the English civil authorities. May 30, 1431 she is burnt alive on the Market Square where we stood earlier today.

Picture a town with an Elizabethan look - buildings are half wood, half plaster - with the wood painted in bright colors, windows open outward, with numerous tiny leaded diamond-shaped rose, purple and gold colored panes.

Barry: Oddly, the center of the square is occupied by a fairly stunning Scandinavian style memorial church - the ceiling like an inverted wooden ship.

Mark: It was a hull of a church.

Goldie: In 1456 the church declares Joan's trial null and void, and in 1910 she is acknowledged as a saint and in 1920 her birthday is made a French national holiday.

Goldie: The church calls this voiding of her trial, "rehabilitation," the reclaiming of a soul that had been condemned. I wonder if political expediencies at the time, needing a way to move forward with the British present right in the face of the church, to prevent further destruction of sacred sites and create some merging of powers...was she a young pawn in a medieval chess match? Or another woman up against a stain glass ceiling?

Speaking of chess; my son, Mark, has been enjoying having the pieces come alive during this part of the journey. The faces of locals capture so well my image of bishops and knights...he and Barry are intermittently locked in fierce chess combat, I kept demurring until last night.

Back to the present.....this long haired fellow just ran through the Cathedral square from behind me and leapt onto my bench screaming.....I also screamed and scared him back a few steps, then he bowed and seemed to take my howl for a sign of participation in the evolving evening's din.

...in the distance the crowd is growing....do I see flames flaring in the north? Look up - gargoyles, saints, flying buttresses on the huge cathedral...just as I think the scene is dying down...here comes a mob...they are banging on the metal perimeter fence of the Cathedral, designed to shield it during renovations...the pounding noise is deafening...a shot sounds and there is cheering, this looks like a scene from Les Miserables; flags aloft.

Barry and Mark return. Now there is another shot - firecrackers? They laugh at my concern, twas a motorcycle backfiring and they head back into the throng quoting the poet Rumi at me: "be the noise".

Police sirens with that WW II "dee-dah, dee-dah" sound fill the square....earlier while Mark watched the soccer match, Barry and I wandered the streets and came upon the palace, beside the old Jewish quarter, and saw how pockmarked it and many buildings still are, from Allied bombardment.

Lots of love from our hearts to yours, Goldie, Barry and Mark



For What Ales You

Goldie: Ireland is composed of 42 colors of green, infinite immaculately kept villages each with 50-100 pubs, and the remains of at least one castle. Why did we wander Ireland?

Barry: We developed code words e.g., "apples" for when a certain mother is being hyperbolic.

Goldie: In part, this summer's adventure is based upon a hunch implanted during my training at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. There our education primarily revolved around a sequential understanding of history and philosophy, in so far as it impacted upon the formation of the Jewish people. Since the primary architect of the curriculum, Dr. Jacob Staub was one of the best teachers I encountered there and also a rather deep person, I imagine he has his reasons for this curriculum, although I would have preferred a greater emphasis upon prayer, holy days, counseling, art, music and life cycle rituals.

I always fantasized about ditching the infinitude of dense readings and circular logic of the seminars where we would discuss them. What if instead the whole class zipped off to wander through the medieval streets of Europe with someone like Dr. Staub and perhaps a saging monk-on-loan from the Vatican to bring it all to life.

So after spending the last decade working on reclaiming Judaism as a spiritual practice, this summer is dedicated to reclaiming some meaning from the bulk of my Reconstructionist rabbinical training. I've read its founder's writings, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, every way over the years, and yes it is good to know that Judaism is an evolving civilization, the point is fully made. Time perhaps, to move on with depth of knowledge of the traditions themselves, not only the historical forces that impacted upon us.

Since one of our five children from our previous marriages is along, Mark - age 14, I've discovered the trip is also about introducing him to Christianity, which as a long-time Jewish day school student has left him in his own dark ages. I often wonder, what do other Jewish parents teach their children about Christianity and Christians?

While in Ireland, I learned not to wonder much about what is taught about us, though there are synagogues and a kosher butcher in Dublin and some 2000 Jews in the country, all and all. We have been sticking to the small towns and most young people claim never to have met a Jew before, nor to have given us much thought.

Usually an encounter happens when I explain why I am being so particular about the menu. Then they always ask something like, "Just what is it that Jews believe about Christ?" I'm never really sure what to say that would be respectful of someone under whose roof we are staying.....upon inquiring I usually learn that most have not gone to university, many have never been to even the nearest major city.

By the way, each place we've stayed in Ireland, many little B & B's, all have been immaculate and the people very kind.

Barry: I'm reading *Angela's Ashes*, which as you probably know, is about a poor family growing up in Ireland before and during WW II. I'm reminded of the desperate poverty that existed in Ireland and many of the towns through which we pass look like they've been taken over by Disney. The economy is doing very well.

Our host for the week, a generous friend and former patient of mine, Mrs. Theresa McCarthy, says the book is hyperbolic and that Ireland was never that poor. I was surprised to hear from her that the Republic of Ireland sat out WW II as neutrals, refusing to aid the English. In *Angela's Ashes* many of the Irish men worked in English factories and were able to send home money to their starving families.

In any event traveling around Ireland is a delightful break from the intensity and pressures of New York City; also, the emphasis on Christianity [even with all the killing associated with] is for me a merciful change of subject from Judaism and all its issues.

Goldie: The heritage parks in Ireland are well-funded and effective, many have working reconstructions of Celt, Viking and Norman villages - the *eruv rav* (Hebrew for mixed multitude) from which the Irish are composed. This time, we were wandering among the ruins of a church, wondering why we would even want to be in the ruins of a church. We spotted a guided tour in English and tagged along, usually not that helpful unless it's a Smithsonian guide or that ilk.

The group turned out to be composed of Anglican priests and their partners, led by a colleague of my own age, Father Marcus. He wasn't just guiding them through the ruins; he was creating an experience during their two week travels together. He quoted a Celtic figure named Brigid, who spoke of the idea of "soul friends" and the importance of having them in your life.

He quoted her as saying "being without your soul friend is like a body without the head." Brigid later was incorporated into the canon of the church as a saint. He asked everyone to recall the soul friends of their lives - many couples looked at each other, a wonderful sight and others spoke of friends near and far.

As Barry and I gently pressed each other's hands, Father Marcus pointed to a second church nearby. The first was of a fellow no known as Saint Steven thereabouts, the second of his soul friend Saint Kieren. The locals so admired the friendship between the men they erected the second church in honor of it.

Father Marcus then took his group off the beaten track into a heavily overgrown field, when we hesitated to follow he held out his hand to me, apparently having noted my *kippah*. "You'll be a rabbi then," he said in strong brogue. "We're heading toward a special place which you will appreciate, come along."

Now to be an Anglican priest in Ireland right now is about as great as being a Karaite leader after the time of Maimonides. The Irish are fiercely reverting to Catholicism and spurning the English influences, though they revert to whispers about such matters when tourists are about.

Across the long field we wound our trail and came upon the shell of a tiny chapel. "This was the Women's Church," he announced. After the Celtic church, he explained, certain practices were prohibited by the Catholics. For example, miscarriages and suicides could not be buried in holy ground, only outside the cemetery and could have no eulogy. (Traditional Judaism has a version of this, as well.) The women created ritual for such losses and did the burials outside the Women's Church; the priests looked the other way or came over to the Women's Church to assist, depending on the decade.

Then he said "the women had a practice of welcoming those who came into the church. Two women would stand inside the doorway and warmly welcome each arriving saying "*Felcher*," "Welcome." He asked for volunteers to do the welcoming. I stepped up, as did a woman priest.

We held hands like in a Virginia reel, said *felcher* to each other and stepped inside. Welcoming each colleague, doing what our people call *hachnassat orchim*, the "welcoming of guests," felt like the next step in this adventure. Once inside he had a form a circle, as he said was the practice in times past. He asked if I would give a blessing in Hebrew and if one of the women clerics would give a blessing of her choice as well.

The Torah portion that week included *birkat ha-kohanim*, the Priestly Benediction, so I chanted it using a Sufi melody from the Dances of Universal Peace, the stones sang back an amen like a sigh of joy to be heard whenever spirit exceeds the parochial. Looking at me strangely Father Marcus told the group, "the Christ comes in many guises." At this I shook his hand and we left, the metaphors are still so uncomfortable and unfamiliar for me.

Other days are peppered with abbeys and castles. Organizing and controlling the human spirit has been and continues to be such a challenging enterprise. My son Mark seems to know from nothing about apostles and I know little more. A patient guide teaches us the iconography of martyrdom of this large other people, Christians.

Court and church intrigues abound in the lore, while surfs toil and monks mortify flesh. All told we visited Dun Laoghaire - home for a bit to Shaw and Joyce, Dalkey, Shenkill, Brae, Glendalough, Meeting of the Waters, Rathdrum Laragh, Avondale, Enniscorthy, Wexford, Killkenny, Jerpoint, Dunmore East, Waterford, Cahir, Cashel, Abbey Leix and Kildare.

We toured the Waterford Crystal Factory, which is surprisingly fascinating. The workers require 25 years experience to engage in free-lance crystal design and each stage of the process is incredibly labor intensive, they re-cycle every piece, with even those with even the minutest flaws.

Barry: It rained only one day that we were there.

Goldie: The last time I came it rained 19 of 21 days.

Barry: There's been quite a radical shift in culture, Mrs. McCarthy tells me. People are no longer as friendly, they don't make eye contact or greet one another and crime is up. A lot of the youth smoke, even grade school kids rove about acting like punks. I question the advantages of prosperity and the technological era and the freedoms that technology has given us. What do we do with our free time? As societies are we using this time well? Why do we seem to have less free time, when it would seem we would have more?

Goldie: Enough reminiscing and blessings to our readers around the world. We leave France today and are heading, by car, for Belgium. You will meet us on the beaches of Normandy in the next posting.

The Peaches of Normandy

Goldie: The silver metal suitcase was a myth of my childhood. My mother said it existed, this suitcase of my father's, Sam Milgram, holding his photos from the war. He told me it had been lost. She would mention it from time to time and he would always say it was lost.

Dad didn't talk about the war, though due to his injured leg and on and off hospitalizations for it, the memory was always there. He used to be a basketball star in high school, his sister, my Aunt Sylvia Semanoff, of blessed memory told me. He never talks about it.

The only tangible reminder was a leather belt bearing his sergeant's stripes, star clusters and signal corps propeller hanging on a hook; I have those stripes in my jewelry box. Dad told an occasional story, maybe three over the years, like the one about the big knife - a buddy wanted to borrow it to slice off the ring fingers of the enemies fallen in the field, but he didn't let him.

There was a book on his shelf titled *Eleven Blue Men*, the only book in the house he wouldn't let me read. Not for children, he'd say, it's about war. I snuck it when I was studying for my Bat Mitzvah and could never shake the horrors out of my mind, never dreaming they were his horrors. Each story was a day of WW II fighting for a different GI and what they had to do to survive.

Barry and I are downsizing, trying to sell our home in Reading and disburse or store two life times of belongings, the most precious of which (books) will be temporarily residing in part at my folks. Before leaving for Europe we rushed in, arms full, headed to the basement and upon laying down our boxes, there it was...open and empty, the silver metal suitcase.

Upstairs, almost fifty years to the date, the photos have appeared; one by the mantle, another beside the phone, then a few on a desk top; a handsome tall dark haired guy in uniform. My father is eighty years old this year and now the stories emerging from him.

The only major difference in his experience of landing at Omaha Beach from that depicted in the movie *Sergeant Ryan*, he says, was the smell of boys' bodies burst open mingled with gun powder. I'd left planning the trip itinerary to Barry, as long as my professional appointments were included, it was all his. When we landed at the beaches of Normandy, it was a surprise to me. They are vast beyond anything I could have guessed and empty and silent.

I knew little about the importance of this battle or any battle, though I can name every concentration camp ever recorded and tell you about extinct Jewish groups like the Hasseidei Ashkenaz to which a whole unit of study was given in my rabbinical training. Until seeing this place, really grasping its incredible proximity to England, and walking the actual medieval village streets nearby, replete with the famous hedges that could obscure an occupying German at any moment, I didn't get it.

That word "occupation," - of your house, your farm, your business, your bed, your country. I ran a Holocaust archive for five years taking depositions of survivors and Allied soldiers. Every step we take here in Europe reawakens those tapes of their lives forever emblazoned upon my soul. Today, it is the word "Allies" that stirs within me....

Barry: In contrast to Goldie I have watched many war movies. As we drove towards the beaches I imagined tanks rumbling on the cobblestones, knocking down medieval walls as they turned on the narrow roads. I could picture snipers behind the hedges and shooting from narrow windows. I wasn't prepared for the serenity and beauty of Omaha beach when we finally arrived there.

The US Military Cemetery is beautifully landscaped, the lawn is immaculate. I was very moved by the entire scene. In hindsight, the tranquility was unnerving. It reeks of order - the rows of crosses and stars, the memorials and gardens - everything is under control kind of thing. This is such a contrast between the chaos of battle, the violence with death and destruction that was the reality of the landings.

The only visible evidence of war was that of the artificial harbor and bunkers and bomb craters left at one site perched on tall cliffs over the beach. Rangers scaled these cliffs using hooks to achieve what aerial bombing could not. For completeness, I drove us to the German Cemetery . It had far fewer visitors, is stark, and clearly does not have the stamp of honor that the American one has.

Many of the Germans were young - under twenty. I could not find it in me to feel anger, just sadness at the stupidity of it all and the waste of so many lives. Goldie felt unable to get out of the car and enter this cemetery at all.

Goldie: The American cemetery overlooking Omaha beach ripples today with mature trees and those at the entry are visibly weeping. Mark and I walk among the graves stretching endlessly before us marked with a sea of crosses and occasional stars of David.

We fasted that morning; Mark wanted a ritual way to honor the experience and stayed with it. He asked me many deep questions as we read the names aloud and he tried to comprehend how so many teenagers and young men could perish on one day and why. "Why didn't someone stop Hitler in beginning?" he asked me with great passion. "How could the world let it come to this? If grandpa had died we would never have been born. If we hadn't entered the war the whole world would have been conquered!?"

The unreal video war games and star wars movies had gone pale, I could see him getting it - war is real, evil is real. In the excellent museum which explains the landing, he points, "Was Grandpa Sam dressed like that? How did he and his unit plant the communications wires?"

The British floated a huge platform across the English Channel to these beaches at Normandy to allow the transports to unload trucks, ammo, you name it. They unleashed the freedom forces for the world. Imagine doing a thing like that - it was huge and heavy, with many bridges linking the parts. The version built by the Americans didn't work out, it broke up from the storm that hit that day; our casualties were heavy.

My father remembers the scene that lay before him as his group surged forward in the surf, the third wave to land, defended by the bodies before him.

A family gathers around a star with fresh flowers to set down. The woman is my age; her son has his hand on the star. When she bends to place the flowers we hear her speak towards the stone: "Uncle Ben, I'm Miriam I was your niece and this is my son, your namesake Ben. We came to say thank you."

Over by our star Mark asks if we aren't supposed to say something, so I begin to chant *el maleh rachamim*, "G*d full of compassion", the Jewish funeral prayer. I can hardly get the sounds out, it is not my sense of G*d at the moment.

I once found my father's *tefillin*, a contemplative prayer set of straps with Torah-filled boxes mounted on them, mouldering in the basement. "What is this daddy?" I asked. He replied: I used them, kept kosher and said *krishma* (*kriyat shema* - bedtime prayer) my whole life until that part of the war..... and then he stopped and couldn't go on. (Daddy, please forgive me if I've merged some of the details of your stories...my memory isn't so perfect these days.)

Before he was wounded and evacuated to spend, I believe, six years in Walter Reed Army Navy Hospital successfully resisting amputation of his leg, he would move along with his unit. "We didn't

send men ahead to dangerous combat if they had children at home, often the single kids would volunteer...not for adventure, for kindness to those with families."

His group were sent to lay wires one day and then given a few days furlough to the nearest town, which was where he entered and learned about the day before liberated - Auschwitz . My awareness has always been of the war the way Dr. Lucy Davidowitz put it in her book's title *The War Against the Jews*, this bit of the trip is helping me understand why others call it World War II.

As we leave the shadow side for the Chateaux region in the Loire Valley, a small correction from the last posting. I put "*eruv rav*" for mixed multitude and meant *erev rav*. A neat Freudian slip in that I'd been reading about the controversy about the use of an *eruv* in Brooklyn a few minutes before sitting down to write to you. There are communities who require a boundary be drawn to define neighborhood walking parameters for the Sabbath, this boundary can be of string, phone wires and such, and it is called an *eruv*. We received many interesting notes about Jews, Ireland, the war.

This posting is dedicated to Rav Gedaliah Silverstone, was a rabbi in Belfast for several years before coming to D.C. in 1905. They called him the "Irish Rabbi" because he spoke Hebrew with an Irish brogue. He was reputed to be quite an interesting rabbi, and prolific writer. A book about him is in the office we have learned via email from his granddaughter Marlene.

Blessings to all and appreciation for your thoughtful notes back to us! Our next posting will come to you most likely from Belgium.

 Cross Europe #4 

The Chateau Side

The headlines in Europe, at least where we had been, are steadily about the Jewish victims of the train station bombing in Dusseldorf, skinheads, neo-Nazis and the burgeoning of such incidents inside of Germany. This all occurred the week after we left Dusseldorf, which is an industrial city of significant drabness compared to the French countryside.

Immigrants from the former Soviet Union, six Jews and their three significant others - those who were bombed always attend a language class for new immigrants the same day and time each week. Europe has been shaken by the event; my father tells me America is relatively oblivious to it.

To me, this bombing and those near our family in South Africa are reminiscent of when I learned about the rape camps in Bosnia. Foolishly I had come to believe, as a teen, that once the world knew about the Holocaust, these things would never happen again. The day I realized that idea was a big self-deception felt like it was truly my first day of conscious adulthood.

Do you remember when you first felt like an adult? There was a time when I might have said it was the first time I took myself out alone to a restaurant. Or the first time I realized that having a child had come to mean that his/her happiness came before my own. So now, perhaps it is a hallmark of mid-life to feel disillusionment in the human potential to collectively support and tolerate peace simultaneously with a great, growing passion to prove we can go to a positive new level as a species!

Until last week throughout the trip I heard from Jews that they are not worried, the war was so recent; their children will at least live in peace. *Ribbono Shel Olam* - "Master of the Universe" - let it be so!

There are about 80,000 some Jews who live in Germany today, perhaps 6000 in Dusseldorf alone. The vast majority come from the FSU, seeking a better life and entering under special legislation which is a kind of self-assessed emotional reparations of the German people. They offer covers absorption

costs - such as language training, and for a generous time housing, etc. Why not go to Israel? Many reasons, including stories of how hard life will be there that drift back daily from families on aliyah, the perceptions of better employment possibilities, and a general cluelessness of what it is to be Jewish anyway.

The German Chancellor and government are in agreement that the attack was likely racial and anti-immigrant. He offered dramatic statistics on the rising and rampant nature of such crimes and called for his nation not to be silent this time; they must be fully intolerant of intolerance, violence and the spreading of hatred.

We are praying for two victims' lives which hang in the balance - Tatyana and Michael Lerner. Tatyana's fetus died from shrapnel wounds during the attack and she has had to lose a leg.

For us these are not fully strangers or solely statistics. The chief Orthodox rabbi of Dusseldorf is a dear friend, colleague and one of the great *menschen* and honest scholars of our times, his name is Michael Goldberger.

A walk through the Great Synagogue in Dusseldorf is usually full of the light of Torah, which he sheds with every word and obvious careful ethical consideration given to the expression of thoughts. He sometimes works a wonder, for example, when he wanted to open a day school.

The board thought there would not be enough children, despite some 5700 congregants (in Germany there is a mandatory religion tax on everyone and the funds and names are given to the church/synagogue/mosque system in their town, according to their stated religion.) Some specific number of students was required by the government to create the school, I think 24.

Rabbi Goldberger only had perhaps 8. He negotiated with them, when the authorities said, how about 18? The synagogue board thought this would be impossible. He pressed the civil authorities harder, they said something like, "no - sixteen then." Still impossible, was the opinion of the board.

Where in Dusseldorf would one find sixteen children for a Jewish day school? He thought and thought and then went back to the town authority saying, "We are not asking to open a new school. We are simply continuing the large day school from before the war; it is not our fault that all the children died." This approach worked immediately and today there are over 100 primarily immigrant Jewish children learning his rich, warm, loving approach to Jewishing, including one all Hebrew classroom imported from Canada.

As regards the Dusseldorf bombing, Rabbi Goldberger reports effusive support from the non-Jewish community and urges us not to generalize about the German people.

I often work with those seeking to convert to Judaism. I love Judaism. When someone really wants support to enter our tradition, if it's at all realistic and feasible time-wise, I try to do so. In many countries it's nigh-impossible to find a way into the Jewish people. *batei din*, "religious courts," are reported to turn people down repeatedly in some areas, others are told flat out that if they are married to a non-Jew, or had a civil marriage first to a Jew, that they simply must forget it.

Several individuals hopeful of converting in Holland told me that they could not gain entry to pray in the liberal synagogue's services unless they were accompanied by a known Jewish boy/girlfriend. Two years ago I led High Holiday services at Bet Ha Chidush in Amsterdam, a relatively new independent congregation; it happened there, alas, that non-Jews who attended were verbally attacked by members for participating and told not to return. After some interventions, apologies were made but wounds remain in those who experienced the rebuff.

When a soul knows that we are her people, no matter what is happening for that person s/he won't stop trying to join us. One day, in Amsterdam two years ago, such a couple approached me upon the recommendation of a colleague, neither were Jewish or clearly descended from Jews, yet for almost six years they had been living as Jews and studying and growing in love and commitment to our

tradition. Local rabbis wouldn't let them in, perhaps because of their five children of diverse ages, or, more likely because in Europe it doesn't feel intuitively right that anyone would want to become Jewish if they aren't already.

Or, perhaps the situation had become difficult because of a stunning comment the mother made to me and perhaps others, something like:

"I know I am a Jewish soul. After the war there weren't enough Jewish women left alive to give birth to all of the returning souls of the Jews killed in the war. Perhaps those Jewish souls have to be reborn into the world by non-Jewish mothers. I believe I am one of those souls."

And in her dreams a Yiddish name came to her as the name of her soul.

And then there was her bemused husband, who remembers how his mother's fierce participation in the resistance, helping to hide Jews during the war. Out of love for his wife he began to explore Judaism and discovered a way of life he came to love and desire, as well. And the matter of five children, each needing to decide on his/her own whether to join the Jewish people and face the challenge of even finding enough single Jews to date.

After our time together and endless, fascinating e-mail correspondence rich in their profound questions and truly exceptional self-written Torah commentary, I knew with all my heart and soul that there had to be just the right, most brilliant and creative and halachically (follower of Jewish law) impeccable European rabbi to facilitate their conversion. I could have done it on my own authority but didn't want a matter of feminist politics to get in the way of their successful acceptance on their home turf.

So who would be just right for this conversion of a family?! You guessed it: Rabbi Michael Goldberger. He worked with them for two years and finally it all came together during this trip to Europe.

After the *beit din* met and examined them individually over the course of almost six hours (!) I was so glad to be a woman and able to bring the mother and two of her daughters for their individual experiences in the body-temperature *mikveh*, immersion ritual, in the synagogue in Dusseldorf.

A *mikveh* must be done in living waters, whether accumulated in an indoor facility, or in a river, sea, or lake. I learned from one loving husband to place long-stemmed roses into the sand at the water's edge to create a pathway for the person converting to walk through on his/her way into the ocean. Upon returning, they find a path of rose petals upon which to tread, symbolizing transformation.

At the synagogue *mikveh*, I paused for inspiration. Many converts complain of how unspiritually and pro-forma the mikveh attendants handle the matter of immersion. To me nothing is regular in a conversion; each soul is as magnificent and individual as the most precious imaginable element of creation.

In this case I experienced a new element; the first immersion is done wearing a robe, to be witnessed by the *Av* (head of, "father") *bet din* who then leaves. For the next immersion, I envisioned every Jewish person who ever lived or who ever will live holding out their arms to receive and welcome this new Jewish soul....sharing this intimation with her, she then immersed so that every floating hair went under and then she arose chanting the *Shema* at her own inspiration, (prayer of Oneness – recited a sleep, death, and three daily prayer rituals). A final immersion we had designated for personal prayer, to envision what she needs to fulfill this destiny, to pray it and then to float, to be, finally.....a Jew.

So it is with awareness of how impossibly bizarrely the Cosmos operates, that four magnificent new members of the Jewish people emanated from Dusseldorf, just some ten days before the shadow of anti-Semitic murder discussed earlier would rise again in that very town.

Spire or Mire?

The shadow appeared everywhere we went in France and Belgium, even penetrating through the two solid weeks of rain. Shadow has many guises. It can be cloaked in the greatest of art and architectural brilliance, yet it hovers over every village and town, appearing in multiples even in cities. Often in Europe it feels like it is the shadow of the cathedrals and churches, even prominent places like Mt. Saint Michel and the Cathedral at Chartres carry it. I hadn't felt this so keenly on other trips to France; however, this time we have consciously kept to the small towns and country-side.

We passed many fairy-tale like chateaus dotting the Loire Valley . I never imagined such edifices actually exist. Didn't Disney invented Cinderella's castle as a graphic image?), Even these confectionary resides of overdone times do not take away the dark energy I have come to associate with the approach of *Tisha b'Av*, (day of fasting and mourning for many persecutions and two destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem), which takes on ever greater significance during each step of this journey.

One reader sends a reminder of the part of the shadow of which we are well aware because he feels we are too romantic in our attitude toward the medieval period. Fear not, that enchantment wore off quickly, spires no longer inspire; they have become more like bayonets to my soul.

A reader writes: "What about the birth of the accusation of Jews of ritual murder and profanation of Catholic unleavened bread just prior to Pesach in 1243, the most famous case being L'affaire des Billettes in Paris in 1290." and he continues...

"What about the massacres of Jews in Anjou (not so far from Rouen), or the Crusade of Pastoureaux in 1251 in the north of France, or the multiple autodafes of Talmud made by most of the French kings (*autodafe*, a French word coming from *auto da fe*, act of faith, consists of burning books in the name of G*d)"

And he adds: "Or the so romantic date of 1390 when Philippe le Bel, King of France expelled the Jews from France, or the hunting of Jews all over Europe after the Black Plague epidemic ? And what about the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the inquisition?"

Quite so, I once wrote a paper on the impact of the Black Plague upon the Jews. The same year I read and shed tears of sorrow and terror over the translated testimony of a Jewish woman who argued eloquently with the Grand Inquisitioner before she was burned.

Oostende is the town that houses the Jewish Museum of Belgium. Even at its height it seems that only 300 Jews ever lived in this town. It disturbs me to see museums that seem to proclaim to the world that they should love us - sometimes the theme is because we have suffered so much as a people, other times because we have been so creative in art, sciences, literature - because we are useful. Believe me, the shadow doesn't care.

After *Tisha b'Av* I feel grateful our daily liturgy includes a prayer for *geulah*, "redemption," which appears rights before the *amidah* (*silent*). Rabbi Robert Freedman has described this as a prayer for "liberation from our concern with history."

I wrote these notes while we were driving through pastoral Dutch country-side on our way to the glorious, remote island called Ameland for a week-long retreat. Carola de Vries Robles is our primary host in Holland. She is a well-known therapist and teacher of therapists in Europe and teacher of Jewish spirituality and spiritual eldering. We met during my first trip to Elat Chayyim retreat center in New York state, we were room mates and over time, have become true friends. Carola is a helpful

interpreter of life here in Europe, which is essential to serving here.

Carola: We especially need the blessing about "liberation from our concern from history" here in Holland.

Goldie: As an American, it is hard to understand what it is to grow up in a recent battlefield. I used to be a professor at Gettysburg College, where the Civil War history supports the economy of the area, yet no longer seems to saturate the psyche of those who reside there.

I had not noticed on previous trips that there are German bunkers which dot the fields everywhere one goes in Holland, more intensely so along the southern coast....they are for playing in now, or storage. Yet unlike in America, here EVERY person seems to have been scarred by the war in so many ways...and this still unfolding. Recently have come the confessions of Dutch about exactly how and when they informed on their Jewish neighbors, and archives newly opened revealed about two years ago a huge scandal about the government.

Carola: In the archive it turned out that money and precious things which were brought to the bank by Jews during the war for safekeeping were kept until 1950 by the Dutch government and around 1952 they items were sold at auction and the funds were given to the employees of the local version of the IRS tax service.

What turns out now is that when the Jews who survived couldn't get back into their houses because they were occupied by others and they weren't helped or welcomed, and rather were sent away and sometimes couldn't claim their possessions at all. Only now does this come into the country's consciousness and Jews also realizing how much they lost.

All our energy was involved in trying to build up a decent life, no one was talking about this until now....when we were growing up after the war being Jewish wasn't talked about....at a recent children of survivor's conference I was surprised to see my college roommates...we had never talked about being Jewish with each other. To show feelings about this is called *zeelekh*, unacceptable and weak.

Goldie: In America there is a lot of criticism about law suits to secure funds for losses in the Holocaust.

Carola: That's here too.

Goldie: I feel much more compassionate and less judgmental about that now. The suits are clearly a part of healing, releasing anger and dealing with so many losses.

Carola: My brother was born in the camp, it's not just anger, it's a bitterness of not being recognized ...the Prime Minister of Holland apologized for this and some people think that it's very important that he did that, the recognition of responsibility, that the picture of Holland being a tolerant culture must be corrected.

Goldie: In Holland, almost daily someone finds out from their parents that they were hidden Jews and in a sentence that will resound for a lifetime their inner experience begins to make sense and a chaos and clarity simultaneously seem to begin. The preoccupation with history is so intense here, there is almost no such thing as an idle conversation. We are passing Harlingen now, Carola mentions to me that only her uncle survived from here, no one else, he just refurbished the remains of the synagogue as a monument...there are no Jews left in the town to attend.

In the ancient Portuguese Cemetery outside Amsterdam we visit the grave of Carola's uncle, a rabbi so beloved that his tomb stone is inscribed with glowing love and respect from his students....after the rain a red resin has pooled atop many of the most ancient stones which are elegantly carved with figures, lions and phrases, giving an eerie impression. The grave of Spinoza's mother is there, she died when he was only eight years old.

In the excellent Jewish Museum in Amsterdam there is a map with dark dots throughout Holland. Press it once and all of the Jewish communities here before the war light up - 140,000 souls. Press it again and only in the south are there some lights, 40,000 souls. At almost every meal I hear the locals' stories. The stories sound different over here.

In rabbinical school we read the *Diary of Etty Hillesum*, a Dutch woman who died in the war. Beside me, our friend and host tells me her mother of blessed memory, knew Etty well. Her mother did not consider Etty to be a hero because she voluntarily went into the camp, her mother's choice was to do everything she could to stay alive. I appreciated the diary very much because it was the only text I recall that we studied at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College which modeled praying from the heart.

Speaking of prayer and healing, Carola has also helped in the development of three important new Jewish groups here - an alternative congregation called Beyt HaChidush - attractive to American expatriots and open to gay and lesbian Jews (though not open at this time to non-Jews), and she is the initiator of a fully inclusive Jewish renewal havurah called Makom Or Zarua which holds monthly gatherings, and a network for Jewish inspiration and renewal, Ruach Chadashah.

Carola: I feel we are bringing light and joy back into Jewish life here; an antidote to the Dutch Jewish culture which is quite Calvinistic.

Goldie: A great creative spirit also shows in the work of two reform rabbis and a woman who functions as a chazzan (there are no official woman rabbis or chazzanim in Holland yet). Together they have created a truly great children's department in the Jewish museum here. It is cutting edge work involving all forms of media to touch the soul and the imagination of children and truthfully my inner child was dancing too.

Now that Tisha B'Av has ended, this post concludes with a real-life funny.

In Antwerp, Belgium we steer our car through the endless rain into the very, very Jewish diamond district in search of a kosher restaurant since it is the time of month where this Goldfish dearly desires a hot pastrami sandwich. (Diamond polishing, the local museum declares, was invented by a Jew in medieval times and long perpetuated as a family secret.) The center of the tiny district has an active *shul* (synagogue) and the streets have strong security including James Bond-like metal poles that can be electronically activated to block streets.

We find a kosher shwarma [meat and pita sandwich] place run by an ebullient Israeli, who upon seeing my kippah and learning I'm a rabbi, still serves us kindly but feels called upon to state that "I'm sorry, but I don't believe you exist." Assuring him that I am real, I inquire after the bathroom. He ushers me to the back, pointing to one door as men's and opens another. I step through it as he declares it to be the "bathroom for feminists" and find myself in the back alley. Laughing he opens the door and offers me the true seat of honor. We were both laughing so hard it was a good thing the proper facilities were at hand.

Much love and blessings, Reb Goldie & Barry & Carola

 Cross Europe #6 

Anna, Frankly

Barry: I have to keep reminding myself that it's not winter, just a Central European summer. Gray, cold and except for brief moments of clearing, steady rain. I have stopped counting, perhaps ten days worth. People in the street are scruffy looking, dressed for the most part drably - olive green, grays, black, brown. The water of the canals is brown. The side walks and buildings are brick colored or gray.

Every now and then there is some color. Bright red incandescent or fluorescent lights in some windows face the sidewalk. The little red rooms or cubicles are either empty with a for rent sign in them, or occupied by women in their underwear. How do they keep warm?

In this district people smoke, drink beer, scrawl graffiti and roam the streets yelling at 3 a.m. Perhaps they are instinctively drawn to adding color to the walls.

I think I have cabin fever. We are staying with a friend in Amsterdam who is a hospitable well-read therapist, teacher, and artist whose apartment is overflowing with books, art and interesting artifacts from her travels. The apartment abuts the Anne Frank house.

We are one floor up and face both the canal in front and the garden behind. The garden still contains the gigantic Chestnut tree that Anne described. Every few minutes tour boats stop in front and tourists click away with their cameras. Except for late at night, there is always a small crowd of people hanging around on the sidewalk below.

Recently the Anne Frank foundation built an ugly administrative building/museum here. It was supposed to take care of the problem of people standing on the sidewalk and street. Yesterday I counted two hundred and fifty tourists patiently waiting in line. Many more were standing around having their pictures taken in front of the building. It takes a committee to design a building that has all the neighbors up in arms, doesn't look good, and doesn't work.

Cabin fever breeds cynicism. I have been shut in for days - by rain. Anne Frank was shut in by Gestapo - for years. How did she survive emotionally? Not only survive, but write about it in a way that people pilgrimage and patiently stand in the rain for hours to see her hiding place. Surely not cynically, I am going to read The diary of Anne Frank. Then tour her house. There is a lesson in it for me.

Graffiti and anti-graffiti: One of the things I like so much about Manhattan is that the city has been so spruced up. I remember the time not so long ago, when almost every building, subway car, tree, dog and cat (a little hyperbole is in order) was covered with graffiti. This is no longer tolerated. Knowing that it is possible to do something about this blight makes it particularly irritating to see beautifully preserved medieval buildings scribbled on. Ireland, France and Holland are where New York was a few years ago.

By the way, petty crime - theft, pick pocketing, car and bicycle theft are also prevalent and seemingly tolerated. The poet Rumi said it well: Butterflies need two wings to fly. Every point needs a counterpoint. Matter requires the existence of anti matter.

Walking the streets of Amsterdam, I wondered aloud to Goldie: "Why do people put so much energy into vandalizing other peoples' property? There must be some gratification for them. Spray painting graffiti is an act of aggression towards society, to me it implies anger, disrespect, a desire to destroy and make ugly. How does one counteract this?"

A few days later, we were taken to a sculpture garden by our friend Carola. Amstel Tuin is located along the Amstel River near the site that Rembrandt used to sit and paint his landscapes. It is quite close to the old Portuguese Jewish cemetery, about 2 acres in all. I have seen many famous gardens including Kew, Longwood Gardens, Kirstenbosch: big, impressive, beautiful. This is small and a gem. To quote my friend Rumi again: "A ruby is not a mountain."

Groupings abound, shade plants with many swathes of ferns, Astilbe, various ground cover, bamboo, accent trees and plants. Interspersed, are ninety five pieces of sculpture, each very different and cleverly complemented by the plantings in its neighborhood. They are by various sculptors and for sale. We were shown around by the proprietress, a woman in her sixties who herself is a sculptor. Her husband is a man who appears quite a bit older and appears quite frail. He is the landscaper.

The proprietress shared with us the challenges of designing and maintaining the property over the past ten years. We expressed our appreciation of it and that this as possibly the single most impressively beautiful piece of work we had seen in Europe. "And it's quite mad, isn't it? We don't even own this property!"

The owner has apparently expressed interest in taking the property back and living there. My mind boggled at the thought of the hundreds of thousands of guilders and thousands of man hours invested by them in the garden. Owner, ill health, old age can wipe it out at any time. Then I realized that this is not about permanence. It's not about improving one's own property; it's about not only respecting someone else's property but improving it. The opposite of what we have been seeing. It is anti graffiti.

Patriotism, nationalism, racial hatred are in abundance around us as Armstrong wins his second Tour de France. That will teach the French! Tiger Woods wins his fourth title at 24; both fellow Americans. The summer Olympics will be soon; country against country. Watching the riotous celebrations in the streets of Rouen when France won the European soccer tournament, I was conscious of celebration turning to violence in the screaming motor cycles, cars, banging, noise-makers; nationalism gone wild.

At the Anne Frank Museum there is an exhibit of nationalism and hatred. Politically, Europe has changed dramatically since her time. Have the people?

Goldie says the Torah portion this Shabbat contains a very difficult segment. G*d asks Moses to do one more thing before he dies, to wipe out the Midianites (Moses' in-laws, as it happens.) While I can view this *parsha*, Torah portion, from a viewpoint that it was intended to stop the spread of a venereal disease epidemic, (Moses adds the killings of all Midianite women and girls who have had sex to the original order to kill all the men), but that's not much help given the historical applications of the portion. This *parsha* has been used by right wing religious groups of all types to insist upon purifying by purging unwanted peoples off of the land one perceives as one's own and from one's midst. Nationalism kills.

Back to "civilization" with five days on the Island of Ameland in north Holland with friends. Sand dunes, enormous number of birds, sea lions in the distance, deer, rabbits, broad expanses of beach; all the cottages have thatched roofs, and are scattered between the dunes. There is nothing to do here except read, eat, bike ride, swim walk and look at nature. Our last walk on the beach we encounter seven people riding on horseback. The air is so pure we can smell the horses hundreds of yards away. They gallop, two fall off and their horses run away. No one seems perturbed in this idyllic environment.

Now back to CIVILIZATION and Amsterdam. First night back the scenery is dramatically different. Two police women on horseback were galloping in the narrow streets yelling at each intersection to warn traffic. They are in hot pursuit of a man wearing a pink shirt who is running as for his life. In the background, an alarm is wailing and three half dressed prostitutes are shouting from a doorway. At first there something comical about the scene, it seems staged and as it becomes clear that it is all for real, the sadness sets in.

Making one's mark in the world: My friend Gerrit, on reading my writing about graffiti, says his view of it is that it is done by people who need to leave visible evidence of their existence. Perhaps it is an affirmation of themselves; territorial, like dogs marking their territory; like American presidents and their libraries. Point is taken.

 Cross Europe #7 

Herring Loss

Barry: After days of incessant rain, the most logical thing was to give up on being tourists and make a dash to friends in Holland. Once we stopped being tourists we actually began to experience the culture of the country we were visiting.

Goldie: Truth to be told, friends are golden beacons of light for me. Perhaps in travel hearts are like magnets, compelling the journey.

Barry: You know you are in Holland, when on a vacation island the line for the raw herring is longer than the line for ice cream.

Goldie: Imagine herring that melts in your mouth and doesn't come out of a jar, imagine at least nine kinds of herring - smoked, pickled, in curry/wine/cream sauce, etc. If you are a vegetarian, as I am some years, please don't imagine.

Barry: You know you are in Holland, when the Superman t-shirt a young person is wearing has a big Z on it for - Zuperman. Never had the opportunity to check, but suspect that there may be more "z's" in the Dutch version of Scrabble than in the English version; also suspect that the letter has a value closer to one than ten over here.

Goldie: Dutch has quite a repertoire of Yiddish words, "rochelling" (readers - spell check please?) means the substitution of one item for another when you didn't expect this to be the case.

Barry: Walking in the countryside, a car pulled over, a head popped out and in Dutch I was asked if I had just lost a horse. Apparently there was one running free in the area and there was something abnormal about me being on foot (in contrast to being on a bicycle or horse.) With the economy doing well, many farmers are finding it more profitable to raise horses.

Goldie: Our Dutch friends have been quite vociferous about keeping us off of bicycles in the cities, for survival reasons. While the density of cars would not seem high to a New Yorker, one boggles at the four lanes of traffic. A walking lane, a bicycling/motorized wheel chair lane (sometimes going four abreast), car lanes in both directions, then again with bicycles and those on foot. Now think about turning left on your bicycle....in Amsterdam; so I imagine in our friends' minds is our potential for a mistake of the sort that sends all dangerously sprawling in the Tour de France...

Barry: You know you are in Holland, when you see men in suits with briefcases biking to the office.

Goldie: My favorite was an elegantly dressed woman in high heels and stockings sitting on the rack of a bike ridden by an equally dapper man.

Barry: In other words, when we actually stopped looking for things to see, we began to see them. Yesterday, we experienced summer and spent the day on the beach. Saw two adults in a ring wall of sand surrounded by the incoming tide. I smiled, remembering, my childhood, playing sand and furiously trying to keep the wall from being swept away. Then I realized these were not kids but adults in their fifties. Gerrit said this is a common activity on the beach and it clicked that this is Holland where keeping the ocean at bay is a never ending national preoccupation.

Goldie: Mark, who is now visiting Paris with his father, didn't want to leave....not that it was the historic sites that captured his heart. Our friends have five children, the twenty-year old son became his idol and the four drop-dead gorgeous younger daughters.....well, let's just say that when he stayed with them on his own for a few days he called to say he was remaining there for either the week or the rest of his life.

Barry: I'm writing this on our flight home, since we are returning early in order to pack up our house which has just been sold. We are particularly sad about having to leave, especially since summer arrived yesterday and we're leaving really good friends.

The past two days were spent in a summer house of friends in a little town called Bergen, adjacent to the seaside town Bergen en Zee, which is a short *zigh zagh* (guttural g) on bike away. There are very few English speaking tourists here and I'd strongly recommend it to anyone visiting Holland. The village is quaint, a bit of an art colony, with genuine Dutch country-side, as one might see in a landscape of the seventeenth century, i.e., canals, windmills, cows, cows, cows, herons, horses and sheep and an endless skyscape.

Here it happened that we would have two mysteries revealed. Struggling with the menu in a café (Barry's South African fluency in Afrikans helps a lot with Dutch), a refined fellow leans over in a proper English influenced by a gentle Dutch accent offers to translate for us. Finding him a kindly sort and seeing whereas he was sitting alone with his beer, we invited his company and perhaps his thoughts on the village.

He told us he'd make the big move from Alkamer (some 5 miles away) to a house by the forest of the village 30 years ago and serves as an English teacher, almost retired at age 63. Upon learning of Goldie's passion for Dutch *appelgebak* (this must be what Jewish apple cake once truly resembled, awesome - and never, never forget the country-fresh hand whipped cream!) he announced that he himself made and consumed an *applegebak* once a week and offered to instruct us in how to make one and so he did - 150 grams of creamery butter, this particular tart apple-not that one, or heavens forbend, never Granny Smith! and so on. We took copious notes.

We asked are there many American tourists in Bergen? "Mostly Germans, unfortunately," was his reply. Seeing me wince a bit at the nationalism, he explained: "They took our homes, our cattle, our cars, killed our sons and do you know, they killed 100,000 of our Jews, the highest percentage per capita of any country." He didn't know we are Jewish, Goldie's *kippah* was under a baseball cap intended to shade the sun.

He went on, "I'll tell you a miracle happened here recently. You see, my grandmother sheltered a Jewish boy for five years during the war, not here, in Alkamar. One day a neighbor told her that he knows she is hiding a Jew.

Then, sadly, she had to find him another safe house in another city. We never knew if he survived the war. And, just recently, here in Bergen, I see someone who looks just like him....still I am not sure. I go up and ask him 'Are you Kim?' This was his hiding name. He looks scared, very unsure and uncomfortable and backs away. "Wait, I cried out, I am the grandson of Berga, I was young with you in her house." He looks at me and says, "Yes, I am Kim." "I learned that day that he is a professional in Amsterdam. He only wished he had found Berga to thank her, though she died long, long ago."

Our luncheon companion suggested one problem with the *appelgebak* recipe, there is a special Dutch flour that must be used. So, he brings us to his lovely forest home with an enchanted garden of fourteen varieties of Fuchsias for a nip of sherry.

Barry: Our last few days were deeply touched also by the death of our very close friend Kenneth Barnett, may his memory be for a blessing. He had been courageous through decades of chronic illness and we will miss him very,very much. Generous, always ready with a joke, a kiss and dinner (he was a four star chef), the *appelgebak* we bake is dedicated to Ken, who would have so savored the encounter, the story and the recipe.

So as we wing our way west, across the Atlantic, we say good bye to *appelgebak en slaag*, toasties, *nieuwe herring*, *frietjes* (fries and don't trust the spelling), cheeses galore, *kibbeling* (bits of fried fish) and friends so precious and holy we still can't really pronounce their names such as Frouke, Jouke, Nimjke, Gerrit, Carola, Kees, Ania and the only clue we'll give is that the "g" in Dutch sounds as a "chet" in Hebrew, and the "ou" is like in cow. And course there's Tzeitl, it takes a Dutch Jew to redeem a Jewish name with a Z in it.

Thank you for the kindness of virtually being on this journey with us. See you in the BIG APPELgebak. Lots of love and blessings from our hearts to yours.

America Revisited

 Southwest Crossing #1 

Doggie Daddy

Barry: I don't fly for long weekends, takes me a few days to recover from the stress. So, naturally, Goldie's invite to rabbi for a friend's wedding in Durango, Colorado became an opportunity for us to spend two and a half weeks in the southwest USA. We are round tripping via Phoenix.

Goldie: I'm not at all keen on long winding highways, still, my love is connecting with friends and family everywhere and these trips provide the opportunity to wander from one amazing person to the next.

Barry: Flying is the price I pay for experiencing nature and people.

Goldie: Driving is the price I pay for experiencing Barry. Just traded my hot little red sports car for a van; really would have preferred a tiny plane. Ah, what one will do for love.

Barry: Except for having our rental car rear-ended in Phoenix, the trip has been filled with delightful hospitality, friendship, learning, exquisite scenery and surprises.

The email note from our next host reads: "Ours is the pink adobe house at the end of the street."

Barry: "That must be it on the right. Run up to the front door and see if it's a Jewish home." It seemed a reasonable suggestion, given how few the numbers of Jewish residents might be in the mining town of Silver City, New Mexico. Beside the front door is a lengthy Hebrew plaque, more lovely than most. The owner looks at us in surprise, "No, the Wegman's live at the very end of the block."

An email invitation to drop in received from a reader of Goldie's web site prompted our visit to Alan Wegman and his wife Ann. We told them laughing we'd already met the other Jew in town. "Oh, he's not Jewish," they responded, "He just liked the plaque."

Goldie: Alan is the public defender in this mining town which he describes as having a Mexico-like third world culture. It is one of the poorest counties in America, in the poorest state in the nation. Unbeknownst to us, it is also a town of great historical significance: The gaping terraced chasms of the mines that gash the otherwise magnificent mountainous horizon were the site of a defining labor dispute.

Barry: The movie *Salt of the Earth* was filmed here in 1953, by black listed film makers, documenting the successful strike of mostly Mexican miners for equal treatment in matters of sanitation, safety and pay. It was a long, brutal strike and when the picketing by miners was ruled illegal, the women challenged their husbands' machoness by forming an auxiliary and all-women picket lines. The movie was banned and declared subversive in the McCarthy era.

Goldie: A book by the movie's same name makes important reading. The author emphasizes the power of peoplehood vs corporate greed, in doing so he touches something I've been searching for but can't yet fit into the puzzle of our lives. It has something to do with facing down anti-Semitism the way the Mexicans and Chinese in the story were able to, in tandem with respecting the peoplehood of

others. Originally moved to use blacklisted actors, the film makers suddenly realized they were about to cast Caucasians into the role of the native laborers....they turned around on a dime and cast the locals.

"Pg 46 "The Chinese developed a homogeneity, a group presence, that endowed each individual with stature that was a gift from the whole. It brought a power in relaxation to them that few actors achieve. If they brought less skill, they brought the authority and dedication of their own persons and that incomparable thing—the reality of a people."

Pg 40. "We're dealing with something else. Not just people. A people. The point is this: discrimination has forced these people into a conscious as well as unconscious unity. They have respect for themselves as a whole, because they've learned that individual doesn't get anywhere by himself. The fact is they're a people. It's a beautiful thing to see and to reflect."

Barry: Alas, history repeats itself. The multinational corporate operator recently closed one of the two copper mines, throwing 1200 people out of work. It must be so hard to be a child here; there is nothing to do, no youth programs, nothing.

Goldie: The creative individualism of those drawn to live in the southwest leaves me in awe and a deep appreciation for the quality of care given for our comfort and understanding by each family with which we've visited. Alan placed a two-handled cup for the traditional Jewish washing ritual in our bathroom, having learned this practice is meant to be part of Jewish morning blessing practice, not just reserved for meals or Shabbat. No one has ever done this before, I am deeply touched.

Barry: Alan introduced us to Yo Kalisher who lives way out in the wilderness on an old commune, which is still a communal property. While we languished in the hot springs on the grounds, Goldie and Yo seemed to bond instantly.

Goldie: What my study partner and I call "eternitis" takes over immediately as Yo and I share our takes on ways to go up the Kabbalists' sephirotic tree of life. His spatial abilities as a natural sculptor seem to help him render in words a dimensionality of understanding I have never before experienced. For me it is like going from 0 to 120 mph spiritually in a matter of minutes, he opens up the heart space, *tiferet*, in ways that will never be the same again for me.

And then there are his sculptures, to touch them is to experience the power of G*d's name through the a new sense. And when he shows the *yud hey vav hey* letters of G*d's name chiseled through alabaster, so that the letters are negative space framing the desert . . . you have to experience it. And, the Shin lettered over the fireplace as below.

Barry: As the heat of the day waned and evening colors beckoned, we hiked the mountains with Alan and his street-found Chow-type dog Charlie, previously known as "Dead Beat Dad" for years of spontaneously siring puppies all over town.

Goldie: Barry and I begin to do our Jewish meditation walks *davenning* (passionate prayer) and Alan joins us. This practice has become so dear to us; we lead one formally earlier in the trip in the dramatic Sabino Canyon in Tuscon, at the request of delightful folks who befriended us at the Aleph Kallah, Marilyn and Samuel Devore. Being unaccustomed to cacti being called a "forest," let's say this setting was a both thorny and amazing experience. We're deeply into our process of planning a Jewish Meditation and Nature course for our August week in Elat Chayyim, very excited about it.

Being in the wilderness during Shavuot, the holy day commemorating receiving the Torah at Sinai, is becoming a tradition for us. The Arizona heat was so daunting, 103 degrees for days on end. The mostly laid-back nature of folks out here is a joy as we're winding down our NYC-bred affects. One local tension appears paramount, concern about fires starting, they are in a four year drought here; most every plant is a tinder box waiting to be sparked.

Barry: The adaptability of the plant life fascinates. Saguaro [su-wah-row] cacti abound, topped by

bouquet-like blooms of their brief seasonal flower. Doves dine on their sweet day time scent, and bats travel 50 miles up from Mexico to savor their night time ferment. Saguaro, often term one-armed bandit cacti in the movies, turn out to have an internal wood-like skeleton and are technically classified as trees!

A pleasure that keeps growing on us is birding. In Tuscon's Madeira Canyon lands over 12 varieties of humming birds play the trumpeting flowers. Birders' seem to be mentors-in-waiting, so friendly and informative!

Goldie: Few we meet seem to have been born here. Each person is a transplant that took the courage of their hopes and convictions in hand to re-invent themselves here. Our Phoenix stay with Carl and Elaine Hammerschlag puts us in a Paradise Valley home full of joyful visiting young adult children, garnished with such fine southwest artwork that each basket stitch seems to be chanting its own prayer.

Carl is a shamanically-wizened Jewish psychiatrist deeply connected to the local Native Americans. We met at a retreat center last year and delight in deepening our connection. A now retired, entrepreneurial designer, Elaine regaled us with photos of the 40th birthday girls' party she'd just thrown for a daughter, where everyone who came dressed as a Wild West "show biz" women....oooh, I have the perfect ostrich feather hat for that left over from my mom's youth (hmm) and never had a place to wear it.

South West #2 

Anastazi City Remains n Arizona

Barry: We're actually heading to Durango, Colorado where Goldie will officiate at a wedding on a ranch. Today we were mostly on the road, traversing stunning, dry, precipitous, winding mountainous passes. We paused in Albuquerque for Goldie to catch up on news with colleague Rabbi Lynne Gottlieb.

Goldie: Lynn's congregation has developed land with housing options for a few congregants, art, photography and music studios, in-house klezmer dance and band groups, women's studies and diversity programs, and even a monthly Shabbat service in Ladino in honor of the many Conversos (Jews forcibly or protectively turned Christian during the Spanish Inquisition) in this region who find the shul a safe place to re-discover and preserve their origins and much more. They plan to soon be able to welcome and train those who seek to learn how to create such new paradigm congregations.

Barry: More after Shavuot, which Goldie will be leading at Rabbi Ayla Grafstein's community Ruach HaMidbar (spirit of the wilderness) in Phoenix. We can't actually post this yet, no email connections in the area, so your reading may be a bit asynchronous with the writing.

Goldie: Blessings for a Shavuot full of in-coming guidance for the vision you seek.

 South West Crossing #3 

Shazzam Dunk

Goldie writing, Barry sleeping: Yes, we are joyously engaged in another working vacation. Shavuot with Reb Ayla's full-of spirit, vigor and nature-loving congregation was set in a park at the base of the mountains, beside a sky-reflecting lake. For us it is very healing to be away from the immediate sense of impending terrorism in recent days in New York City. Life here feels SO SPACIOUS; how ever-so-

much more difficult for those in Israel where times are frightening.

Our drive took us through the San Carlos Apache Reservation where Barry is reminded of Cape Flats in South Africa, arid wasteland dotted with shacks, shanty towns and dust. Ultimately this sad vista yields to a gem of a morning visiting Frank Lloyd Wright's winter home and architectural school, Taleisin West.

So striking to learn that, at age 65 Frank Lloyd Wright and his third wife built this home and architectural school deep in the Arizona desert. About third of his commissions he did from age 81 to 91, with over one hundred left to go when he died. He set up the site by viewing the desert as an ocean, respecting the land so much, that he put nothing atop a peak, built nothing higher than the tree-line, which he termed the 'brow of the mountain'.

His architectural forms were well-known for steering people through spaces to do and experience what he wanted of them. For example, in the dining room, the ceiling was so low one is forced to sit so as to see revealed the view of the mountains. He saw the site as an experimental learning center. Students build their own dwelling for the last three years of their program. Over 360 experimental buildings were built and taken down on the premises over the years.

This almost three-week trip was occasioned by a request to wed friends Lonn Heymann and Susie Greene of Denver. They chose the gem of a recovered old western railroad town, Durango for the four day event. The couple perceived their families as quite secular and hoped they could be drawn in to the religious experience. I love helping to braid two souls marriage. Like moving from the separateness of Shabbat candles into the sensuous melting of the end of Shabbat's braided Havdalah candle, holiness happens palpably at such Jewish weddings.

In that odd way some sister and fellow rebbes report, I can't remember being there. What must have been needed played through. Having said that, one image, no two arise: When they danced the *sephiroth*, [a tree of qualities of being each person can refine and balance, according to the Kabbalists] (that's a very shorthand explanation) the couple began to improvise, turning their turnings into a most sensuous, sweet dance, which told the story of each *sephirah's* impact upon them in the moment, e.g., Loving-kindness winding into good boundaries. They chose to begin with *da-at*, which we interpreted as transforming knowledge into safe speech. As Barry mentioned, you can check my web site for some more of the nuances.

What some now call evolutionary spirituality, this couple pledged as their awareness, that each of us are created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of G*d, "becoming what we are becoming." They mutually committed with their rings: "with this symbol I make you holy unto me" and both added the prophetic: "with a love full of justice, compassion, love, honest and trust."

Have you ever noticed that sometimes the Cosmos just wants something to happen, then all of the underbrush on the yellow brick road of life disappears and the way is clear? This wedding was like that, woven by bride, groom and family as precious as the area's abundance of finely woven, richly symbolic Ute and Pima basketry. I had to hoot when the couple had mutated the words *shomer* and *shomeret* into calling the person who served as their sacred servant a shazzam. It is a Jewish wedding tradition to give the bride and groom freedom to focus only on readying their minds, bodies and spirits for the wedding by each having a friend serve their every need on the day of the wedding. Suzie chose a best friend, Lonn, a brother. Imagine Barry's surprise when the day after this wedding, he opened a book given to us by Marilyn Devore in Tuscon and on the third page the word shazzam is defined!

The shazzamim [plural?] proved to be loving and appropriately detail-oriented wedding attendants and liaison to yours truly, I miss them already. Shazzam was only part of the magic; the hot springs even let us in after hours for *mikveh* (immersion for spiritual preparation). The overly shallow drought challenged rivers of melted snow were proved too daunting for us. It seems to me that a person becomes truly bride or groom in the *mikveh*. There the eggshell of single life breaks and an expanded soul is midwived from this visit to the cosmic womb; each of them immersed without the other, at

separate times, birthing a layer of soul they don't yet fully know that is realizable in relationship. They made a practice of not seeing each other from *mikveh* until the wedding, for the joy of the practice, the freshness, building up of joyful tension, the glory of how such a ritual dilutes old *klippot*, "husks" of traumas gone by and newly planted by the inevitable wedding preparation stresses, *mikvah* never ceases to amaze me.

The inability to remember the actual moments of serving as rabbi at the wedding, it's not exactly new, it is recent. It has been a long process of drenching my soul with the liturgy, adding practices that take a person beyond "self" in order to be able to achieve a transparency during ritual. Years ago Reb Zalman had adjured me of still having too much ego and not enough transparency operative at such times. Had no idea what he meant back then, was only aware of a necessary feeling of falling, a healthy descent of soul for the purpose of learning, when he spoke.


Crafting Jewish renewal and Reconstructionist methods and models to serve a mainstream family like those at the wedding, and mainstream congregations and organizations has taken time and testing. It was Barry's idea, perhaps stemming from the toxic-ly boring suburban congregation he'd lived with since coming to America from South Africa. Living with him in Reading, Pennsylvania, I mostly learned what didn't work when trying to bring the juiciness of Jewish renewal to the mainstream. On the road, I learned to get the tapes of what congregations hold as their traditions and to spice their norms with tastes of the possible. It was sometimes hard and very important learning how not to put out such a high spiritual volume as to create resistance, and yet, not so low as to misjudge the community's capacity to in my mother, Leona Milgram's words again: "stretch and grow, reach for the sky."

Our journey has included much time in the three gems in the diadem of creation, at least from my vantage point: Nature, friends and intimacy. While hot springing back in Silver City with Yo Kalisher, he told me of Reb Zalman's teachings to him on *mikvah* - a macho *mikveh* for occasional use by males, where one is held down by all until he tugs to request release. I'm more likely to adopt the second teaching, four immersions, each begun facing in a different direction, calling under the water from within yourself upon a different name for G*d which you wish to pray through at this time. Wonderful!

That's all about the wedding scene, tomorrow we turn toward Jimez Springs to hang out with friends Shefa and Rachmiel for awhile, then Mesa Verde and Native American connections. Planning to stop in Flagstaff to organize a Kosher Canyon Run for 2004, two weeks white water rafting and Jewish spiritual practice, hoping they'll have space for a charter. Maybe you'll be interested in coming along? I did this once before ago, not as organizer, as the student intern and it may be the most fun you can have with your pants on.

Much love, Goldie and Barry [now at the wheel and needing me to navigate]

Coast Hopping

 Coast Hopping #1 

Ark Angel

As Rosh HaShannah, the Jewish spiritual New Year approaches, I'm struggling to break through an inner silence, a listening for guidance and sense of knowing little or nothing that will be of consequence in the face of what might be possible to hear leaning over the fence of fear that arose within since 911. People keep asking why so long between postings? Listening, sometimes with equanimity often with yearning, that is "why."

We've been busy in fascinating ways. Lifted and drifted like leaves in a warm breeze of Indian summer, various e-mails have come inviting us to visit folks or communities around the world, to hang out, to teach. So much so that we gave up our apartment facing the former World Trade Center site in order to be fully free to respond and freer of the pervasiveness of the event's impact in the region.

I have little residual sense of what we've taught along the way; hopefully what was needed came through for others. It is the listening that stands out and what can be heard continually feeds my spirit.

For twelve days we served as rabbinic-couple in residence on the senior adult side of the lake of Emanuel Camp in the Berkshires. While leading an intergenerational bibliodrama on Sarah and Hagar with elder women (ages 75-98 or so) and young girls (ages 9-12), they became radically animated at discovering a precious level of Torah study so little taught in Hebrew schools, metaphor. This way of drinking from the deep well of text never ceases to amaze, I experienced their joy at entering the Flow. Like a nursing mother, the milk comes and it is not one's own to give. My sense is of being a vessel refilling and serving as a synapse through which the spark must travel with as much need as a sperm has to reach the egg.

One vignette among many worth sharing is regarding the angel that draws Hagar's attention to the nearby well. [How did Hagar forget? She's in the wilderness of Be'er Sheva, "Seven Wells," surely a local would know where some of the Seven Wells are?] "G*d is the angel, the Listener," one elder explained, to which she pours her heart out like water when the pain of being alive is too great. When her pouch is empty, the lament exhausted, she is ready to lift her head, then what friends have been yearning to offer from their wells she is able to receive to refill her pouch. Their love is part of how G*d refills her.

A young girl at the camp who never had spoken once in the two hours hesitantly reaches for the microphone. The group is so connected now that a hush falls as they wait for her. "I am Sarah," she says. "I slipped out of the camp to go to Hagar. I had no idea the huge hole that would appear in our lives when I pushed her and Ishmael out. I brought her water. We talked. She decided not to return, that her son needed not to grow up in the shadow of his brother.

I had set in motion a process I was powerless to stop. Was I an angel to bring her water? No. Was just a person who was doing *teshuvah*, (ethically realigning the relationship). Or, perhaps one becomes an angel through the act of *teshuvah*.

Have you ever been white water rafting? The river guides learn to follow "the tongue of the river." Rocks may fall and alter its course, sand may move and mass and shape the flow, yet the heart of the flow continues, even when stones and breadth tickle it to trickling, the tongue of the river regroups its momentum and goes on.

Water themes permeate this year for Barry and me by choice. After senior camp we moved one hour over to Elat Chayyim to teach a week of Jewish Meditation Walks in Nature. After years of studies in the barns and yurts there, we resolved last year to create courses that would take us and our students off campus into the vast, exquisite nature of the Catskill region. This year we decided to immerse in the study and contemplative theme of "water" in Judaism. Beside streams and rivers, under waterfalls and in water holes we frolicked and studied, gazed, and wondered and glimpsed the image of "The King" in the mirror of such glory. We're invited back to lead a Jewish nature walk weekend there this November; we've named our class "As Autumn Leaves."

Tears have been flowing freely, mostly in joy. My oldest son Adam started college this year, Vassar. In a new trend we're speaking every day, delightful to hear his progress in a new place. He tells me the orientation included important facts like the campus is "clothing optional" and that so long as sex is consensual, it can be held anywhere without fear of intervention. My sixteen year old Mark is learning how to rally forces against administrative tyranny in his public high school. That's my boy! And my step-children and our grandchildren through them are multiplying and thriving, thank G*d.

I take a limited number of private life cycle event assignments, and one in preparation is a very deep, poetic young man whose parents are maximally involved in the process. Such a joy for me as his family to joins him around the table of study and reflection. Studying with a male Orthodox rabbi, he decided to add a woman rabbi to the mix of his experience. Imagine taking the idea from a Torah portion of *nedivat lev* [generosity of heart] and transforming it into an aliyah at the Torah for those who have signed their organ donor cards or wish the spiritual support to do so. So he has chosen to do.

I feel a great urgency to continue working on a B-mitzvah [r]evolution; very current studies now show a direct correlation between alienation from Judaism and having a bar/bat mitzvah. My hope is to help infeminate a shift from memorization and stuffing in of knowledge, to having this b-mitzvah season be a source of enduring meaning and maturation for youth and families. What a privilege to have been blessed with congregations in Philadelphia, Parsippany and Boston areas to beta test the effort.

Now we're out west for a few months, our first stop was time with Barry's brother Jeff, wife Sheila and delightful extended family. They offered the height of South African hospitality and I felt my New Year instantly sweetened by coming to know another facet of Barry's huge world-wide family.

A very sensuous environment is California. The Huntingdon Library Gardens range some 200 acres, with more South African species than we saw in any one place in South Africa itself. The patterns in the cacti and pre-historic plantings in opulence were entrancing, the docents rich in detail we would have overlooked. Then at the Getty Museum for a second time in several years, the newly planted gardens were stunning in different, geometric, state of the art architectural ways that we hadn't caught on to before.

The richly spirited P'nai Or community in Long Beach California invited us to teach a four hour workshop on *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is a core Jewish value, it means that each of us is viewed as responsible for cleaning up toxic mistakes in our relationships; G*d can't do this for us, we have to work it out with one another.

My hubbatzin Barry psychotherapist/chaplain/intellect and me - rebbe/intuitive/stickler for knowing the tradition - studied and then wrestled for months about how to create this experience for their group. Out of this, of course, came our own opportunities for *teshuvah*. We became clear that our beloved friend/mentor/teacher, Dr. Gene Gendlin, who created the form of listening within known as

Focusing, has found useful tool for *teshuvah* as a process, which might be termed as the skill to gently, supportively allow the soft voice of G*d to be heard out from under a plethora inner voices built up on the path of life. Hearing this voice - whether as a feeling, a symbol, a voice, etc. - and listening to it, dialoguing with it, yields a turning within which ultimately allows us to turn a new face to the world.

We found examples within Judaism of a similar sense and the combination with a dash of dance, a solid measure of chant; add a twist of Yiddish folk music, baked into what one participant sweetly termed "one challah of an afternoon."

Yesterday was a perfect day. With one of our gracious, vivacious local hosts, Steve Braveman, we wandered from picture perfect Monterey to Esalen to prepare for leading Rosh HaShannah services and retreat there. At the River Inn in the mountains of Big Sur we paused to take in a river with chairs built into it, a huge resident pet goose, and splendiferous reflections. Moving on to Esalen, we found this season to look so different than Spring - everything is in such richness of blooming and we've been given what's called The Big House, a program room overlooking the cliffs and Pacific coast. Mmmmmmmmm.

To our surprise yesterday was a big day at Esalen, they completed and opened at 5 pm their new natural hot spring baths down by the ocean. A breathtaking cliff-side perch and of awesome architectural concept, these very hot tubs crafted of stone and ever-flowing spring water must be the most beautiful anywhere. We did a blessing ritual and of course invited the spirit of Fritz Perls and Timothy Leary to be in attendance!

Our "vacation" in Monterey has had two focal points, precious mentoring time with Rabbi Leah Novick, and long walks in nature with Steve and Michaela Braveman. Steve is a national expert on the treatment of male sex offenders and has a second specialty in preparing people who wish to change their gender through drugs and/or surgery. We learned many mind-expanding psychotherapy concepts, tons about sex therapy also lots about some of their *tikkun olam* (the mitzvah of working for justice in the world) interests - homelessness and sea-otters. Did you know that sea otters make love free-floating on the water, the male bites onto the female's snout so he won't fall off; beats being a praying mantis.

The jelly fish exhibit here at the aquarium in Monterey exceeds those we've seen around the world. Even my love of science fiction hasn't wrought anything this magnificent, from the microscopic to the giant phosphorescence of their flowing glory. For me, Rosh HaShannah is about rebirthing optimism through witnessing how everything is constantly changing, evolving, and innovating in order to thrive in changing circumstances. The grand vision of *Yud Hey Vav Hey*, the Jewish conception of G*d as "becoming what it is becoming" is what we are - beings becoming.

This is an easy part of the world with which to fall in love. One of the big decisions facing us in the coming year is where to live when we grow up, where to be of service and how. Daunting, exciting, confusing! A nice thing is the new web site family and non-profit I'm working on with a talented team of innovators and supporters, ReclaimingJudaism.org and Barry has a site coming out soon too, processmedicine.com, relating to his teachings in physician wellness, medicine and healing. His work is starting to be recognized by the AMA and medical educators I'm very proud of his principled persistence and profound concepts.

Pacific Grove is the Monarch [*ha melekh* - "the king" in Hebrew?] butterfly capital of the continent. It takes four generations for them to complete a cycle of migration from Canada to South America. Each generation gives its all on its segment of the journey. Some Jewish mystics say this is not the first time the world was created and that it has gone through several cycles of creation and destruction on the way to becoming what it is. One blessing for the New Year might be for each of us trust the rightness of our place and phase in the cycle of Being.

Another blessing might come from a version of a parable as is said to have been told by the Rebbe of Tzanz: "Two people are separately lost in a forest. One of them had been lost for many days and had no sense of the right way to get out. Suddenly the other person appeared traveling nearby. A great joy arose in the first person, finally, there would be someone to show the correct way out. When they came to each other, the first asked, "Traveler, tell me. What is the best way to go? I have been lost in the forest for many days." The second answered, "I cannot tell you what is the proper way. I am also lost. However, one thing I can tell you. The way I have been going you should not go. It is not the correct way. Come let us together choose out a new way." It is said the rebbe would finish telling this story with tears in his eyes. He said: "I am not able to tell you anything except this, the way in which we have been going until now we should not follow any more. This way is an error. Let us try for ourselves a new way." Otzar HaChaim

Others are writing with diverse and eloquent opinions on the times we live. Just for today the Tanzer Rebbe speaks to my existential condition and perhaps yours, may we all be blessed to find a new way. We're enroute after Esalen to Napa, then Yom Kippur in Portland, Oregon, family time in Seattle and teaching for the AMA in Canada. B'ezrat haShem, perhaps another posting will be possible along the way.

 Coast Hopping #2 

Hum Free

Prescript: While enjoying Shabbat with our friends in Tennessee we were stunned to learn of the space shuttle disaster. Recognizing that our postings about the good things in life may be discordant with events, we have, nonetheless, made a conscious decision to carry on. These spiritually-oriented travelogues include an itinerary of touring, teaching, researching, and visiting friends and family in far-flung places. If you don't want to receive them, please let us know. People are busy, we'll understand.

Goldie: We're still "home free" [without residence, electively for the joy of it] and hence on the road again, this time driving Humphrey (note pun please – "home-free") our new deep blue Grand Caravan mini van.

Barry: We're in Northern Virginia, outside of Washington, DC, en route to Cape Town, South Africa. Goldie's geographically diverse teaching schedule continues to offer us a chance to savor a tapestry of people and places.

Goldie: And Barry's research leads us into nooks and crannies of history and culture along the way much like butter melts into an English muffin. While in my foreground is writing against some editorial deadlines and preparing to teach an upcoming Rosh Chodesh retreat in Greensboro, NC, in my background is Norton's Utilities running a virus check.

We began in Washington, DC, allocating our one free day to the National Gallery of Art, touring the east and the west wings. Regulars at NYC's Metropolitan Museum of Art we still found ourselves agape at the classical treasures and exceptional examples of contemporary work, all donated, on display here.

Barry: The tour turned more unique while standing before a huge black and white abstract painting described as created by someone who threw paint at it and punctured it randomly. Hearing this, a young woman burst out at the guide in anger: "I was a dancer, for twenty years I labored to learn and perfect my art and we never made this kind of money. Where's the appreciation of art when so much money goes to someone who throw throws paint on a canvas?"

While the guide tried to shift her perspective, what I heard was the lament of an undervalued profession. When our priorities are to spend huge amounts on litigation and insurance, supporting over one million lawyers, how much is left over for the arts in general? This could also be seen as the lament of an American physician who sees our values as a society being distorted.

Goldie: I learned that she teaches dance to disabled youth. We paused before a gigantic fractal-based portrait done by Chuck Close, who happens to be a paraplegic. Museums are like Torah study, there is something waiting for you, sometimes deep in the intersection of text and life. My moment would come later.

In the 1930's millions of Americans were unemployed. A Public Works Administration was established to turn the coffers of the US treasury into subsidized work. Among many profession-specific projects, unemployed artists were commissioned to copy the images of American folk arts that were on government repository as historical treasures. We came upon a display of some of this beside the paintings intended to preserve them in memory.

The artists' renderings seem to be impossible in their precision, beauty and ability to capture the items they represent. A water color of a crewel needle point even captured the prick of the needle on the fabric and the waving lines of the underlying linen, the velvet edging appeared plush and even an area which had been pushed the wrong way was recorded.

I felt awe and sadness. Imagine! What if these artists had been supported as free spirits and not constrained to do copy work. And yet, the decaying objects beside them did not retain enough of their original patina and form (decaying wicker and rusting metals abounded in what remains of the originals), so the paintings really tell the glory of each craft. The economic tragedy also left a positive outcome. Inspiring!

Barry: To some extent what constitutes a blessing and a curse, versus a curse, is our interpretation of the event. In these economic hard times, having unemployed people can be turned into a blessing if there's wisdom enough to offer meaningful employment to those who need it. I'm currently writing a book on health care issues which has me thinking that the despair that many now feel can be a stimulus to reforms that are long, long overdue.

Tapestry continued as a theme in our arts adventure as we turned toward the exhibit on trompe l'oeil. Going back to 400 B.C.E artists have tried to paint so realistically that it fooled the eye. A bunch of grapes is a common theme as is dust or a fly that seems to have settled into the painting but is really part of it. It's magical. National Geographic, when reproducing one of the paintings, actually removed the fly thinking it was in the photograph, never dreaming it was really part of the painting.

Goldie: Barry's daughter Juliette Aristides is receiving wide acclaim for her work as a classical realist which sometimes incorporates this technique.(aristidesarts.com) My sense of this genre was greatly shifted when I almost walked past a white sheet draped over what appeared to be the outline of a dark brown wooden grandfather clock. Barry pointed out this was an actual art installation, not a clock in storage. The sheet and clock were carved out of the same piece of wood - the white fabric was a physical illusion.

Barry: Somehow Judaism appears when least expected. Our attention was arrested by the words "Zim Zum" written in chalk on a gigantic textured lead, mud, mottled brown and grey crackled painting at the end of our afternoon tour.

Goldie: Kiefer, a Germany-born artist, was born in 1945 and this is a 1990 work. The guide described it as something from Kabbalah that refers to creation and destruction. Simultaneously Barry and I exclaimed: "Tzim tzum!" This Kabbalistic notion of the contraction of G*d that led to the bursting forth of light and shattering of vessels, a powerful shattering of all that was that led to all that is.

Barry: The marriage between blessing and curse is played out in this painting which reflects in the interdependence of destruction and creation.

Goldie: Our DC hosts were deep and delightful Robin and Jeff Bub, cousins of Barry. Robin and I went at it over Middle East politics until our underlying frustration, sadness and impotence united us in spirit. Jeff is a professor of the philosophy of science. Often I reach for physics or science fiction to stretch past the limitations of mysticism. By that I mean the problem of unio mystica, which leads to an assumption proven wrong in every generation, that such mystical or meditative practices breed peace. Those who have been near the epicenter of religious institutions - whether contemplative or administrative know they are rife with politics, not unity. But doesn't physics support the assumption of universal coherence? We learned, no, a split of opinion about this has emerged about whether that wholeness is available within the physics of our universe.

In our conversations Jeff took us to the limits of knowledge. His specialty is quantum mechanics and more recently an argument between Bohr and Einstein that he seems to have put to rest in favor of Bohr. There are complexities of behavior in our universe called entanglements that, if I understood him, led Einstein to feel there were missing chunks in his elegant theories.

Jeff suggests these entanglements are not the stuff of missing theory; rather they are important resources/information/limitations available within our physical universe. Ultimately these may account for limitations which belie the possibility of achieving on our plane of being the unity we believe to be possible. In some ways this too is anticipated in Jewish mysticism, which postulates Elohim as referring to the way "G*d" manifests in this physical world as different from *Ein Sof*, the infinite possible beyond the limitations of our ability to back up to see the Big Picture beyond our universe.

Barry: We're heading for Johnson City, Tennessee, a long ride, how to break it up? Stepping back a hundred years, we took a tour of the Woodrow Wilson birthplace in Staunton, Va., a charming town that escaped damage from the Civil War. Neither of us knew much about him. Aside from lots of helpful history, here we learned four new/old facts:

The word "range" as used for a kitchen stove, refers to a new-fangled iron invention that provided various compartments at different temperatures, hence offering a "range" of options.

Next, a "rolling pin bed" had a circular wooden rolling pin sitting atop the headboard so that one could smooth out the feather bed.

Third, hair was saved from hair brushes in a slotted china dish to be used for making braided jewelry; also the hair of one deceased was braided into jewelry to be worn while mourning.

Finally, you know how some chairs are built quite low to the ground? This was because with the stoves, fireplaces and kerosene lamps the rooms were smoky and by sitting low one could access more oxygen.

Southern United States

 Heading South #1 

Blue Grist

Goldie: Some say that G*d's representative at the gate to the world to come will ask the multi-taskers: "So you've made many mitzvahs, but did you see My Alps? We'll, we've reached the mountains of Tennessee, where mountain folk still make their lively, passionate music and crosses grow like cedars of Lebanon. We'll be meeting with medical, rabbinic and cantorial colleagues settled quietly here-bouts like precious low profile orchids, as well as taking a long tall sip of local culture.

Barry: Like learning to enjoy beer by visiting pubs in Great Britain almost daily for three weeks, I'm taking a similar immersion approach to the south and country music which I passionately dislike.

Goldie: After Kabbalat Shabbat services (Friday night, Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown) at the converted plantation mansion that houses Rabbi Brian Nevins-Goldman's congregation in the Appalachian town of Blountville, TN we slipped around the corner to a bluegrass jam session. It proved to be a log cabin crammed with about a dozen folks pickin' an' strummin' an' singin' and soon they invited our hosts' daughter Corianna, age 3, to dance in the center til even the grimmest grinch among 'em was grin'n an' hoot'n.

I've begun studying a huge tome on the musical notation known as Torah trope shown to me by Chazzan Neil Schwartz, one of my study partners when we lived in Reading, PA, who with his wife Katie and delightful children are our hosts in Chattanooga. Taught to me by rote in rabbinical school, I've become fascinated by the nuances of meaning trope actually makes possible. So, doesn't that make one wonder about nuances in country music? Nashville, the \$34 million Country Music Hall of Fame provided fascinating answers in a high-tech museum environment, which in itself is worth experiencing for the new technology.

Barry: Country-western reflects the history of America, starting with fiddle music brought over from the British Empire, combined with gospel, jazz, soul, African music brought over by slaves, the history of the depression, the poverty of Appalachia, the beginning of radio and the phonograph industry, then television shows, Elvis, rock and roll influences, a huge dose of patriotism, the good guy/bad guy singing cow boy. This we learned touring the Country Music Hall of Fame here in Nashville. I am definitely warming up to this music.

Goldie: The next night our country music education was exponentially expanded at the Barter Theater's new play about the life of the Carter family who started the whole country western blue grass explosion in popularity. The family's matriarch Sarah brought the plaintive sound of rural women's experience with the perils of partners, pregnancies and poverty into the Country Western Hall of Fame. No longer pre-minstral, lately new chants have been being born in my spirit. What chants don't provide is lyrics. We are surrounded by the laments and laudatory verses of country music. Like olives, I've grown to like the taste and realize there are product quality differences between the good stuff played down here and the more commercial pieces that hit the airwaves in the northeast. Poignant to hear pieces written when the first space shuttle crashed, now, pardon the expression, resurrected for the tragedy's return.

Barry: True to its name, the Barter Theatre was founded during the Depression by a starving young NYC actor. He contrasted New York's legions of out-of-work actors with the abundance of food, but no live theater in his native Southeast Virginia. He returned home with the proposition of trading "hams for Hamlet." The price of admission was 40 cents or the equivalent in produce. The first season ended with the staff's collective weight gain of 300 pounds. Play rights accepting meat for barter included Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams, and Thornton Wilder. George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, required spinach.

This theater has spawned great actors, such as Gregory Peck, Patricia O'Neil, Ernest Borgnine, and Kevin Spacey. In our previous posting we noted how watercolor artists were employed during the depression to paint American treasures. Here too was a creation solution to the problem of unemployed actors that has ended up benefiting generations. Today, America has many physicians quitting because of work that is often meaningless and stressful. There are areas in the world that are desperate for physicians and offer the opportunity for meaningful work. What if we arranged a match, a *shidduch*?

Goldie: While lost on Nashville's Bellemead (beautiful meadow) Avenue, looking for its namesake plantation, we called to inquire about better directions. "Where are you?" "We're beside a white church with an inspiring steeple." "That's not actually very helpful," she says, "This is the Bible Belt." True, churches are everywhere.

So difficult to contrast what religion has fostered with what it claims. On the Bellemead plantation were 136 slaves. Its Civil War owner gave \$500,000 to the Confederate cause. In this face of his affluence the slaves lived a thread-bare existence.

Chattanooga (population 250,000) has 1000 churches 3 synagogues, and 3 Messianic "Jewish" congregations. My favorite so far is "Shekina Church" known for the passing around of snakes during services and the ability of the pastor and congregants to speak in tongues. The Ten Commandments can be found cast as preferred lawn ornaments and religious slogans are as profuse as graffiti. Unlike in NYC where therapists are so populous they have each other as clients, here we pass none, because, if you dial 888-NEED-HIM, you'll find that Jesus has replaced therapy.

During the long drives I've begun writing an academic paper on "Principles of Neo-Hassidic Rebbetude" my title for the topic requested for the upcoming conference on Neo-Hassidism in NYC at the end of March.

Does the term neo-Hassidic fit this peripatetic rabbinate of mine? Once, on a flight to the Ukraine I was the only person not wearing a blue and white tee shirt with a Russian slogan. Inquiring of my seat mate as to its meaning, he reported: "Jesus will make you rich." Noting my *kippah*, he asked the reason for my visit. "Teaching bible." "You are a Jewish evangelist! Go figure. Pleased to meet you sister." "No, not an evangelist." I insisted. "What's the difference?" He asked. My response: "I was invited."

Barry: In contrast to the high profile of the churches is the low profile of the synagogues. Right now with the Schwartz family in Chattanooga we're learning about the closeness of the Jewish community.

Our visit to Jonesboro, the oldest town in Tennessee revealed it to be almost European with its narrow streets and superbly preserved buildings of total charm, best known for hosting the International Storytellers annual gathering.

On the way here we also stopped for a planned visit with author Rabbi Rami Shapiro who currently lives in Murphreesboro, TN, Rami was out but we had fun in the one square block downtown of this county seat eating in its "City Café" where a fellow identifying himself as "one of the town fathers" introduced us to fried okra and buttered apples. While a battle to put the Ten Commandments on a court house was lost elsewhere in Tennessee, here, a bible encased in glass adorns the yard of the

courthouse. It's bizarre that folks can't seem to remember the Ten Commandments; they seem to need reminders all over the place. Talking to locals, perhaps this is not misplaced. Despite all the hype, domestic violence, adultery and incest are by no means rare.

Goldie: Then on to Lord's Landing Tennessee Kosher B&B on a former cotton farm with a landing strip for the proprietor's husband's plane. It is literally in the middle of nowhere, beside two rural unincorporated towns. It seems we were to be their last guests; the proprietors are about to make *aliyah*, move to Israel, after one returned to Judaism from a lengthy stay (since age 12) in Christian fundamentalism and her husband is now studying to join her and the children in an observant Jewish life.

Barry: It had been suggested to us that we visit this B & B. I've learned to see people as messengers, when they give us recommendations we try to follow-through, trusting in the outcome; rarely has it turned out other than a very positive experience. Each place it seems there's an important conversation to have, a seed to plant or to carry on to the next community. We seem to have a pattern; teenage children are clearly engrossed by Goldie and her teaching. I find myself absorbed by the two or three year olds

Today, with Chazzan Neil as our guide, we visited local tourist sites in Chattanooga. Suddenly, my attention was grabbed by a sign: The International Towing and Recovery Museum. Neil expressed disbelief that we'd want to see this but for us this is just the idiosyncratic thing that gives meaning to being on the road. Museum was closed, but a kind woman let us in and even gave us a tour. My attention was caught once again. A full-sized map of South Africa (our next destination); apparently the largest truck recovery was on a highway north of Cape Town. They even had the newspaper article in Afrikaans which I translated. Many in SA drive without licenses, brakes, lights and they have a huge death toll on the road. I told the curator we would be there next week.

Her response was that she would pray for us.

You gotta love travel.

 Heading South #2 

Hitting the Stain Glass Ceiling

We were each in different cities this weekend; Barry in Atlanta, and Goldie leading a retreat in Greensboro, NC. Tomorrow we fly to South Africa.

Barry: "This is why I keep my hair this way." The vivacious young receptionist at the B & Bin Atlanta explained. "I could not make up my mind if I was going to have it long or short, so I decided to keep it in an interim state." She was referring to her hair style which can best be described as helter-skelter, and we were talking about liminal states. Hairdo as a rite of passage! She is also an installation artist and next week is the opening of an exhibition in which artists collaborated on a project to take a house researched to have about ninety previous occupants, and to capture some of the moments of their lives in art and music.

I nibbled on cheese and sipped some delicious Chardonnay thoughtfully provided by the B & B in lieu of afternoon tea, while she fed me interesting tidbits on southern culture. Did I know for example, about the region in lower Tennessee has spawned the world's experts on steeple architecture. (Had I thought about it.....) She also shared that all this bible punching has stimulated a lively underground counter-culture. (Hooray for the human spirit, I thought.)

Today, I had this enormous feeling of well-being come over me. I was sitting on a bench outside Alon's Bakery in the charming Virginia Highland district of Atlanta finishing a sandwich for lunch. The

sun felt warm in the crisp air. I had just shared the bench with an architect. We spoke about creative architecture in pediatric clinics and hospitals. We both wondered why this could not be applied to adult medical centers. Medicine is all about splits and fixed images, I told him, and this was just one of many examples. If you are a child, you are scared; so folks make the room look fun. If you are an adult, and scared - there's zip. (Goldie: Can think of one great exception, our friend Joe August has developed landscape image curtains to draw around the beds in hospital rooms, may they catch on!)

Earlier, inside the bakery, one of the assistants had offered me a free sandwich if I would help with the dishes, David who was giving a cheese demonstration, and I engaged in a lively discussion of the improbability of a low fat, high flavor cheese. He suggested that I should eat high fat cheese in moderation and exercise to create balance.

Saying goodbye to Goldie yesterday was difficult, yet it is hard to feel alone on the road. Her warm loving presence stays with me as I encounter interesting, friendly people happy to spend a few minutes sharing wisdoms. Then twice a day we call each other to share our individual experiences.

The concept of well-being is very much in my foreground right now. I am on a list discussing the topic of physician wellness (a regrettable oxymoron, if ever there was, in this day of high stress medicine.) There is much talk about the subject, yet I wonder if the physicians engaged in the discussion, (many of whom coach, counsel or work with stressed physicians), actually experience wellness. I find very little listening, creativity, risk-taking, collaboration, search for wisdom vs facts, establishment of safe boundaries, pro-active thinking, shared ownership, on the list; in other words, the same absence of healthy traits missing in physicians at large. Perhaps the discussion should focus on ourselves; we are all "recovering physicians."

Not so some of the unfortunate women in Chattanooga who've had abortions. Many, it seems, remain stuck in a place of guilt and shame. Yesterday Neil took me to the remarkable freshwater aquarium that has sparked a renaissance in downtown Chattanooga. I reciprocated by showing him the National Memorial for the Unborn. The "National Memorial" according to the pamphlet at the site, is located at a site where "35,000 babies died" Not fetuses, but babies mind you. Apparently they acquired this abortion clinic thereby stopping a "holocaust," and provided a 50 foot granite wall for plaques such as: "JASON STEPHEN LOWE I will always love you" and "TO MY LOST BABY June 1989 Forgive me my trespass." There are teddy bears, handwritten notes, toys left on a ledge under the wall. It's all painted in black and white. The guilt, the judgment, the absence of gray is chilling.

Contrast this with the warm, delightful Friday night service for toddlers and children at Neil's synagogue. They come to services dressed in pajamas, bringing teddy bears that participate in the short, mostly singing service; delightful, for me an antidote to the experience of the afternoon. At the dinner after the service, I sat next to an Israeli cardiologist who is a single parent - the irony of an Israeli in the land of the bible did not escape me. He lamented the heavy cigarette smoking of his patients, none of whom seemed to want to listen to him. I suggested he talk to the local pastors (all 1000 of them) Perhaps they could add "Thou shalt not smoke" to the other ten.

This morning I had breakfast with three lovely women who have driven down for the weekend from North Carolina to view a special exhibit at the High Museum of Art. One of the women has a sense of humor that's whip-like as it flies and cuts to the quick. I kept asking myself, where is her sadness, where is her sadness? After the other two left to pack, she and I talked about the South. I asked about the Memorial to the Unborn. She looked me in the eye and said some of us have left the past behind. Now she has to deal with the present. Her husband has graciously allowed her to spend the weekend with friends. They are waiting to hear if he has liver cancer. She thanked me for listening.

Goldie: The women on retreat with me in Greensboro were ready to party hardy, study deeply and pray in harmony. Did we ever! I come alive doing the scholar-in-residence thing because of the group energy, and profound questing of participants. We dive in together, and while I am grounded by my training, we fly high together in the field of new possibilities that bringing women's (and, when teaching gender inclusive retreats, contemporary male) voices, vision, views and values to the text.

It seems to be my calling to bring the applications of Jewish spiritual practice to mainstream contexts, as bookings are increasingly in Reform, Conservative and non-denominational mainstream settings. Their thirst for meaning and connection is so familiar to me, from my own earlier life.

What goals to have when taking women off for their first *Rosh Chodesh* [time of the New Moon, traditional for contemplation and women's gathering] retreat? The first goal is intimacy, for folks to have a chance to make friends, cross over class boundaries to get to know each other, to find common talents, interests and concerns, to play. Next is inner peace, for the word "retreat" to apply and not turn the weekend into an "intensive." Less is more on a retreat, white space for bonding, walks, naps; reflection needs to be placed between everything. Third is revealing the beauty of Jewish spiritual practice through meditation-based, *niggun*-ful (wordless-melodies), dance-enriched davenings (services), group *aliyot* (witnessing of the Torah reading) attuned to those present, and Torah study where participants get to interface the Torah of their lives through the prism of our sacred text.

What I learned? First and foremost, in the age of electronic fire detectors, one ought not to use more than one Havdallah candle (braided candle for ritual to end the Sabbath each week). Let's just say the rescue squad and hook and ladder truck drivers were not interested in joining our ritual.

Next, so many women mentioned their own recent unemployment or their husbands'. For the third time on this trip I met those who have sold their homes to downsize due to economic struggles, and also a few who are house-sharing (described as not easy) in mid-life for the same reasons. Here in Atlanta, the housing crunch has clearly abated; every third property on the block in the upscale Virginia Highlands neighborhood where our B & B is located has a "for rent" or "apartment available" sign. Folks with nice homes who have rooms to let may well want to consider making this known; congregations could have committees to facilitate this.

Thirdly, the group was deliciously intergenerational, folks in their 30's through early 70's. Our lives connected through the themes we considered and where we chose to pause. Several were mourning their mothers; many, as I do, have mothers with Alzheimers. When we were to leave my parents' house at the beginning of this trip, I said good-bye to my mother, Leona Fradin Milgram, sadly knowing it would be unlikely she would ever know me by name again.

Kaddishes, memorial prayers, became portals where we tugged on the silver cord that connects souls through *emet*, shared truth. I believe I learned from the author of blessed memory, Aryeh Kaplan, that in the Hebrew word for truth, *emet*, the first letter. An *aleph* represents the past, the next letter the *mem* is for being in the present, and the final letter, a *taf* represents one's future. So might truth be termed the ever changing present point of meaning as perceived from one's past, present and future? One of the goals of a retreat is to be fully in the present. We did a ritual in the *mikveh* [a heated pool in this case] to help us honor what of our preoccupations needed to be set aside so that we could *shavat va'yeenafash*, rest, resoul and ultimately return home renewed.

Here is a poem read at one of the Kaddishes, written by one of the retreat participants, offered with her permission:

Her Flame Still Burns

She melts away as I watch
Each day a little more.
Every morning survives a little less.
Yet fire on the wick burns hot.
Even a strong breath struggles
To extinguish her flame.
In the dark I see it.
Smaller and smaller in the night
The wick glows
Until the fire disappears
When her light dies

Even the dark will change.
by Caren Masem

Lastly, our afternoon "playshop" on Shabbat was a deep study of when Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses regarding the matter of the Cushite woman. As much as the sages tend to white wash the real lives of women out of their stories (making Sarah so sweet and caring the incident with Hagar is almost rewritten), when it comes to Miriam in this section she seems to be the scapegoat for all their anger at women's authority. In Torah Miriam will be described as "one whose father has spit in her face and must go outside the camp for seven days."

Can this text be redeemed? One of the many insights that came through during our studies was that while Moses may indeed have received the marching orders, laws, and directives, Miriam led from a different seat of authority. While he was on the mountain for forty days and nights at a time, it fell to her to keep the flow of spirit, music, water, faith alive. The Bible says: "The people did not move on until she was added back in." The people spoke louder than any editor could squelch.

The women on the retreat quickly grasped the importance of utilizing hermeneutics of suspicion when studying Torah. Patriarchy may have denied Miriam a place in the trinity of wilderness leadership with her two brothers, (Aaron is promoted to High Priest shortly after this incident) but the people (and the prophet Micah) knew the truth, her presence filled their wells. Reb Nachman of Breslov taught the importance of sweeping a friend or one among you who is suffering from depression up into the ecstasy of dance, a legacy of the Miriam tradition perhaps.

It is this legacy which many need right now. In such stressful times people come to congregations seeking spiritual resources to renew energy for living, for comfort after on-going economic losses, for inspiration and faith to live. On the road it's easy to see those congregations that supply political debates attract contentious congregants and those that offer appropriate forms of support are spoken of with love.

Rabbi Guttman's community just moved into their new state of the art synagogue which is the most tasteful and artistically magnificent new structure I've seen. It is alive with activity and a passion for joyful Jewishing - music, theatre, groups, gatherings; five hundred members. Across the street is the only non-orthodox Jewish boarding school in America, an equally stunning new facility, with a few openings yet, up through twelfth grade. (They are looking for a head master, fyi.)

The ride home was a total counterpoint. The fellow in the seat next to me is a member of the paparazi - formerly head of a Coke bottling plant; he's getting back at the rich by taking assignments to photograph them in compromising situations or *farshimelt* (less than one's best) conditions. This time he was off to an NBA gathering in Atlanta to take photos as the players approach or leave the rest room. Happily, he didn't ask for a blessing, as often happens along the trail.

Bless us for safe travels to South Africa tomorrow, please. With blessings for your safety, parnassa, happiness and increasing peace, Reb Goldie

South Africa



Buy a Donkey

Goldie; "Let us give thanks to Alamo and National Car Rental for the use their vehicles," was the fitting final announcement of the shuttle bus driver in Atlanta at the end of our explorations in Bible belt country.

Barry: Because of a flurry of last minute administrative details, we never got to Martin Luther King National Monument; we did see some of his memorabilia at the Atlanta airport. What struck me in analyzing his hand writing was the intense philosophical/spiritual interest exhibited by his high upper loops, very strong determination by his downward strokes, and minimal interest in the mundane everyday, as shown in the tiny middle section of his letters.

Goldie: Witnessing Barry returning to the land of his birth, his inhaling the sea air and taking in the oceanic blue sky. He's like a penguin returning to its habitat, slipping easily into the local language, Afrikans and looks healthier almost immediately.

What jumps out first is Cape Town's multi-national character. In the 1600's slaves were brought here from Malaysia, India, and Madagascar and the eventual combination of their characteristics with the tribes here and the Dutch, British, and Jewish have resulted in a rainbow of beings and experiences. It takes some getting used to people who are neither a pure African tribal jet black or golden Malay or white calling themselves "colored."

While English is the language uniting everyone these days, some 60 languages are recognized as official tongues here. Afrikans, created by the White former Afrikaner regime is widely spoken by colored folks and the older generation of whites. Street signs are in both languages. In phraseology it is colorful like Yiddishism can be.

A few simple words in transliteration are:

Dorp	Town
Bye ah khoot	Very Good
Dunkee	Thanks
Stad	City
Strand	Beach

Profuse wild life and magnificent gardens, even in and near the city are presents embedded in daily life. Walking by the harbor enroute to a *shiur*, Torah study session, we saw a mother and baby whales blowing water high in the air off the coast. While swimming among cerulean blue waters and towering boulders in Simonstown one is greeted by scores of Jackass penguins which nest there.

During our visit to Cousin Debbie in Kommikie a baboon lounged atop her fence, having earlier leapt to the porch to rattle her window bars in hopes of raiding her cupboards, again. If I were to create a palate to paint the "sense of this place" it would include the:

- coastal wildlife and turquoise waters of Monterey, USA
- fertility of farms and foods of Provence, France,
- inlets, lagoons and mountains of Vancouver, Canada
- gardens of Martha's Vineyard, USA, and
- luxurious terraced buildings, affluence and vistas of Nice, France

with one massive exception - pandemic, violent crime.

Barry: Despite the presence of family, blue skies, warm climate, great beaches, favorable rate of exchange, inexpensive good restaurants (a fine bottle of wine is about \$6 – total bill for two in an excellent restaurant inclusive of tip and taxes perhaps \$25.00), I'm finding myself somewhat uncomfortable. Why? What emerges for me is a mix of confusion, disorientation, anger and sadness. It is difficult to orient to this environment – to feel grounded and clear.

That the Cape Times headlines screams in huge letters: "Dagga in PM Compound," i.e. marijuana found growing at President Mebeke's palace, the equivalent of our White House feels normal. This is Africa after all, the continent where the weird is normal and the normal weird. Last year, despite "security", vagrants were found living in a house on the presidential compound as well.

Reported in the news today: Winnie Mandela (believed by many to be a murderess and corrupt – the opposite of her ex-husband), has volunteered to act as a human shield person in Iraq, much to the delight of many people who want to see the end of her. Also reported today was "45 Children Packed into a Minivan Taxi." The driver was arrested. Later in the day, cops stopped the same taxi and 36 children were found in it. The driver ran away.

Goldie: Unlike when I visit the former Soviet Union, some of the infrastructure here – roads, buildings, homes, waterfront is superb, but behavior can be something else.

Barry: Driving on the beachfront a black man darted between the cars and collided with mine with a loud thud. By some miracle the almost invisible police were driving in the opposite direction and stopped. The man lying on the ground said: "*Ek was verkeerd*" meaning, he declared himself in the wrong. The cops said I could go. Just as I was leaving, his friend came running and asked if I would give him 10 rand i.e. \$1 to make his injured buddy feel better. I gave him 20 rand for his honesty.

All this feels normal.

On the other hand, The Cape Town that I knew is changing. Races seem to be very much at ease with one another. Blacks and Coloreds are better dressed. The city seems clean. Tourism is booming – this is apparently the 4th favorite foreign destination of Americans.

These changes are for the better, and I wonder if this is as close to paradise as it comes. On the other hand, this morning I met an old neighbor – someone I hadn't seen in 40 years. Behind a mask of a fixed smile, she told me her husband had been murdered and the killers never found. Opposite my grandparents' apartment, 9 men had had their necks slashed a few weeks ago. The two killers were caught (a rarity here) and motive was robbery. The newspaper reports that the crime rate has doubled in one year here in Sea Point and the police force is undermanned by 70%. This is the good news. Had the police force been fully staffed the crime rate would be even higher, since the police are reportedly involved in much of the crime.

Goldie: The weather has been delightfully; unseasonably cool (70-85), for it is summer here in South Africa. On beach walks we need to trudge over huge pieces of kelp that have been pounded over the

sea wall. Record waves cover beaches here in an unexpected surge of fascinating, roiling activity. A recent beach walk in open sandals yielded bugs and ooze squishing out of the kelp and resulting in a very squeamish tummy for this veteran naturalist.

Flotillas of sacred ibis, white egrets and cormorants descend to harvest tide pools. On walks I'm internally preparing a sequence of meditations and teachings on the presence of G*d as reflected in Jewish metaphors of rock and nature (One version will also be offered at Elat Chayyim Retreat Center and another at the Aleph Kallah in Bellingham, WA, this summer.) The backdrop of everything is the huge, impossibly flat-topped Table Mountain, a sacred site for tribal peoples and major tourist destination which I hope to ascend in weeks to come. The sight of literally thousands of seals during a boat trip the other day was enthralling.

While scientists bemoan losses of wildlife in the northern pole of the planet, down here they are bemused by the return en masse of many species. Profusion is a major part of life here. The country still has open borders and the trickle down of folks seeking work, food and to sell drugs from further up in Africa threatens efforts at stability.

Trucks wander the streets proclaiming "Ice for Africa" and T-shirts proliferated last week calling for "Treatment for Africa." The government's denial of the ability to treat and prevent AIDS is being fought by the people with widely advertised marches and appeals to parliament which is now in session. Here prostitution is legal and child pornography is on the increase.

AND, 200,000 marched for world peace in Johannesburg, the rape and murder capital of the world.

AND, a number of folks here see America's heading for Iraq as a colonialism aimed at taking their oil, a cabinet minister here is warning South Africa to take precautions against America coming here to steal the countries gems and minerals deposits.

AT the same time, profound discomfort prevails at seeing France's Chirac invite the despot Mugabe to tea.

AND, a few weeks before we arrived, Islamic fundamentalists marched the streets here bearing signs "Death to the Jews"

AND the street where Barry's mom lives and we are staying is lined with Nigerian mob drug dealers by night who then sleep crumpled about the street by day or in a tenement at the top of the street by day.

AND next door to us is a new hotel that has a fleet of new Mercedes for its guests.

Barry: The borders are open to any Africans regardless of background. Unlike New York City which declared zero tolerance on crime, this country with the highest incidence of car-jackings, rapes, and perhaps murder in the world, seems to have declared total tolerance on crime. In the past, the population introjected racial stereotyping as normal. This seems to have switched to accepting violence as normal. In a country with 50% unemployment, the labor laws are so strict, that everyone is afraid to hire.

Goldie: The life of a maid here tells a corner of the story of the massive transitions underway in this country. Many live at a great distance from this town and stay in little maids' rooms provided adjacent to or in the lower levels of apartment buildings. They go home on days off, or on occasion. With 50% unemployment in the country all jobs are coveted. (It's now much harder for whites (as we're called here) to get jobs and young cousins are struggling to find employment.) New legislation has its benefits, they've created minimum wages, requirements for employers to register their workers, to pay into the nation's first unemployment insurance fund and there are now stringent limitations on hours worked and required breaks.

The value of the local currency, the rand dropped to 12 (now 8) to the dollar (making it very inexpensive for us to be here, but to the locals a rand has the value impact of a dollar to an American.) So increasingly maids are finding themselves in the situation more usual in America, of having to string many employers together to create a fully worked week. This results in much harder and more concentrated work for some, in the sense that previously they had major intervals of down time when the folks they attend to were not at home. Unlike our visit here four years ago, the washing machine has finally become a widespread phenomenon in affluent homes, reducing the time a family needs someone on hand and becoming a mixed blessing for those in the service industry because what shrinks are hours of available paid work.

It is customary when staying with someone or going to their house for dinner to give them a sum of money to cover their cost of the work of the maid on your behalf, sort of home-tipping. Such nuances take some getting used to.

Barry: I met with Professor Tuviah Zabow, head of the Dept of Psychiatry at Groote Schuur Hospital, an eminent forensic psychiatrist who attended to the detainees at Robin Island in its day. He explained that much of the violence is from the Africans who have migrated into this country, which has open borders. Nigerians, Ruandans and others are given virtually automatic refugee status here. This makes no sense at all, given that many have AIDS virus, overwhelm the health care system and add to the unemployment and violence.

We discussed physician well-being and impairment issues, while malpractice is not a problem over here, the massive AIDS epidemic is. Most of the seriously ill children are suffering from AIDS, and unlike in America, it is an automatic death sentence. (There is no treatment here. Where are the human rights protesters when we need them? Remember the rallies against apartheid?) Physicians are accidentally infected.

Here interns have one year compulsory internship at a designated location about which they have no choice, followed by two years of mandatory community service in an underprivileged area; at neither local will they have appropriate supervision or support. Only following this can they enter a residency training program. A huge number of physicians elect to emigrate every year. In a country desperate for physicians, government policy encourages them to leave.

Goldie: The hospitality and generosity of family here is exceptional, a sort of old-world flavor of each person taking care of the other based on their work and range of influence. Need pants or a car for a week? Uncle Jeff jumps in. What about an extra room for Barry's son Jeremy who joined us at the last minute from Seattle? Aunt Helen and Uncle Ralph don't hesitate to offer. And how about a place to stay in the wine country when it's booked solid? Uncle Ralph was visionary and with a friend had bought an olive farm there, the friend stayed in the business and within minutes of meeting us out on a walk organized for us to stay at his stunning new manor house on the farm. One of the top four exhilarating views in my life was had yesterday high atop his perch above the fertile wine region. So much so that an entirely new melody for Friday night's *L'cha Dodi* came through the either into my heart and it seems to have a dance with it – zoomed right into *hitgashmiut*, beyond the material world. Yum! My feelings were also bolstered by a mouthful of the perfume-like Hanapoot grapes and a bottle of exquisite local vintage Merlot.

Goldie: In 1731 a poet named Pope wrote about "genius loci," the genius of a place, its spirit and natural environment that, when respected, yield healthy living. In the town known as Stellenbosch we attended a local art exhibition on this theme. Among the works were several by a Jewish artist who painted portraits of her ancestors from old photos and frames them with tiny items they'd shlepped to this distant land to save the "spirit of the places" from which they had come.

Thankfully we have email and freedom and are hopefully, helping to communicate the spirit of this place. I want to be here for awhile longer before writing about the Jewish community. It's a complex scene of dwindling population and shifting allegiances. More when I feel more confident about what's correct and ethical to say.

Barry: Part of me lusts to live here, grow flowers and herbs and live the good life. Another part thinks this place is insane, without any rational policies. Perhaps, irrationality is the norm for most of the world and American problem solving is not accepted as making sense to others. Perhaps it's time to give my left brain a vacation.

Goldie: Ah sweet beloved, for that you get a vote and not a veto. Shabbat begins here in an hour and we're off to the Marais Road Synagogue where the choir sings in four part barbershop harmony with an infectious spirit.



Featheren

Goldie: In vast unique arid region of South Africa known as the Karoo, we have experienced awe at nature and the nature of change.

The Shabbat before we set out on our trip up-country, my mother-in-law Leah set out, with a show of great pleasure, a home-made bottle of kosher Shabbos wine from Oudtshoorn - the taste and fragrance exceed any I've experienced before. It seems my husband's family has a history of connection to this Karoo dorp (town) where it was made. How?

In the late 1800's Jewish peddlers trickled down to Oudtshoorn from the towns of Keln and Shavli in Lithuania. Like darning needles their perambulations connected them with local products which they then hooked up with their return markets at home. In the arid, semi-desert, rural farming town they found something curious and easy to transport, ostrich feathers.

Keln and Shavli were destroyed by the Nazis. Their traditions and lineages not only survived, but prospered among those transplanted to Oudtshoorn. It is a gem of a town, developed as the Dutch farmers (who became known as Afrikaners) learned Yiddish to communicate with the peddlers turned entrepreneur suppliers to the fashion industry, who in turn learned Dutch and English. At one point, through the whims of the fashion industry, ostrich feathers comprised 37% of the national agricultural product.

The Oudtshoorn Museum in the town reports that all residents gave freely and with pride to help with construction of a synagogue. A Lithuanian rabbi was brought who had trained in England. I hooted with unsurprised mirth upon learning that not three years after the rabbi arrived, a split occurred in the congregation and a second synagogue began. The argument is described as the rabbi having been overly influenced by his time in England and so placing too much emphasis on how the pomp of ritual in services would be conducted, whereas the group that left wanted a greater focus on text study and law.

Oudtshoorn became known as a "Little Jerusalem" and the homes of the feather barons are still termed "feather palaces," we stayed in one which is now a B & B, enjoying elegance which would cost upwards of \$300 per night in the US, but only \$70 here because of the value of the rand. The original synagogue contents are housed in the town's museum; the second building is beautifully maintained and houses a small residual congregation.

Barry: "A country holds its breath" is what the headlines in the Cape Times scream. It's Monday, March 3rd and the Iraq crisis is building up to climax in the UN. I buy the newspaper and continue reading: "Coach Eric Simons has appealed for a heroic performance from South African cricketers."

Goldie: It's somewhere between balm for the soul and infuriating to have so little international news available in this country. I worry for family (3 sons between us within range of the draft), the world

and the innocents caught between powers. And then we do the only reasonable thing, release and to be in the moment, which is a really good idea because this is being typed as my step-son Jeremy carefully and competently drives us over the Swartberg Mountain Pass.

Barry: Mountains here are about 6000 feet high; they are older than the Alps and the Andes and we're told, used to be three times their present height. Indeed, it was breathtaking (when I had the courage to open my eyes). The pass itself was built by prisoners over a century ago, and this unpaved road is unchanged since that time.

Goldie: The geology is unlike any I've seen before, as though a burnt-orange, sienna and golden rock swirl soup was spun by giants through space, landing as mountain; beside the swirls, huge slabs stand up-ended thousands of feet tall. You know that windy street in San Francisco that tourists like to drive? Multiply it by 100 power and allow no guardrails, line it with an occasional forest of the national flower Protea (one variety looks like cerise and peach feathers bundled around a cob core) to trick you into not looking at the road just long enough to.....Jeremy's driving was great, so why is my brake foot so sore from pressing into the floor?

Barry: How do we find out the news in the adorable, Karoo (semi desert) town of Prince Albert? This place is like an oasis between oceans of semi-desert. We are told that newspapers arrive a day late so if we buy the paper tomorrow, we will have the paper we bought earlier today, which only talks about cricket anyway.

Our B & B is on the town's only significant street. They serve us tea and moist chocolate cake in the garden of a bright white Cape Dutch thatched home, some 160 years old. We are filled in on the owner's perspective, for example that there is 70% unemployment here but very little crime because the unemployed are "colored". By reputation and behavior, the preponderance of violent crime here is done by blacks.

Goldie: The Cape Colored (the name they call themselves) are a distinct population numbering several million. They are light brown-skinned, speak Afrikaans, have their own culture and despite years of discrimination under Apartheid are generally positive, friendly and comfortable with whites even to the extent of voting for the former Afrikaner political party.

Today in Prince Albert, is pay day, the government gives every unemployed citizen with a child under fifteen 150 rands per month; sadly most parents will convert this to alcohol before nightfall. The local business people run soup kitchens for the children. When we take a walk through town, at either end - shacks, or lovely homes, we find everyone who passes makes eye contact and greeting us politely.

Barry: In the small towns people are very open and social. While having typical South African dinner at a local restaurant, the owner, a middle aged man who also serves us, kids Goldie about her hat. (Because she doesn't have to worry about the sun, it's night time. She explains to him that it's a spiritual practice.) Then, as we hold hands to say a blessing of gratitude for the meal he has just served us, he adds his hand to ours.

At 9 p.m. we have a date with Albert, the name is coincidental to the town's. He is an older man from the Netherlands who is waiting for us when we arrive at his home. For R50 each (\$6.00) he is going to give us a two hour lesson on the night sky. Later he tells us about his life, how he became disillusioned at living in Holland after 30 years of teaching astronomy, math and model-making to vast numbers of vocational school students who weren't interested in learning. So he dreamed a dream and lives it in this affordable, virtually rain/pollution-free environment where he now dabbles in astronomy research projects and teaches tourists astronomy.

Goldie: The ancients called the night sky "the lace table cloth" and down here it is spectacular. Albert has taken the roof of his garage and put it on a track he can roll back with a long handle. Three professional telescopes acquired from California are back lit by starlight. He shows us Taurus, Orion,

Gemini while pointing a laser pen effectively at the skies and explaining how the zodiac really does rotate in a plane like shown on astrology charts. Then we go to observe planets and triple stars through one of the scopes, and then deeper into space we learn of dark patches that are deep space dust clouds and view a spider nebula and more.

While I never believed in astrology as a predictor for life, a dear friend, Chazzan Robert Esformes, has twice done my chart and been phenomenally accurate each time. Did you know that the *sheheheyanu* prayer comes from our association with astrology, it is meant to be said when the lunar month has a particular conjunction of celestial bodies that are auspicious for the qualities of the holiday. [So Passover, for example, is a *z'man*, time, that is auspicious for attaining freedom.]

Barry: As we are ready to leave, the talk turns to Iraq. Albert expresses his anger towards America, convinced that our aim is to steal Iraqi oil. He is unconvinced by our protests, until I suggest that we share a common desire for peace, and prosperity. Perhaps our disagreement is about the best way to achieve this in the world. He confesses he loves America and its ideals. It liberated his country after WWII. For this reason, he cares and is particularly disturbed, the way one is when seeing a good friend making a serious mistake.

Goldie: Peddlers turned feather barons are not the only mid-life career changers in this posting. Here in tiny Prince Albert the B & B owner was a children's clothing manufacturer, successful, well-traveled and hated the politics of the industry. She blew off her big career, and four years ago picked this house out of a catalog. Her husband dropped his work as a business coach to partner the project and now they love their life and show it with full-hearted hosting. As we left they were popping an elderly English lady into a plush armchair set into the back of a flat bed truck in order to take her off to see a dam where black eagles breed. She appeared ecstatic at the prospect of the wild ride.

Barry: At breakfast, Gary our host fills us in on the local healthcare politics (plenty.) AIDS is the major concern though this area is not as affected as most. The government, he tells us, says there isn't sufficient money to treat every one. When the minister of health was asked why South Africa is buying submarines, any one of which costs more than a year's treatment for all the victims of this disease, she replied that one knows when the US might attack South Africa to capture its minerals and gems!

AIDS is a huge problem. The Cape Times reports that HIV-related deaths in the city will exceed all other causes by 2009. The life expectancy of the black population is to drop from 55 to 40 years. Still, President Mbecki jets around the world solving the major problems that are not in this country - like Iraq and Korea. A well-known local actor/playwright has suggested that Mbecki and his Minister of health be charged at the Hague with crimes against humanity for neglect of the AIDS issues. This suggestion has received scant attention (cricket, remember?).

Goldie: On this break from Cape Town we also went up the forested region known as the "Garden Route" as far as the magnificent, huge land preserves which are the first of the great national parks for the preservation of wildlife. A huge tortoise mowed the lawn beside the hut where we stayed at the Addo Park, tiny twin white monkeys woke me twittering in the trees until their sizeable dad chased them to safer heights. Here live jackal, warthogs, four hundred elephants, and hartebeest, antelope, aardvark, owls and all manner of exotic birds live freely.

At a water hole we watched two clearly differentiated elephant groupings elegantly take turns through the use of dominance rituals and also marveled as a baby elephant frolicked just like in a Disney characterization only to be unable to get back out of the water hole. Three huge females surrounded the little critter and cooperated to push and hoist him out without damage.

Private conservation and animal rescue areas also abound and are equally fascinating to visit. This lap of our trip has been primarily vacation except for an intersection with students from a Johannesburg day school at national park, a place of crashing 30 foot waves, awesomely endowed with boulder-based trails for some challenging Jewish nature walks and in this environment, meditative sits. I was

so struck by one student's fear of camping out as he explained that he's never before slept somewhere without bars coming down outside his bedroom door for protection, because even in affluent areas crime is so fearsome in Johannesburg.

Our last stop was a teeny town in the Karoo that once was solely a tuberculosis sanitarium, now turned into a British-style hotel and maintained like a jewelry box that plays a tale of its time when opened. The porter escorted us through like royalty and gave an imitation of Mandela that sent Barry into paroxysms of laughter. What a country!

Barry: Returning to South Africa after a four-year absence, I am surprised how well the infrastructure has held up. Roads and bridges are well maintained, gardens and parks are beautiful, public rest rooms are clean. Right now the rand has strengthened, there is a budget surplus, the price of gold is up and tourism is booming. One sees many upwardly mobile Blacks and Coloureds well dressed, driving nice cars, jogging, eating in restaurants - all unimaginable just a decade ago. There is much to be optimistic about.

How to explain the blinding rural poverty, rows of shacks, inaction towards healthcare, violence and Zimbabwe - all serious pressing issues? Despite a committed democracy, independent judiciary, free press - corruption in government, such as bribes and favoritism is blatant. Unlike the USA, when the press finds ineptitude, corruption, bribery, etc., politicians like Mbeke continue seemingly impervious and unfazed. Much that is irrational can be explained by drive for power and money.

Like the Dutch astronomer and his feelings towards the USA, I find my frustration and criticism of this country based on my love of the place and a deep desire that some of its insanity evaporates in the African sun.

Goldie: One correction to a prior posting, there are only 11 official languages here. And one final point noticed with interest, the San, a tribe of the Karoo, were asked to draw picture of humans. While shamans drew figures in lightning shapes and spirals, all others drew stick figures. The shamans explained this is the effect of trance, it allows one to more fully see the soul animating a being. Indeed.

Blessings for to all, we are behind on reading your responses and will catch up on them now that we've reached Cape Town with fewer limitations on internet access.

 **South Africa #3** 

Naturity

Goldie: My sister-in-law Helen Bub's face gets that soft look that comes over those recalling the day they stood in line for hours to vote in the first election for the new government, nine years ago. Apartheid was over. People from every strata of society stood in long lines together to vote. "We voted not knowing if there would be a blood bath. Yet it was wonderful that day." Taking a chance on peace, creating the imperfect yet functional evolving country we've enjoyed so these few weeks.

Barry: Saturday morning on our power walk at the Beachfront we count six black birds with their signature bright orange beaks; the endangered oyster catchers seem to be coming back! Then to the excellent 7:45 a.m. study group at the orthodox synagogue with Rabbi Jack Steinhorn which was on the subject of freewill versus *hashgakhah pratit*, personal destiny. With a great feeling of well being about being in this city and country, we wandered off to the Waterfront Harbor Complex where we bumped into an old friend who travels extensively internationally on business. He had time for a 5 minute cup of coffee. For an hour and a half he vented his disillusionment with the high crime, unemployment and massive poverty and corruption in the new South Africa.

Goldie: So much for our elevated spirits!

Barry: Another about face on the confusing place that South Africa can be occurred at dinner that night with Dr. Tuviah Zabow and his wife Pam. Barry and Tuviah were classmates at med school. Tuviah is the head of psychiatry at UCT and developed prominence by leading the Red Cross team responsible for the mental health of the political prisoners on Robben Island.

Nelson Mandela, Tuviah tells us, would greet him wearing tennis shorts, for Mandela received special treatment once the Red Cross was involved. Together he and Tuviah would consult on the well-being of the other political prisoners. Dr. Zabow was able to make recommendations to the authorities which improved the prisoners' circumstances. Today he serves on many international committees on human rights and ethics.

Goldie: He tells a story of a consultation he was called in on, an elderly man deemed psychotic for tearing at his clothes, rubbing ashes on his head, speaking in tongues and refusing to eat. Now keep in mind that medical students today are likely to be Colored, Malay, Black, White or Indian. Dr. Zabow found the patient to be quite sane, for he was a Jewish man whose daughter overseas had married a non-Jew and he was lamenting (in Yiddish) in an extreme but relatively traditional manner. We've been invited back to teach at the medical school, and may propose to expand on ritual in medicine - not only in tribal cultures but in mainstream medicine.

Barry: Tuviah's is the only house in his neighborhood without a high security wall. He is bullish on the country, recalling in 1976 how dangerous it was here, with bombs going off in residential areas. So now we see this country from a more positive perspective again.

A couple of days later, we have lunch at a Muslim restaurant to sample typical Malay cooking. As I use the phone, I set my camera down beside me. A fellow reaches over and my hand closes around it, he asks, "What kind of camera is that?" I answer, "Digital." He exists to a car out front filled with four people. The proprietor becomes agitated, "Are you going for a walk? You can't go out for a walk right now." She is insistent saying that she would not go outside if she was us. The car out front is full of thugs. What to do? She sees herself as a neighborhood fixture, they won't hurt her. She goes out to engage them while we made a dash across the street to the safety of our car.

In hindsight we had been lulled into a sense of false security by the beautiful Malay area's brightly colored buildings, and the camera in my hand had given us away as tourists. Mugging avoided, we are now writing this posting in the safety of my brother's backyard next to his pool awaiting a nice pot of tea and back to pondering Rabbi Steinhorn's attempt to reconcile issues of destiny and free will.

Barry: Job creation here can be very creative. The absence of police downtown is made up by the presence of meter persons (all women, so far as we've seen). They have a magnetic card that you fill with funds by passing money to the meter woman who does this for you. Then you just press the card against the meter and enter the number of your parking spot and presto - paid up. Each swipe of the card is equal to the value of a coin dropped in. It's quite excellent. Additionally, every spot comes with one to three people who will "watch" your car to see that it isn't broken into, that costs a rand or two and is only theoretically optional.

Goldie: Today we also toured the local Holocaust museum, a tiny gem filled with African students from one of the township schools listening wide-eyed to the similarity between Nazi racism and Afrikaner racism. Here we were reminded that in 1879 the term anti-semitism was coined in place of a German term meaning "Jew hatred" and the term was intended to emphasize how scientifically proper it was to discriminate against Jews. "Then why we use the term as we do today?" asked a student.

Barry: This morning we both woke up at dawn to manic squawking seagulls, and a common shared concern, where are we going to live when we get back to the states in a week and a half? We discussed the usual range of options, near her folks, near my kids, near dear friends, near a major airport, near a Jewish community that has it together (well, hmmm, uh.).

Barry: We set off on our standard morning walk along the beachfront promenade, a morning ritual for many here. As soon as our pace builds up to a healthy one we bump into a face from Barry's past. It never fails. Today it's first, AB Sank, who lent us his olive farm home in Franschoeck for a night, we thanked him. Continuing our walk we met Uncle Percy (who you may remember from this year's Vancouver posting, that's where he lives; this is where he's from). "Uncle Percy. Where should we live?" His response is a smile and a laugh: "That's an interesting question, When you reach my age the question is where do I want to die?" (He's about age 90, marvelously fit and about to move to Vancouver Island to be near some of his family.)

Goldie: Just as Barry mentions to Uncle Percy that he's still wanting to see the world (!?), Australia for example, we bumped into Abie's brother Barney with another transplanted South African from Melbourne, AU. The synchronicity felt like a message, we're meant to continue our travels. And by the time we had walked the distance to Three Anchor Bay, Barry had thought aha, we can live on a round-the-world-airline ticket (costs about the same as round-trip NYC to Capetown) at least until the housing price bubble bursts in the states. That would accord with what my teacher Reb Zalman has advised, to continue traveling, learning and sharing the principles of applied Jewish spirituality for as long as this way of living feels to be good for our marriage. Well, that's one scenario. I'd also like to feel a little more grounded to a particular community, a place to call home.

Or maybe everywhere is home. We keep arriving somewhere that people have become dear to us, while simultaneously feeling the pull of leaving others we will also miss passionately. So - hi everyone - hope our paths cross soon and that all paths lead to peace.



Gender Apart Time

Barry: What we were dreading has materialized. Like many of you, we're deeply distressed. The posting that follows was written just before the war began.

Goldie: Swat. My mother-in-law Leah Bub gently reproves me with a rap on the arm with the synagogue bulletin. "You can't shuckle [move forward and back rhythmically when praying] so much here; they won't like it."

"They" are pretty powerful around here. "They don't do it that way." "They'll have to ask the chief rabbi." "They'll never allow a woman in the pulpit." "Uck don't be stupid man, they can't have a woman rabbi speak at Weitzman (one of the community day schools)."

"They" are primarily the geriatric orthodox majority and the South African orthodox governing body, the "beyt din." "They" want it the way it used to be, which is obviously, the way it's supposed to be.

Here in Cape Town, at the bottom of the world, the shtetl model was effectively transplanted from Latvia and Lithuania. In my mother-in-law' Leah Bub's home we breakfast on paper-thin home-made sweet kichel for scooping up dainty bites of home made chopped herring (with hard boiled egg sprinkled decoratively on top, of course). Here the gefilte fish is light yellow and melts in your mouth as though the freshly ground fish swam through the air and became a flavored cloud. Bubbe Leah's (Barry's mom's) meat blintzes are lightly fried and then plunged into chicken soup, the substance of culinary awards, expect for years when we're vegetarian.

And then there are those heart-stopping moments, like watching a jar of yellow stuff being blithely spread on toast and passed to us with a covert smile.....oh no, could that really be chicken fat? They got us good. It was a fake chicken fat rendered from carrots.

The largest synagogue, the Marais Road Synagogue is now down to only 3000 members, primarily

elderly. I believe this city's Jewish population has dropped from 34,000 to 17,000 in post-Apartheid years. Everything is set in the round here and very European. The Torah reader's stand is on one end Sephardi style, at the other end, beside the ark are set carved boxes. On one side the rabbi stands/sits wearing a black hat, the other is for the two main congregational officers in black *kippot*. Women have the upper oval gallery, called the *mechitzah*. Look, there! It's my beloved Barry below. . . we signal to each other with smiles and tiny gestures during the service. Our usual side by side *kavannah*, "spiritual focus," is broken by the separation, but romance blossoms. I am Juliette in the balcony, he is Romeo, we are the Shabbat bride [feminine aspect of G*d] and [male aspect of G*d] *Kodesh Borchu* reclaiming our unity. Swaying, soaring on the male choir's rousing *L'cha Dodi* prayer.....swat.

Barry: My perspective on the South African Jewish scene is that of nostalgia. We were raised in cradle of Cape Town, the mother city, we all went to the same beaches, to the same university and restaurants, and had the same abusive Hebrew teacher. We were relatively isolated from the world at large. Inter-marriage was the exception. While generally boring from a religious and cultural point of view, it was a very lively, comfortable social environment. [Example, while buying gifts at the local Judaica store, the sales person, noting my name, said that my cousin-in-law living in America is also her cousin and did I knowthis sort of thing happens here daily.]

One of the remaining unique features of South Africa is the Marais Road Congregation. Today, the energy of their service is centered on the bimah, the magnificent male cantor and male choir create an energy and tension in the room that radiate into the congregation to the extent that there are occasional outcries of *yasher koakh* (more power to you!) after a particularly powerful piece.

But Marais Road synagogue is now under siege. It represents to me a way of life that is coming to an end - to be replaced by small, rigidly orthodox contingents. A generation of people still comes to synagogue here because it is part of the social fabric of their lives; they're not rigid religionists and really quite flexidox at home. Something is being lost. I've discovered it is possible to be "home" and yet homesick. For a brief few weeks Goldie and I have had the luxury of enjoying a taste of the residua of a unique culture.

Goldie: My *kippah* and joyful singing of the liturgy lead to lots of wonderful *mechitzah* moments in the women's gallery. None of the elder women up here seem to know what a single word of the service means and they are increasingly inquisitive at noticing my joyful participation. I find myself shushing them lest "they" get upset. Hmm. But "they" are the ones who are asking the questions!

Trouble really started with an invitation to teach at the day school, except it turns out "they can't advertise or mention that you are a rabbi." (I actually got so triggered by the preposterousness of a community day school restricting a rabbi based on gender, that to hold myself back from making any mistakes I wrote to an email list of colleagues for guidance. Something this sexist has happened to me no where else in the world!) Since we were heading up country, I decided to let the matter simmer awhile.

Rabbi David Hoffman, a dynamic local Reform colleague got back into town from vacation in America the day we were heading out. Usually while here I lead services at one of three pulpits he serves, so he can get some down time. Because of the currency exchange rate and physical danger of the society, it's brutal trying to find rabbis to live here. I ask his advice on the day school matter and he says the response is not surprising, but certainly unacceptable and that he'll look into it.

We return to town nine days later. The only phone message is the social worker from the old age home. It is traditional for all visiting rabbis to give an hour of teaching there. Upon arrival, one elderly man wearing a visible *tallit katan*, (small prayer shawl worn by particularly observant Jews under their clothes) tells me: "I wasn't going to come on principle but there was nothing else to do tonight." A nice crowd gathers and sings joyfully along and get deeply into the spirit of the teaching form called a *fagrogen*, which is new to them. I include a session of Shabbat memory sharing, given the age group. The skeptic elder rises at the end and asks for a more formal teaching about something I've become passionate about. The evening continues. We go through the Kabbalistic model for Shabbat as

a wedding, unfolding all the symbols and sequences.

To my amazement, no one has yet fallen asleep. The skeptic elder comes up at the end. "I never heard from this before! They robbed us, forcing us to memorize things that seemed meaningless; I always did it to be a good Jew, never knowing it was full of such beautiful ideas! It would appear that a woman rabbi is a necessary thing."

Go figure. Still, as the days go on I get to feeling like a purple duck. Next posting will explain why.



Purple Duck Days

Goldie: Rabbi Jack Steinhorn, about to become rabbi emeritus of Marais Road Congregation (he is a former head of Yeshivat haKotel in Jerusalem). He has become a rebellious soul, often being censored by the Chief Rabbi of South Africa for matters like holding conversions with less than four years preparation, or giving an aliyah to the Jewish half of an intermarried couple. [You may wonder why we're not attending the liberal congregation; this is in order to share Shabbat with Barry's mom who walks to shul.]

According to my mother-in-law, in years past Rabbi Steinhorn was overruled by his board ("they") when he wanted me (a woman rabbi) to teach while in town. So, you could have knocked me over with a feather when he asks if Barry and I would co-lead the *shiur*, study session, before services on the coming Shabbat morning. We'd been attending his teachings on Rav Kook during our stay and enjoying provocative dialogue. He requests cosmology as our topic. I was dubious of the wisdom of accepting the offer, since while he was retiring, we'd be back. Then it turns out that the incoming president of the synagogue is a medical school classmate and friend of Barry's, who drops by to assure me it is really ok to do.

What has changed here? Lubavitch came, drew membership, swelled and has shrunk down to a moderate cluster. B'nai Akiva has a sector. Nothing affiliated conservative or orthodox down here, though a dozen hours north in Pretoria a Reconstructionist colleague, Rabbi Bonnie Leavey served briefly some years back. Judaism down here, even when labeled orthodox, has traditionally been easy-going on every except the rabbi and cantor on matters of travel of Shabbat, lights, kashrut and the rare very observant person would be called by mainstream Orthodox as *meshuganeh frum*, crazy/exaggeratedly religious.

But now Ohr Sameach has come to town, in a big glitzy way, with expensive advertisements, upscale bringing in of outreach speakers on "Sex and Kabbalah" from overseas, a plush office on the main road and the appeal is a real pull, though I noticed only mid-life men are the praisers and promoters of it. The Ohr Sameach rabbi (we didn't get a chance to meet yet) grew up in the local Reform congregation, went to NYC and returned as an impassioned, empowered, well-funded outreach rabbi. Everyone tells me how "he puts a funnel into your mouth at Purim and pours in the schnapps" and has members from the Drum Café for the Purim party (African drumming) and that "the place is always overflowing." Barry decides to go there for Purim, but disappointingly, despite the hype, there were no drummers or funnels, just parents and kids.

The social worker who organized my work at the geriatric center calls to invite me to a women's *megillah* reading [festival text in form of a novel] in a private home. It is their second year. A third of the twenty women present are transplanted Israelis. Some chant one or two lines, others whole chapters; a few dress in fanciful medieval garb. The Israelis remember Purim songs and their eyes shine as they share them. I begin to sing the delightful work by Margot Stein and Geelah Rayzl, "She Said No to the King." They all laugh, "That's our favorite! Don't you remember, you taught it at the Reform synagogue four years ago and now every synagogue in town uses it!" Good taste. And, before

my eyes, the women form a plan to hold a Rosh Hodesh group and with amazing rapidity adopt the name Chavurat Bat Kol (Daughter Voice, a term for annunciation scenes in Torah). I'm sad to realize we are leaving the country in two days and won't be there to participate.

On Shabbat the shiur starts at 7:45 a.m. with the rabbi having moved his *shtender* (Yiddish for reader's stand) in front of our pew and the usual smattering of students in attendance. He opens the topic with some thoughts from Rav Kook and then asks Barry to begin. After explaining a bit of current trends in physics, Barry turns to me so that I can draw the premises he has laid out through the lens of two prayers: *Ein Koloheyenu* and *Adon Olam*.

I am jolted out of the sweet place of transparency where the magnificence of the *Adon Olam* cosmology races through one's soul stream, when the rabbi insisted that I go up to the *shtender* and he takes a seat in the pews. The eyes of long-time congregants face me, and immediately I understand the phrase "eyes bugging out of people's heads." Still, the shiur flows easily, interactive and deep. The material is familiar and the students' Hebrew excellent, many are in graduate studies at the local university. Afterward the elder *gabbai* (assistant) thanked me, no longer as "Mrs. Bub," but as "rabbi."

Another day, Rabbi Hoffman picks me up, he likes to create surprises. "We worked it out at the school; you're welcome there, title and all. But tonight, will you be my date at a *bat mitzvah* party? You might as well see how these things are done here." We arrive and the mother of the *bat mitzvah* asks if I'll lead *ha motzi*. The *bat mitzvah* girl comes out beaming, "this is the most amazing *bat mitzvah* present - a woman rabbi - I can't believe it." You can easily imagine how the DJ did the introduction. *Vey iz mir*. [Yiddish; "woe is me", or long for "oy."] Is this what it was like for my colleagues on the front lines twenty-five years ago, when there weren't hundreds of women rabbis? Today some 55% of non-orthodox rabbinical school enrollees are women. I hope the stories of our sister pioneers are recorded somewhere!

The headmaster (another reform rabbi) at the day school explains it's a political risk to bring a woman rabbi to teach because the school has signed an agreement to be under the supervision and funding of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues of South Africa and the Chief Rabbi will surely disapprove. But, since there is support from local colleagues, let's do it.

The introduction of new forms of Judaism is certainly mixing things up here. Age 12, Cousin Megan is troubled by an 11 year old classmate whose family is increasingly observant. Such practices have not been the norm here. "She won't look at or touch a boy! Is she like a chicken cooped up being fattened for slaughter?" She recognizes the goal of such restrictions as indoctrinating the need and desire for marriage via hyper-stimulation through deprivation. Megan describes herself as "a free range chicken" who feels "funny" about what how to relate to her friend, not to mention boys.

At the day school, the teacher tells the students, "We have something very special for you today, something you've never seen before because we wouldn't have this here, but none-the less they exist. Please clap for Rabbi Milgram, a woman rabbi."

Felt like a purple duck.

Inside of me is a fidgety bored, curious, yearning to learn school kid, so I try to teach in dynamic ways that help students discover the sweetness and meaning of their Judaism. The school wanted me to speak of my travels in the Former Soviet Union, rather than teaching Torah or Talmud and thus limiting the perceived political risk.. So I ask the students if an alien came down to ask them for aspects of Judaism they'd recommend bringing back to the home planet, what would they say? 25 girls, 25 boys, seated in separate columns, they had a hard time with this, saying what they thought would be approved of - Shabbat, services, Torah, but being unable to explain why there was any benefit to be gained from these. Most kept falling back on doing good deeds and realizing that's not intrinsically Jewish. So through the lens of how teaching in the Former Soviet Union represents a similar challenge, we started to explore the compelling meanings behind things Jewish, starting with *mezuzah* as a Jewish consciousness shifting tool, so that we keep blood off the doorposts of our

homes by entering *shema*, "listening" and *v'ahavta*, "loving."

It was a risk, opening a window beyond the peshat, mundane, and, thank G*d, the energy and interest swirled ever higher in the room. The youth were marvelously engaging and interactive. The head master extended the period into lunch time so students could ask more questions, as did several teachers. Students who stayed longest were overtly wrestling with the gender dilemma: "If men and women are equal, what is the difference in a marriage then between husband and wife?" "Do you study the same material as male rabbis; have the same duties?" A simple answer sufficed. "Do women and men doctors study different subjects, or treat a strep throat differently?" "Oh!"

The sixth grade teacher had asked me to study a bit of a parsha with him before this session, a screening device, he apologized; they wanted to check out this thing called a spiritual perspective and woman rabbi. (Purple duck) We looked at Miriam breaking out in Tza-ra-at, she sent out of the camp disgraced, as one the Torah describes as her father having spit in her face, while Aaron gets promoted to high priest. The teacher's eyebrows meet in a point. "You see a political battle here? The patriarchy killed the leadership career of Miriam? The commentator Rashi doesn't say that!"

We turn to look at the section on the *teraphim*, and commentaries of Ibn Ezra and others. Rabbi Judy Kummer and I had studied this together and hit upon an idea. What if Rachel miss-carried a daughter and that's why the Torah says Jacob had daughters, but we hear of only one, Dinah? He looks at me and says, "The women's perspective is truly missing; it's like the commentaries are half empty, you realize things that wouldn't occur to us. Is there a method for this?" Indeed. So we explored several.

And, we have thankfully arrived in America! Time for attending to the activities of daily living: a place to live, where to make Pesach, and most importantly, time with family and friends here. Much love from our hearts to yours.



Realitea

Barry: Dr. Gordon Isaacs was both relaxed and articulate as he shared his views of the future of South Africa. As the director of counseling services at The Trauma Center for Survivors of Violence and Torture, he has a unique insight into trauma.

Goldie: We're writing this final posting with the image of the rescued, tortured woman nineteen year old private atop every front page and TV screen here in America. "We don't want to infringe on her privacy," says the commander who reports on her condition, the revealed parts of which include gunshot wounds and multiple broken limbs. One is left to wonder, what does he mean?

Dr. Isaacs told us victims of Middle East torture will come for treatment at his South African Trauma Center. He is soft-spoken, gentle and determined. The first local example he offered actually shocked me, it was of a client who had just left, having completed the second of the three sessions this NGO [non-governmental organization] can offer. Her fingers had been cut off by gangs displeased that she would not pay a weekly percentage to them of her earnings as a domestic worker; they also killed her husband and raped her daughter.

Barry: Initially the center was set up to deal with victims of apartheid, now it deals with victims of savage criminal violence. They send out teams to the townships when particularly severe incidents occur (e.g. during the previous week, 5 young children had been shot in gang warfare in Cape Town.) He and his associates are very busy teaching, lecturing, leading groups and counseling.

I wondered, since he has not chosen to emigrate, was he optimistic about the future? His response to my question was to suggest one must be careful not to confuse hope with optimism. Because of Aids there will soon be tens of thousands of orphans roaming the streets of this town, sniffing glue, joining

gangs; SA has the highest incidence of alcoholism and drug abuse in the world; highest incidence of Aids; open borders with millions of refugees adding to the high unemployment; a less than perfect government; poor policing; tolerant constitution. For all these reasons, no sooner will one problem subside, than another will exacerbate.

Goldie: A week earlier, we had attended a conference on domestic violence sponsored by University of Cape Town at the local Valkenberg Mental Hospital. The ingrained patterns of patriarchy here was a strong theme. As they talked about the vast farms here, for example the vineyards, it became clear that when a man is given a job his wife is written into the contract as a domestic employee of the farm. If they are given housing in this contract and he loses his job, she becomes homeless, even though guiltless. If she files a domestic violence claim and he is convicted and has to serve time, then he'll lose his job and she'll be homeless. The conference didn't even address child, elder, husband or same sex partner abuse. This is a culture still awakening to the challenges of the world's most liberal constitution being "enforced" in the context of raging rates of unemployment and patriarchy.

Hope. *Kol od ba'leyvav p'neema*, "inside of every heart".....*lih'yote am hofshee beyartzeynu*...."to be a free people in our own land." The song I grew up with as a prayer, a declaration, an article of faith, Israel's national anthem, is every people's hope. His task, Dr. Isaacs says, is to fan hope; from this everything necessary is possible. So close to Israel's fiftieth birthday, observing the violent character of South Africa in its own year nine, I resolve to return and learn his techniques for nurturing the human spirit.

Barry: In the medical arena, my particular area of interest, over 3000 medical specialists emigrated last year. We finally found out why. The government has responded to this brain-drain by legislating that newly graduated physicians do 2 years of internship and another two years of community service - without supervision, safety, basic infrastructure, minimal income etc. The response is that 75% of students say they will emigrate.

All this, sounds depressing and might easily dissuade someone from visiting South Africa. And this would be a mistake. As we've described, it is a gorgeous country with friendly people and unnaturally exquisite natural beauty. It is neither hell, nor is it paradise. It has elements of both, depending on your viewpoint. What makes South Africa unique is that both are extreme and often overwhelming.

Goldie: South Africa was a place of great relationship contentment for us. Many of the symptoms I'd attributed to "change of life," like three day headaches for me and spates of irritability and chronic exhaustion for both of us simply melted away here. They must be symptoms of the pace of life in America. It was an eye-opener to become utterly laid back a far differently and importantly healing experience beyond meditation, which I now understand by contrast is intense and a form of work in its own way.

Barry: Here in the USA, we ended the vacation the way we began it. We tend to plan our trips with a gradual introduction and gradual post script - like a meal with an appetizer and a desert. So after flying into Atlanta, we picked up our minivan in Chattanooga and over 5 days slowly made our way back to NJ via scenic springtime Asheville, NC, Winston Salem, etc. - allowing time to savor, integrate and adjust to the transition.

Goldie: We saw the first flowers of spring in Tennessee, white magnolias and pink weeping cherries, reciting the traditional blessing and wishing for a note to put up welcoming the sight as is a spiritual practice among some Jews. We also visited a few estates such as the Biltmore, in Asheville, North Carolina, really the equivalent of a castle in a Tudor style; while well-worth visiting, it's no substitute for Africa. Every day I increasingly miss the sound of the powerful surf at the end of the world forming a rhythm that penetrates dreams at night. I egret leaving the flocks of sacred ibis that innocently land near my perch for morning prayer, and feel tea-ful memories of sweet time with gracious family now so far away.

Barry: In South Africa there are new norms of violence, high walls, and private security guards.. Here in America, fearing terrorism, our new norms are barriers and guards too. This is not an advance in

civilization. I keep wondering why was the white, apartheid government protested so vigorously by Americans ten years ago but not the present multiracial one that commits genocide by denying treatment to AIDS patients. Many protest against the war in Iraq but were not doing so against the Iraq government that brutalizes, ignores cease fires, UN resolutions, develops and uses poison gas and other horrors? My wrestling with the South African situation in many ways reflects my concern about a world that could be so much better if only.

 South Africa #7 

Zees Talk

Tried to find the fellow from the story below, this incident actually occurred on a prior trip:

He was Political Prisoner 6063 on Robben Island, South Africa during Apartheid. We spent a day with him there yesterday. Just one day in the blazing heat, searing our protected eyes in the white limestone quarry where political prisoners and hardened criminals labored side by side.

He is a Moslem of great warmth and kindness.

"How can you bear to be here, back on the island?" asks my husband, Barry, a Jew who was born here in Cape Town of family who had fled the Cossacks.

"It is talking therapy for me." Prisoner 6063 answers. "If such talking can help prevent inhumanity, I will talk forever."

A local Moslem anti-drug group has become infiltrated by HAMAS and some of its members are now highly politicized, angry and dangerous. Bombing public sites has become common, over six hundred episodes have occurred. A synagogue in the town where I will appear tonight was bombed just one week ago. The police station was hit yesterday.

This is a country being reformatted, it has endured only two and a half of the coming wilderness years. Despite a magnificent constitution which took them out of the Egypt of apartheid, it is not an "instant promised land - just add theoretical equality and stir" by any stretch of the imagination.

Oh, yes! This land is geographically stunning and agriculturally fertile beyond my imagination. Certainly South Africa is the most beautiful country I have ever visited (Israel forgive me, it is true). Everyday we hike or traverse mountain passes down to any one of dozens of stunning, unblemished beaches framed by cerulean splashed blue-green seas.

We feast on amazing fruits - fresh lichees (orgasmic flavor), gooseberries (a close second), sabra, mango, guava, kiwi, granadilla, plum, pear, grape and other more familiar fruits. Whales, dolphin, seals and penguins hang around in various areas seemingly oblivious to humans. Baboons leer at us from boulders along the highway. There is a forest legitimately named "Garden of Eden" not far from here.

From Robben Island's prison you can see the mainland with its fantastic flat-topped "Table Mountain". Robben Island is a hot rock imprisoned by the azure sea.

Moments of agony sift through our guide's recollections as we walk. "Black prisoners were not issued underwear until the late 1980's....They told us they had scientifically calculated that Colored and Indian prisoners needed several more grams of meat than Blacks....They let the hardened criminals have their way with us...sometimes we were raped or made to sleep between the buckets so when they relieved themselves they could splash on us.....If a pen or paper was found amongst us, we

would lose a day's meals...should we find a thick leaf to shield us from whipping winter winds while gathering kelp to be processed for fertilizer, it would be taken away and we would be denied the day's meals..."

"In the beginning we were allowed one phone call every six months. Later one visit each year. If your visitor did not speak a dialect which the guards could understand, they were sent away and the annual visit was over. You could not touch that visitor during your 20 minutes together. A Solomon's choice had to be made, would your wife visit or one of the children?"

Some served seventeen years, some more, some less.

The political prisoners tried to influence the hard core criminals. Prisoner 6063 still had an element of surprise and dismay in his voice as he related discovering not only the cruelty of most of the hardened criminals but also their lack of interest in the cause.

He was a student when he was arrested for organizing against apartheid.

Power in contemporary South Africa is increasingly concentrated into the hands of gangs and such criminals. The police fear for their lives and are utterly ineffective. My husband, Barry, asks: "How do you feel about the leadership going to the kind of criminals who served in this prison beside you?"

"We tried to teach them, to reason with them and we learned not all humans can be elevated. It is terrifying to discover this. Even worse is to know this and live under their domination every day."

Fearing the efforts of political prisoners to coalition with the criminals would succeed, eventually the Afrikaners made the political prisoners build themselves a separate prison, rich in solitary confinement cells.

We are told that in the beginning the racial and religious divisions between prisoners had been greater sources of identity and pride than their common status as prisoners. Diverse tribal peoples would not collaborate with each other, nor black with colored prisoners, nor with Indians, nor any with each other. Ultimately the crucible of imprisonment melted these divisions of humanity.

"We had many educated political prisoners among us. Men learned whole graduate degrees here. We taught each other. Our egos and group identities had us fighting each other on the outside, in here we slowly learned to care for each other regardless of racial origin...we became united."

"Prisoner 6063, do you hate the Afrikaners?" I am so uncomfortable that he insists on being called by his prison title, but continue to respect his choice. (Afrikaners were the government oppressors of the times, a nationality forged out of Dutch, French and German trader-colonists.) His answer is passionate, delivered in soft tones with the eyes of one who loves life and its potential:

"I believe in reconciliation, in a unified South Africa, in mutual respect and support. Only this makes sense of my suffering. While I feel endless anger, I know revenge would render all the suffering meaningless."

South Africans' initially high hopes for successful unity are terribly frustrated these days. There is 40% unemployment (60% in the non-white areas), an uncontrolled AIDS infection rate destabilizing families and what trained labor force there is, and an utter brain drain from emigration affecting all levels of government and professions. Extensive efforts at affirmative action that put people by dint of their color into governmental roles with little or no preparation or education for their tasks are resulting in dissolution of prior infrastructuresome officials are even found to be functionally illiterate.

My husband left South Africa because he could not tolerate Apartheid. Today he wanders the streets of this country delighted and amazed at the successful co-mingling of peoples, marveling and rejoicing at the sight. On the beaches we see total integration and he kvels at this accomplishment by his former country-persons. I am so ignorant. He describes a time when blacks would say "Yes, Boss" to any white person, holding their bodies deferentially. It is a phenomenon erased virtually overnight.

Prisoner 6063 returns to the topic of the recent spate of bombings here in Cape Town. He describes the successful bombings as becoming perversely important to giving minority youth self esteem and a sense of empowerment. He decries the phenomenon, urging our involvement in drawing industry and hence jobs to the region, instituting activities for teens, volunteerism to increase literacy, a need for rapid expansion of low income housing developments....

Prisoner 6063's eyes cloud with sadness as he speaks of a western world that helped to bring apartheid down but has not stayed to build South Africa back up. I think of the effective work of UJA's Project Renewal in reviving Israel's inner-city areas.....such meaningful partnerships based not so totally in money, as in skillful management of change, might matter greatly. Perhaps relevant expertise exists likely others have realized this earlier and it is being applied.

It is past time to leave. I implore that he share his real name.

"Tzaddik Levy." he replies after a great, searching pause. "You can say you were speaking with Tzaddik Levy."

I double check with a guard with whom he chats familiarly as we exit. "Yes, that truly is his name", which, the guard tells me in the spirit of a confidence, he "understands it to be Arabic for Righteous Servant."

 **South Africa #8** 

BomBarded

We're back home in the states and since we're living in Woodstock, NY as a writing retreat, I've agreed to facilitate Bard College Jewish student programming for the year. Agitated son Adam, soon-to-be age 20 has lots of opinions on the upcoming Passover seder [ritual]: " Mom! NO! Your planned creative readings supplement for the Bard seder this year totally misses the mark! Hiroshima? Scorched earth warnings?! Mom, the *seder* is supposed to be uplifting! We remember being slaves; we don't carry the burdens of living in challenging times all the way through the night. Mom! Look at this *Dayenu* you picked – it reads like a Yom Kippur liturgy! *Dayenu* (prayer saying it would have been enough if we had survived, received Torah, etc.) is about faith and feeling supported and guided! Pesach is an inspiring celebration of freedom; it is not a social justice guilt-a-thon.

Mom (aka Rabbi Goldie Milgram): Wait a minute. Two short years you were USYer of the year planning kinnusim and creative services, and hoping to move to Israel and today you major in both philosophy and Buddhism, sit in weekly mediation sangas and have your hat set for a Palestinian homeland without worrying for a second about the survival of Israel. YOU want a more traditional *seder*?

Son: Mom! I'm bringing MY FRIENDS to this *seder*, most of them are from intermarried families who only had a Passover meal growing up, not a seder. They don't even really know the story or the metaphors for transformation within it. And the rest are diplomats kids – from Spain, Bangladesh, and Denmark, they're not even Jewish!

Mom, look at all this women's liberation stuff in your *seder* supplement. There's supposed to be a big difference between a thematic political-action model *seder* and the real one on Passover night!

And, mom, get all that extra fruit off the seder plate – an orange, an olive, and you’ve got to be kidding, this year you’re adding a FIG for gay rights?!! There’s a woman rabbi at our table already - dayenu! I’m all for peace and gay rights, but let the guests have some room to place contemporary parallels on the table. It’s going to take long enough to explain all the usual symbols.

Mom, I want my guests to see how spacious, non-dogmatic and creative Judaism really is. Doesn’t it say something like those who “add to it are to be applauded?” (Not exactly) But do you see the Haggadot [seder booklets] passed down through the generations having two pages of alternative explanations of the four cups? Mom, it’s the people at the table who are supposed to be doing the mitzvah of adding to it!

oahhhhm... feel the size of this thing! No, don’t get all upset and throw them away, they’re still useful - you can have our seder guests pile them up to feel what it’s like to be enslaved by creative liturgy! Mom, really, just hand out three examples of how to be creative and relevant and trust the structure of the original. Mom, LET MY PEOPLE GO!

Mom: Son! I

He walks over and puts an arm around my waist. My resistance melts, it’s true, I love reading everything in sight newly developed by colleagues – this year especially the Michael Kagan’s Holistic Haggadah, several newish Freedom seders, and a whole stack of Project Keshet Women’s seders by and for women in Eastern Europe. And of course, preparing a new piece or two, myself.

Again, a deep, warm, silence. I feel something old and very true just happened. A practitioner of the contemplative skill known as Focusing, I notice a flush of warmth and light in my torso and two memories come rushing up like a healthy belch:

One day at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in a course on Cosmology, our teacher Reb Zalman moved over and let every one of the us take turns teaching from his chair, from the rebbe’s seat. And an earlier memory, of my father looking up from the Maxwell House Haggadah when I was slightly younger than my own son’s age saying, “Next year, it’s your time to lead.”

Barry had earlier suggested that I head over to my son’s dorm room and do some Pesach parenting, cleaning up the impassable. I knew that was a suggestion to pass over. My son has initiated a real opportunity for Passover parenting. When memories bubble up, they are like dreams, a clue – no, a cue to ask:

Mom: How would you do it? Lead the *seder*?

My arms are now on his shoulders, like in a blessing. The warm silence re-commences as he reflects for quite a long time. I can feel the tension draining from his body. He moves back a step, and answers enthusiastically:

Son: Passover is, what is it my step-dad Barry is always saying? It’s supposed to be a Gestalt experience – taste the bitter herbs and see what comes up inside yourself that you want to share out loud; break the middle matzah – what is the wisdom at the table about surviving brokenness? Crossing the sea – what do people know that they can share about overcoming fear? Mom, my favorite *seder* times all these years are when the ritual experiences become questions that are asked and explored.

Mom: You’re saying to trust the Process.

Son: Right! You’ve got it. (I see his face fall a bit.... problem?)

Oh, but if I'm leading, mom, what about your stories? Pesach wouldn't be the same without your stories. Will you bring one? Wait, know just the one.

Mom: What was that about tyranny? Are you going to tell me which story to bring too?

Just kidding. (Sort of) I'd love to know; which one has come to mind for you?

Son: What happened to that posting you were working on about your trip to South Africa? You got too busy and never sent it, right? I mean the story about that lady you met on the breakwater looking out toward Antarctica? Tell it to me again, because that lady really expressed what I'm trying to say.

Goldie: I almost forgot about that, never even wrote it down. Remember the woman whose fingers had been chopped off by gangs in South Africa, who was in therapy at the Center for Victims of Torture? When we were again in Cape Town, teaching and visiting family. There is a stunningly unique mall at the end of town, where seals climb up onto walkways beside you and every imaginable native and visiting international group comes to offer their music, dances and crafts. The mall is on the sea and it has a huge and lengthy concrete breakwater that many use as a promenade. I walk down it beside an unusually calm cerulean sea imagining Antarctica, the next stop on the horizon.

At the end of the breakwater a slender woman stands holding a baby and staring out to sea. I sit down on the edge, legs dangling, to do a gazing meditation and emerge surprised to see her still standing there a half hour later. As I turn to walk back, so does she; our paths begin to parallel. I comment on the beauty of the day and ask how she is? She turns toward me, her hands uplifted against the baby she is cradling – deep brown, weathered fingers are silhouetted against the light yellow blanket. Her right hand is missing two fingers. I seek her face and we recognize each other.

We look deeply into each others eyes in a warm silence.

She answers so softly with a great smile: "I was thinking about things that are not missing. Mine has become such a good life and this is a perfect day."

I ask if she'd relate how her life has changed. "Since you saw me I have a live-in nanny job in the city, far from Cape Flats, in a beautiful house with a wonderful family. My promised land has come to be."

Son: Mom, do you see my point? Passover is primarily about things that are NOT missing. I'm taking a Utopian Literature course this semester and I think Passover is kind of an annual utopian week-long experiment in Jewish living.

Mom: What do you mean?

Son: Well, we don't just say "Let all who are hungry come and eat," we contribute to Passover food funds, right? We have guests with nowhere to go for Pesach right at our table; we experience treating the stranger well. It's not about berating ourselves with the *mitzvot* we aren't doing, it's about living a *mitzvah*-full week, it's about fully being it. We know we don't have it perfect yet, but we do our best and stock up on hope and joy - it's supposed to be a festival mom!

Mom: I'm so proud of you – your ideas and thoughts are wonderful. You trigger me to realize that Passover is also about that other thing Barry is so big on – self care – we are to treat ourselves well! We recline, we feast and we heal into a messianic consciousness that some day when we open the door, everyone will be in cities that are whole, healed and healthy. Every city will become the *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem), the utopia that we have dreamed of creating in Israel. You know the saying, as above, so below. The *seder* renews us and imbues us with hope, it is a form of springtime for the soul.

Son: Remember that phrase you always used to quote during rabbinical school, "the force that makes for"

Mom: Salvation. The force that makes for salvation. It is how Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan described G*d.

Son: On the way here I was thinking about how you always send children to open the door for Elijah. When I would open the door, I'd always wonder if you or dad quickly drank down the wine in Elijah's cup – where did it go? But now I know what matters is that the fifth cup is for the Elijah inside of us – Elijah is when we open ourselves up and drink in hope, the extra bit of life force that we need to keep opening the door of freedom ever wider for all.

He blushes. Oh no, Mom! Now I sound like a Passover supplement.

Mom: (I take a step forward and place my hands on his head in a parenting smichah that folds into a hug. It's time to let my children glow.)

Hungary



Not in Kansas Any More

"Contemplate the candle: It has at its heart a dark spot. All Enlightenment grows from a seed of mystery." Rav Kook

The dark spot, or seed, was revealed by a passionate woman from Croatia and then equally so via the representative from Lithuania: "Rabbi. Is there a compelling reason to remain Jewish?" "Are we really doing our students a favor by helping them to remain Jewish?" And spoken by a Bulgarian with visible relief, "We're so glad you didn't include participants from The Ukraine. Our situation is very different; we are so few we'd be overwhelmed." All three comments occasioned many heads nodding in agreement.

Why would bar/bat mitzvah teachers, tutors, mentors and spiritual leaders from thirteen Central European regions be raising such questions?

This place certainly looks current. Our hotel is ultra-modern. The Jewish Community Center here has a computer skills center par excellence. Although there was a high terrorism alert for this, our teaching site, and the Israeli embassy; so the center's otherwise glorious glass roof did give us the willies. The place was often wondrously full of Israeli-dancing youth, young families and card playing elders.

Speaking of modernity, just recently Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine signed a commitment which created Europe's largest, cross-border wetlands protection and restoration initiative, the "Green Corridor for the Danube." In fact, Budapest has many synagogues, a rabbinical school, Jewish museum, and perhaps 20,000 Jews who actively identify and another 60-80,000 who could.

However, our seminar has been carefully designed by Joint Distribution Committee [non-profit] to serve the vast array of smaller Central European Jewish communities, among them Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and more. Even a senior educator from Bombay was present. New cultures have lengthy learning curves for overseas teachers like me, hmm, what is going on here.

Budapest's geography is strikingly delineated by the Danube, which since glacial times bifurcates Buda and Pesht. The two sides have five lovely bridges to re-connect them. Buda's hilltops are crowned with a huge sprawling castle and terraced with renewed ornate buildings of eras past. On the side where I'm working, Pesht, are many elaborate architectural gems from the Parliament to the Dohany Synagogue. I'll only get to the latter and the ornate Music Academy because it seems our carefully wrought teaching plan is going to require constant fine-tuning.

Shoah, Holocaust, memories pervade the Jewish ghetto beside where we are comfortably quartered in an ultra-modern hotel. Because Hungary sided with Germany, her Jewish citizens survived until 1944. Then, in six weeks 600,000 Jews perished as the Nazis reached peak frenzy and efficiency. The apartment blocks here are the sequential walls of the ghetto; large gates stand open in archways for traffic to pass. During the war as people starved inside sealed ghetto walls, the courtyard beside the great Dohany synagogue was piled high with corpses in the tens of thousands. This, the largest and probably most stunningly beautiful synagogue in the world survived the war because the British were

reluctant to bomb religious institutions, which the Nazis knew. The Nazis used it as their headquarters here, setting their broadcast antennas atop its domed turrets.

We're not in Kansas, Toto. It soon becomes clear that most of our participants have neither had a bar/bat mitzvah nor witnessed one. Few can read any Hebrew, I believe none knew trope.

The idea of helping their students to write Torah commentary that touch upon their lives is received as innovative, exciting, and inviting. Looking past the *p'shat*, the simple meaning of the text, into metaphor and symbolism, radical and – intriguing, raising a real hunger and hope. Initially indifferent or hostile on the subject of religious services, when they experienced a few examples of how decode the portals to higher consciousness within the prayers and to see the spiritual infrastructure, they wanted to stay after hours to learn more. The seed in the darkness trembles with the energy of impending growth.

It takes some distance in time to conceive the Shoah, the Holocaust, as another part of the eternal darkness in which the buried seed is again being fertilized, to realize our people's pain again is decomposing and releasing new energy. After a decade of involvement in the now dramatic reinvigoration of Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union, I'd not connected the awesome, tiny tendrils of awakening that we first experienced there with what might be the situation here. Those who oppress Jews through the ages realize little that they are compressing our G*d sparks into an ever denser, more potent fuel for knowledge and growth. We contain this fossil fuel which, when fully realized will illuminate the human future as our souls pour through Torah and offer a lamp for living, B'H".

On our five-person teaching team is Rabbi Menachem HaCohen, noted author and Chief Rabbi of Romania. A twinkling-eyed *mensch*, ethical man, he knows issues within this group that I forget to expect. One in particular, is that many in the East have never heard of women rabbis. I thought we were past that point in history! But, bless Rabbi HaCohen; he deftly leapt them past their shock by striding across the room with outstretched hand to welcome me in a robust voice: "Rabbi Milgram – so glad to meet you." While jaws actually dropped, later that day two women feel the need to inform me: "We don't believe in women rabbis where we come from."

Rabbi HaCohen's talk centered on increasing the participation of women and girls through bat mitzvah, which he strongly condoned if held during Kabbalat Shabbat sans Torah reading. Some jaws dropped again, others tightened. A western woman reporter called out with indignation: "With your solution, we still won't count; not for minyan, not for coming to Torah? Not just our girls, but our boys won't count. You know what I'm talking about, who is a Jew!"

The bigger problem over here is intermarriage. With essentially no one local to fall in love with in your own tradition, in these Eastern European communities, halachic Jews are getting few and far between. Hundreds of thousands of Former Soviet Union Israeli immigrants fall into this category too. "A mass solution has to be established for this generation," he declared, "we don't have it quite yet, but it will come."

So as not to travel on Shabbat, a few of us attend a Friday night service in an apartment-turned-shul at a small new Orthodox group. The group has "progressed dramatically," we're told, the women no longer have to sit in a separate room, we get to sit at the back of the living room behind a mechitzah [partition] made of two layers of sheer curtains. The melodies are those of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and the chazzan's voice sweet and heart-felt, present are several male Israelis who are medical students here and three local women who chattered behind us while we sing-in Shabbat joyfully.

Also on our teaching team are Shulamit and Moshe Turpaz of Israel's modern Orthodox ritual and life cycle support and resource group ITIM.org. They are dynamic, fun, creative and apparently haven't dealt with a woman rabbi before. Moshe makes a point of passing me the cup to make Kiddush at our seat on Shabbat at one of the area kosher restaurants. The food is good but later we're pretty shocked to notice signs were posted along the other three walls saying that women are not to sing,

Why? *Kavod hatzibur*, for the honor of the community? Oy. We were virtually the only guests, so I guess that's why no one stopped us. Despite this strict halachic [Jewish law] signage, despite having prepaid, we are asked to be sure to pay now...hmm, we musn't sing, but on Shabbat payment is requested?

A Reform community has formed in Budapest, but since the other two groups won't officially recognize it, neither will the government! To count as a religious group they'd have to file as a new religion. This is not an uncommon situation in Europe. Similar groups have formed in Prague, Amsterdam and I'm sure elsewhere. I've learned from my work in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union to view splinter groups – whatever part of the spectrum in which they arise, as new seeds that bode a real, creative, strong Jewish future – IF watered, fed, and supported, as is the case in the NIS.

We offered teaching methods to them and principles for sharing basic Judaism in a way that enters the spirit and kindles an ever more engaged Jewish life. Mission enough. We were adjured not to introduce "radical" ideas that could rattle their rabbis back home. Despite our teaching team's respectful caution, when the students tackled their roles for a bar and bat mitzvah simulation they blew that lid off. Wanting to see a woman rabbi fully in action, they insisted that I lead a brief service, and then one of the reps from Prague (a city of 2500 Jews) staged her bat mitzvah girl as having two mothers and a transsexual father. No one seemed fazed; they too live in the real world. For them gay, lesbian and transexual Jews aren't novel – but women rabbis and bat mitzvahs were! The literature for b'nei mitzvah shown us by the rep from India describes bat mitzvah as "a party to celebrate the girls' coming of age, nothing more." And a woman leading services? "It seemed so natural, why were we ever so concerned?" was the consensus.

Our goal is maximum empowerment of the participants. We teach them Howard Gardner's nine intelligences and help them to contemplate the best ways to work with bar/bat mitzvah students as individuals. They consider the importance of spiritual mentoring a young person on his/her journey. We reveal the powerful infrastructure of Shabbat services and the Kabbalistic metaphors.

IMHO, helping Jews to create their own indigenous interpretations in the light of their own changing times matters most, just like we create for ourselves in our own denominations and idioms back home. I have no agenda for the Jews here to do like we do. With the questions being asked and hearts so open, it is for us just to become transparent like water, and then to advise and encourage and reveal the skills of experiencing Judaism as a system of meaning for living. The seed? It is ever-growing; it is born of the Tree of Life.

Every community a menorah. Every soul a branch carrying Light.

With love and Shabbat Hanukkah blessings for joy and loving connections, Reb Goldie

Germany



Ready to Platz

We were officially in Berlin to attend a conference being co-chaired by Elisa Klapheck, a rabbinical student and prominent author, but let's hold that until the next posting. First impressions:

The first *platz* (square) we experience is a huge expanse in front of a vast library in West Berlin. Crossing it we notice people leaning over a section of cobblestones and wonder why. We lean over too and find ourselves looking into a window into the ground. It reflects the blue sky and clouds and as you gaze, you realize you are looking into a library, a vast underground library of empty white shelves. It is a memorial to the books which were purged from homes and libraries by the Nazis and burned here by the thousands, books by Jews - religious and intellectual works. Only a tiny bronze plaque flush to the ground explains it.

We come to another *platz* in front of the Brandenburg Gate, the threshold between East and West Berlin. It is edged on one side by a bank designed by Frank Gehry to house an internal architectural form so future forward as to surprise many of the senses. Its inner curved conference center is designed of huge arched sound scapes which appear to be monsters rising from the deep, both interesting and fearsome; which is only fair, since this is Germany.

A simple line of differentiated brick marks along the edge of the *platz* mark where the Berlin wall once stood. A fence segment remains on the corner of the park beyond, mounted upon it are plaques, memorials to those shot trying to escape across the wall. Also on the square, right up to the line is a private house and beyond that house the Reichstag, a government building of reknown today for a stunning glass dome constructed over an older dome. At the Jewish museum here there you will find another featured another part of the Reichstag. Over the entry of the Reichstag are three words from before the war: "dem DeutschenVolke." Bitter irony, a Jewish family business had been commissioned to cast those bronze letters.

At the Reichstag we select the handicapped entrance since a substantial cut on my right foot was limiting our progress and the dozens of steps up to the top and view of the full city were not in the cards for me. "Nein." The woman sentry would not let us use the entrance, declaring it to be only for parents with children in strollers and those who have an official card declaring them handicapped. Our skillful guide, Wendy Kloke, an expatriot Berlin resident, attempts to dispute this diplomatically, patiently, carefully. The answer: "Nein." A second staff person comes over and explains "what if others try to copy you? We will have no order here." We look around, there's no one else in line, or even in sight. I start wondering how to borrow a baby and carriage.

A third sentry comes over; the guide tries again and finally asks to talk to a supervisor. "The supervisor is in another city." They say, "We are only doing our jobs." My friend Ania, an adult child of survivors, fills in the obvious next line which we all were thinking, "How can you say that? You are doing what Hitler did." The guide asks for their sentries' names and says she will write a letter to the ministry of tourism. We are met by silence. Finally one says "You must leave now, or we will have to make you leave."

We depart. I feel sad at how the stereotype we'd fought against in choosing to come here had reared

up in our faces. We stop at that private house on the platz beside the Brandenburg gate. It was owned by a Jewish artist who died of natural causes in 1942 and whose wife then killed herself rather than be deported. Today it is an art museum. The staff bend over backwards to be helpful, showing us to the staff elevator, what do you need or want to see? Same country and what a striking difference in attitudes.

The exhibition at the private house is by Bilder von Claudio Lange, an artist who fled to South America, painted there and now has returned. The exhibition theme is "Magdalena und Shechina." Of all moments and places to find such an exhibition! The works are stunning renditions of South American forms rich in Kabbalistic imagery, deeply, beautifully and powerfully feminine, combining sacred chutzpah and nurturing energy. The art feels healing.

This trip to Berlin is about supporting the evolution of a gathering of European Jewish women called Bet Devora. Their theme is "Power and Responsibility." Every session holds deep learning through listening for me, although German is the pervasive language and its exhausting working through the translators here. More on the conference later.

There is now a Jewish Museum in Berlin. It is not a Holocaust museum. It is a new concept, designed by the Polish born Jewish American architect Libeskind who will supposedly be re-creating the World Trade Center in NYC. He crumbled a Jewish star in his hand while planning the museum building and designed on that theme. The building is adjacent to the only segment of the Berlin Wall that is still standing, and also beside it is an empty field that was the site of Gestapo headquarters.

The building carries the sharply angled lines of that star, and has the level of detail of a Frank Lloyd Wright project. Every knob, seat, window, carries the angles and he creates also the theme of axis - trauma, axis - future, although I believe he used other words to express this.

My Dutch friends' eyes light up in the museum, and even today (2 weeks later) they speak of the power of its message to them. A large part of the museum is curated to reveal the culture of the enlightenment that came before WW II. Fantastic strides in human rights being voted by the legislatures, great philosophers abounding, a salon culture exist arising of hosted homes open to artists, poets, musicians, and more.

Little known because she died in a concentration camp, the world's first woman rabbi, Regina Jonas was ordained here in Berlin in 1935. Among the many dynamic men and women featured here, her portrait and bio are placed equally. The museum brooks no sexism. (Unlike European Judaism today where the bouquet of pluralism struggles to flower and rabbis have centralized their power in ways that make me cringe and desire either to rail or cower. But I've learned, to look, listen and feel, to wait on commenting, to be available to those with questions, the curious and hopeful.)

Ania and Carola teach me what a gift it is to have the help of this museum in order to more deeply grasp that a creative, evolving Jewish religion and culture preceded the war. To see clearly explained in a museum that liberal Judaism is not something arising totally new and post war is important. Orthodoxy is so strong throughout Europe; it does feel hard to believe that strong alternatives once existed so effectively beside it. So often we lament how many sages died in the Shoah, how often do we recall the breadth of perspective and gender they represented?

So many here had parents who have shut down their hearts, minds and spirits to Judaism. They have given over a painful history but are unable to pass Judaism's rich spiritual legacy to their now adult children who thirst for meaningful Jewish connection. Little moments in the museum cast light on glimpses of life before the war that some surviving parents afforded their children. Ania shares how her mother was honored to have been called Pearl when she she was reduced to working as a housekeeper for an affluent German family during the war. The exhibit explains that society women traditionally called their help "pearls," and so Pearl was not an endearment, just one more precious item on the necklace of some opportunists.

The efforts of Bertha Pappenheim are well-documented here. Do you recall who she is? The first

famous psychoanalysis patient, Anna O. But in both the conference and the museum she is recalled for her work founding the Jewish Feminist Organization in Germany. Bertha labored furiously to create systems of social service which organized work and shelter for Jewish women as an alternative to prostitution, when increasing limitations forced them into ever more desperate efforts to support their families.

On a tour of social services in pre-war Berlin, our excellent local guide Iris Weiss explains there was originally collaboration between Jewish and Christian social service workers, but as the city flooded with refugees, the Christian group insisted that the Jewish social services be closed down to save funds. Her tour was hard in the way that the museum also reflected the dissembling of all the hard won partnerships initiated by Jews with the general society. Through such efforts, pursued just as vigilantly today, we delude ourselves into thinking we've been accepted as thinkers, innovators, teachers, neighbors, equals, only to gradually have it all unravel.

Even so the exceptional does exist, we turn a corner where a Catholic Hospital still stands and she explains how they would provide care and antibiotics to all who came and protect them, throughout the war. Indeed, I recognize the place as having saved one of the survivors I'd once interviewed on video-tape.

It turns out that Bertha Pappenheim was a poet and liturgist. The organizers of the Bet Devora conference reprinted a volume of her poetry. Here is one of her personal prayers:

Time, Thou ancient and revered, source of help and healing.
Thou hast built and bestowed upon me so much;
hast animated the heritage from my ancestors,
which enriched my life,
hast revealed to me pulsating filaments
which bind together the very existence of things.
Time, Thou all kindly, confer upon me,
at the ripeness of old age,
mildness.

August 12, 1922 Bertha Pappenheim translated by Elissa Klapheckand reprinted with her permission.



Hamburg Helper

Goldie: The train from Berlin, Germany to Amsterdam pulled up two minutes early. Ania and I climbed in eager for the comfort and privacy of European train travel. Seats wide and luxurious, a glass privacy panel encasing our conversation. As we recap our conference experience and reflect on our parents' choices in guiding our lives, the hours sprint by much like the evergreen landscape. Finally we begin to wonder when the gentle rolling fields and dikes of Holland will emerge. At long last a conductor takes our tickets and shaking his head attempts to communicate an apparently critical problem.

Seems we are on a train to Hamburg; headed several hours in the wrong direction! We have to get off there, and be re-routed to Hanover. No problem catching a train to Amsterdam from there, he assures us. How did this happen? It seems the departure track hosts a train every few minutes, and we'd step on an earlier train, by two minutes!

At 11 p.m. after a full day's travel we reach Hanover to learn there is no train out until the morning. What's more, a festival of woodworkers is in town, and there is also no room at any inn, not even at the youth hostel. As the station prepares to close for the night, the police listen to our plight and not

amused. I contemplate calling the village priest and requesting sanctuary. Hold that thought, the police captain has an idea for us; we can pass the night at the station's Christian Mission.

G*d bless Ania who did not blink at the notion; if anything I sensed her soul join mine in pure curiosity at this twist in the road. Two models of the milk of human kindness greet us, lock up our belongings and offer respite among the incontinent and inconsolable men who dribbled in through the night. Mercy was granted after some time when it seemed perhaps safer to offer us the medical exam room as refuge. There Ania insisted I take the exam table and she buffered herself with pediatric exam table padding shifted to the floor.

Around 3 am the inevitable gonging of the town tower clock sent me out to find the men, playing poker without stakes, at the insistence of the ladies of tender mercy. Using my pathetic Yiddish, meager French, and ten words in Dutch, I managed to clown enough to add to the friendly aura of everyone's sleepless time. The really hard part was pushing down the urge to offer each fellow traveler a taste of toothpaste or ten.

Contrast that scene from a month ago to today, traveling contentedly beside my beloved Barry whose infinite attention to detail sets the stage for wandering the back roads of Washington State beside endless lakes, surprising Victoriana, fascinating festivals and leery lane passing lane moments as Weyerhouser trucks bearing huge logs sway perilously on their hilly treks. [Postings about Amsterdam, Valencia, Girona [home of Nachmanides and Isaac the Blind] and Barcelona will follow over the next few weeks; need to find some down time to edit them before posting in fairness to ya'all.]

Goldie: This Kallah revealed Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal in a state of increasing maturity – sweet, deep, interesting, logistically excellent, carefully creative teaching, music, and davening abounded. Even Middle East politics felt safely shifted in this context, at least in the sessions we attended. During one powerful evening service, a blending of Rabbi Shefa Gold's chanting with a teaching by Rabbi Miles Krassen on when G*d chose to slay truth so that peace might live, created open hearts in place of the potential for heated debate.

Barry: A cascade of davening (prayer) attended us each morning. Sequenced, I think, by 15 minutes, all around the circle in front of our dorms (facing a lovely pond) were creative minyanim. Whenever you woke up, enroute to breakfast a minyan of music, or movement and more awaited.

Another perennial feature is the Shabbat Walk. The planning group responsible for these set up across the campus, in a wending, winding way, many musicians, banners, greeters, inspirational and humorous hangings and sayings and more. And one set of services was in a building perched high over the port of Bellingham with spectacular sunsets and as Kallah continued, bursts of July 4 fireworks from towns all around.

Goldie: Cindy Gabriel and her team were amazing organizers. This Kallah approached some kind of perfection. Only the intensely noisy dining room was daunting, and this led us to discover the silent dining room – yet another pleasure! Since the food was quite good.

Some have analogized Jewish renewal to doctors without borders, calling the phenomenon Jews without boundaries. On the one hand, it is a great description for the repertoire of skills which yield depth and joy that is diffusing from renewal into all the denominations. On the other hand, renewal's extended 60's-style experimentation with loose personal boundaries no longer applies. The traumas secondary to that experimentation are still being healed and Barry and I are among many blessed to be a part of renewal's rapid process of moving on from that period of its development.

For the second Kallah in a row Barry and I were invited to offer a session on the creation and maintenance of healthy boundaries for the Kallah faculty. With all of the horror stories about clergy in

the news, it is all the more important in a setting of intense spirituality to bring to consciousness the risks of overly permeable boundaries and to offer effective methods for self regulation.

Barry: I did not want our teaching to be a lecture, nor focus on the obvious major possible boundary transgressions. Rather, I thought to introduce the subtleties of boundaries from multiple perspectives. The theme that we built on was of interpersonal boundaries being a place of separation, allowing for the preservation of one's identity, as well as a place of meeting and paradoxically the creation of identity. In preparation for this class it dawned on me that the legendary Goldilocks is an example of a boundary-challenged person – someone who did not appreciate the importance of personal space, so she felt free to invade the bears home, food, bed, etc. My glee at this discovery came down a peg when a Google search revealed 1200 entries for Goldilocks+boundaries! The teachers focused with great interest upon where a boundary, like a line under high magnification on the computer, gets fuzzy. Using dance, hevruta and gestalt, we encouraged that line of inquiry.

Goldie: In studying the historical roots of the mussar movement, I find a clear intent to coerce, force and shape the student. In American liberal Judaism there is has long been an ethic of freedom of the seeker to grow at one's own rate of interest and permission to participate in shaping the Judaism of the future. Our teachers were appropriately concerned about how to support students to stretch in abilities without pushing, seducing or coercing them. The line between cult and opportunity was felt to lie in the spirit of the teacher and when s/he uses power to empower and teach the seeker replicable skills and material or disempowers and mesmerizes, resulting in more of a discipleship among the students.

Goldie: We also co-taught a course during Kallah week and each took one. Barry reveled in Eli Lester's drumming class and I was transported by Hazzan Richard Kaplan's course on Breslover *niggunim*, melodies. He offered much about how to give over such niggunim as individual and collective expeditions of the spirit. We focused upon *seudah shelishit*, that meal during deep, twilight time towards the end of Shabbat. There was nothing trivial about the niggunim Chazzan Kaplan offered up; works rich in range of emotion, pace, tone, depth of sound and leaps of life spark and faith. We've been listening to his newest CD while driving the Northwest and each time hear nuances which delight even further upon discovery. I pray he'll create more, more!!

Barry: An unforgettable moment from Eli Lester's drumming class was when we were asked to drum chaotically, not to allow any order to the sound in the room. It proved impossible, chaos deteriorated into order! This was a profound teaching, to be believed only in the experience.

Our Kallah week-long course was on the subject of "Rock" in Jewish liturgy, Torah and mysticism texts. We were blessed with a stunning thick arboretum dense with ferns and carefully kept rains on the mountainside of the campus and a full measure of sunny days poking through the dense shade. Our hope is to enliven our students' experiences at services when they go back home by making some core metaphors more accessible. In Judaism rock functions as an object, a symbol, a metaphor and a doorway to higher consciousness. Preparing for the course was a matter of joyful intensity for Goldie and endless irritation for me, only because Goldie was trying to grasp some meta-level idea about the material and in doing so generated too much for the fairly brief teaching segments allotted at Kallah. (It's a festival there, not an intensive.) Somehow I always end up being the tough guy who helps trim back the teaching plan.

Goldie: Readers may appreciate the feeling of one's mind as a CD rom, new tracks being laid day with each subject one emphasizes in one's studies and all the while the connections on your "drive" begin leaping out at you. *Tzur*, G*d as a rock/tether is in *Adon Olam* (*tzur hevli b'et tzarah*), it is in the blessing before the amidah (*tzur yisrael, kuma v'ezrat yisrael*), in *Tzaddik katamar*, (*tzuri v'lo avlata bo*), many more psalms and Biblical texts, like Moses hitting the rock, and Jacob's pillow, let's not forget the Kotel, Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the role of rock vs water in the Tree of Life meditations.

At first in a frustrating trickle, then a landslide of awareness, as an integrative perspective was triggered by a piece of Zohar. This was while I was away from Barry in Europe for the prior month with my son Adam. So hard for Barry and I to be apart, it felt like we were coming apart! We're excited to again offering this course at Elat Chayyim the week of August 4th, where we have a full hour more per day to deepen the experience of our participants through meditation, immersion in some great off-campus waterfalls and other direct moments in nature.

Barry: We gave ourselves a treat after Kallah, several days of long walks on Orcas Island, off the coast of Washington State. Full of sweet trails, profuse with wildflowers and vistas of islands and in the distance of three great volcanic mounts, Victoria and Vancouver Canada.

And after stunning came time with dear artist friends Sara and Fred Harwin in Portland, Oregon who brought us to something you just have to find time to attend, the Eugene Oregon Country Fair!! 200 acres of folks dressed in tie-dye, with angel wings or tiny clay devil's horns, engaging in foot-stomping wash tub music, belly dancing, theatre, poetry reading, fine crafts and lots more. Somehow it has escaped commercialism and is a breath of authenticity and frivolity, with tremendous attention to the little details that make a person welcome and comfortable. A personal favorite was the joy of watching pregnant women with bellies floating free in the filtered sunshine, only to realize some had stopped by face paint stations and painted upside down fetuses on their taut abdomens. What a sweet, holy, healthy day and for me an antidote to formal spirituality and religion.

Meanwhile, we're looking for a furnished sublet for the fall, somewhere pleasant, and good for writing since a book contract falls due in December. Let us know if you hear of an option.

Spain



Soul Stoned

Goldie: It is afternoon of Tisha b'Av here where I'm writing this, back in the states at Elat Chayyim, my teaching perch for the week. A few weeks ago, while walking the streets of Girona, Spain with my son Adam, age 19, a Vassar student and his Spanish roommate Francesq, that Tisha b'Av energy blew its hot chilling breath our way.

Girona is preserved like a gem. The winding medieval stone streets, city walls, grotto-like store fronts, the disproportionately huge church in the center with an infinity of steps leading up to it...it is only the oddly modern dress of those present that belies the century of our visit.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270, of Gerona, Spain, one of the leading Torah scholars of the Middle Ages; who successfully defended Judaism at the famous debate in Barcelona in 1263, lived here. Today he is called Nachmanides. I wish to bump into him, to fly out of this time, into his, to listen in and dispell mysteries.

But at a curve in the cobbled road, is the immaculately restored Jewish house (no furnishings) that is a Jewish museum. Essentially its contents are tomb stones. Huge stones bearing names and simple inscriptions. There are rooms full of these stones four to six feet wide and two to three feet high. If G*d is known as *tzur*, "rock" then a person is an *ehven*, a stone cleaved from that Rock. We read of the biblical practice of stoning a person to death; symbolic, eh? That brings us to the idea of a tombstone and visitors leave a stone to symbolize their own soul stopped by. Yet our ancestors preferred to intern the bones of their beloveds in a stone cave, returning perhaps the rock to the womb of stone.

The tombstones in Girona have none of the elegance of those you'll see in the cemetery where Spinoza's wife is buried outside of Amsterdam. They are huge, simple, and numerous. My son's roommate Francesq is from Valencia, his parents are socialist democratic atheists, by self description. Very ethical, cheerful and caring people. She had warned me: "This country has not been kind to the Jews. I don't know if you will be able to hear beyond the echoes of ancient anguish."

In Exodus 25:1 one reads: "Make a sanctuary for me; that I might dwell in your midst." Nachmanides' commentary explains that G*d wanted a place where the revelation at Sinai could become a daily occurrence. These were the words of the local sage that came to me as we walked those streets.

Francesq wants to know what does Nachhmanides mean by this teaching? I wonder if my son has an opinion, he was USY'er (Jewish youth movement) of the year status but his Jewish involvement faded rapidly upon his entrance to college. He eschews the Jewish Student Union building, reveling in the diversity of the campus, eyes aglow with curiosity, wanting to taste every idea and quickly dropping his physics and math major for art and philosophy. What will he say?

"It is about the temple that stood in Jerusalem. Right, Mom? That's what Nachmanides meant. But he was a mystic, so it must mean more. Yes?"

Azriel (Ezra) ben Menahem also lived in Girona, a primary student of Isaac the Blind. Isaac the Blind gave names to the ten Sefirot, first adopted the idea of metempsychosis and it is to him that some scholars attribute authorship of the Bahir. Isaac the Blind fiercely opposed the public teaching of Kabbalah, he felt it must remain a closely held wisdom tradition available only to those who would practice Judaism with integrity and have sufficient learning to be able to learn the details of the Kabbalistic depths. He described the men of his time as "cutting off the shoots," of subjects related as "the flame is to the coal." So how to answer Francesq's quest for understanding. When my teacher Reb Zalman stood at this cross roads, so far as I can tell, he chose to share.

So, a bit of an answer for Francesq and my listening son. "The Temple in Jerusalem was more than a building, its front pillars represent the Tree of Life. One pillar is Justice, the other is Lovingkindness. In the center, that's the Royal Road, the pillar of harmony, where balance must be created. But Francesq, that Temple, or that Tree, it is also you, and also me. The balance starts with us."

Francesq is a passionate Catalan nationalist, more accustomed to making common cause with Basques, members of the IRA and Palestinians, this excursion out of his hometown of industrial Valencia (with a very cool Gothic historical section) is his first confrontation with the Spanish Inquisition. Short, lithe, olive-skinned, huge brown eyes, an excellent orator, he wants to know more. "So the temple was an illusion? It is really inside of you? Can Moslems take on that practice too?" He is also quick. I restrained myself from making linkage to his own nationalism, hearing my husband Barry's voice in my ear - "Seeds are planted, let it evolve." My son is nodding, he who keeps telling me why socialism is the ultimate best way to reorganize the world. And I keep imploring him to tackle the great challenge of our times, to invent a new, fair economic system, to help us reach beyond the known, to help us get past the now decaying benefits of capitalism, to vision. Adam!! Francesq!! Help us vision.

The six hour return train ride to Valencia became a milk-the-rebbe seminar. As Reb Zalman is fond of quoting, "just as much as the calf needs to suckle, the cow wants to give." Francesq elicited practices, history, tried on meditations, and truth to tell, it was my joy to find my son willing to expand his awareness alongside his friend.

We returned to Holland for a Bat Mitzvah to be held in a tiny rural synagogue outside of Amsterdam. It is now officially a church, the notch in the wall where the ark once stood is empty. It is so tiny, the size of a decent living room in the states. The young girl being b-mitzvah is an amazing young woman. When her family finally managed the impossible, to convert to Judaism in a way acceptable to the Dutch liberal rabbinate (long story), she refused to go to mikveh a second time, declaring G*d to be quite clear that her earlier Orthodox conversion in Germany was sufficient. What a turn-around, the Reform establishment trying to disenfranchise an orthodox conversion. Ultimately they recognized her point.

Our golden-haired chutzpanik, she decided to also tackle the Reform establishment in the rural town where she lives. There they don't allow women to wear a tallit at services, though a woman can lead and leyn. [And it's apparently the vote of two women that keep the custom this way!] Her parsha, as it happened, included the mitzvah of tzitzit, and the Haftarah was the story of Rahab letting down the red string to mark her home as a safe house when the Israelites took Jericho was her parsha. Our bat mitzvah girl pulled out the Talmudic proof for women and tzitzit and waved it like a red flag: (Menachot 43a) reports that Reb Yehudah attached fringes to the aprons of women in his household and there it reads: "All must observe the law of tzitzit, Cohanim, Levites and Israelites, converts, women and slaves." She experiences Rahab as showing the importance of women and fringes, that when we take on the mitzvah of welcoming the stranger, the world changes toward Shalom.

Smoke is a kind of fringe, the fringe of the flame. As she chanted her parsha in a crystalline voice with extraordinary precision, I heard the words "rey-akh hani-ho-ah" - meaning the burning sacrifice on the altar is a "sweet savor." Or, G*d loves the smell of barbecue. The words clicked a shutter in time, I blinked and saw the room softly buzzing with terrified men talking about deportations, the notch where the ark would have been had a resplendent cabinet there, the doors open, two other Torahs

waiting. Their anxiety was infectious; I wanted to scream to them: "Blink! Look up through time - see HER!!" Hot tears poured down my cheeks as I slipped out of the pocket in time and struggled to return my attention to the Dutch rabbi whose words were being softly translated into my ear by a dear friend.

It is a challenge to recover from such jolts in the fabric of time. Nava Tehilla, a mid-life Dutch woman with a beautiful voice serves as cantor. On the wings of her song spirits rise. She has just been accepted as the first woman in the first Dutch Rabbinical school, being founded by Rabbi David Lillienthal this autumn as his retirement gift to Europe. Then, out in the central stone square of the tiny Dutch town we later came upon a huge concert organ. The kind that would be wheeled through the streets and patrons offer coins in exchange for running a wooden template through the back that, just like in a music box, would result in the right chords. Powerful, joyful, requiring a dance for sure.

Our time in Europe ended too quickly. This kind of traveling and teaching brings the most amazing friends, students and teachers into one's life. Friends Ania and Kess took us sculling on the Amstel River. There we recalled the Rosh Hodesh group's ideas about the red thread, which in the Netherlands is a known metaphor for what connects us all. It is an umbilical cord, Rahab was midwifing the departure of the Israelites from the womb of the wilderness, her home was set into the wall around Jericho, she was able to bridge worlds, to create a safe house in a strange land.

This morning we sat on the floor here at Elat Chayyim, some chose to rub ashes into their skin. It came to me that we might pray the *Modeh ani*, without the *modeh*. Not, "I am praising before the king of life that sustains all." Instead take the other meaning of *I'faneckha*, take "in your face" and simply chant, *ani I'faneckha*, "I am in Your face." For our shema we completed the shema of those who went to the gas chamber, who died in the inquisition, who were thrust without time to blink through with the staves of Babylonian conquerors. A kapo [concentration camp inmate who survived by working as a camp laborer taking Nazi orders] once told me that was how he redeemed his job; he finished the *shema* for those inside the gas chamber, while he stood, in anguished privilege outside. The hard energy of Tisha B'av is here.

May we be blessed to bridge worlds, like Rahab, to create safe houses in strange lands.
With love, Reb Goldie

Former Soviet Union

 Former Soviet Union #1 

Flooroscopy

One of the early travelogues after our blooper in the USA was a set of postings from the Ukraine. These were the early days of revitalization of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union; the downfall of Communism had led to a disruption in infrastructure and economy, except for the black marketers and corrupt politicians, most appear quite poor and demoralized. Alcoholism is rife. Something scary is lurking very close to the surface:

While teaching a mother-daughter retreat in the Ukraine for Project Keshet, I began to experience nights so filled with dreams of terror that I was afraid to sleep. It felt as though rivers of raging hot blood were filling the land. My spiritual experiences generally occur while awake, so this was most disturbing and with the jet-lag complications, undesirable.

I trudged from the retreat center into the town to use the ancient telephone system, which still required an operator to place the call to Kiev and only then would a connection be made to America. "Just sit there". The operator motioned to a bench. "I'll let you know when your call has gone through." Two hours later, she points me toward a set of wooden booths, "chitieri [four]" she tells me in Russian. My beloved Barry comes on the line. I fill him in on the dreams, needing a guiding voice and grounding. I know he doesn't buy much of this "hard core spiritual stuff", he'll set me right.

"Goldie, you are so sensitive to the ambient energy around you. Could it be something from the Holocaust or the Stalinists that remains in the area that needs resolving? Can you do some research on the history of the area from where you are?" "

Oy. He's getting too used to me," was my thought.

Later that day I went to meet with the director of the sanatorium where we were holding our retreat. [Today these function as low-budget health spas in many parts of the FSU as a way of supplementing their income for patient care.] A young physician, we chatted about post-traumatic stress syndrome, over 300 children of Chernobyl were occupying the facility for treatment during our visit. "Speaking of which," I inserted my agenda, "Would you know about any Jewish history in this region or here in Petchora? Any special events or traumas?" "No, I am not acquainted with such things, though it could be the case. Why do you ask?" He replied. I told him about my sleeplessness and dreams, he made a generous suggestion. "Take my car and driver, bring your translator, go into the town and ask around, you may find your answer."

We stop at the town hall to seek out the mayor. "There have never been Jews here," he says tersely. "You must be mistaken." Was it my imagination? The old man who was sweeping the office floor seemed to have frozen for a moment at something in my words.

I exited confused, senses still alert to to what? The old man reappeared in the parking lot. "You are looking for Jew?" he asks in Yiddish. "I am the head of the Jewish community here; perhaps you would join me at my home for a while?"

"We are all from The Death Loop." he said, standing under a portrait of himself in full Russian military regalia. "Death Loop?" I often reflect on the perils of working through translators. Tonya, my translator, paled considerably as she received the explanation. "A small Nazi Death Camp was here. They made a net of soldiers and townspeople around us. Encircling the whole district and walking inward to the center of town, looping in all the Jews, tighter and tighter. At the end of the war we were thirteen Jews surviving. Eleven live here. One has died, one lives in Israel."

"I will call the others to come." He gets on the phone, and then makes tea. One comes bearing a manuscript, handwritten memoirs of her time in the local concentration camp.

They inquire after my life, asking probing questions as though to judge my character. Then my host inquires, a warm shift in his voice.

"Reb Goldishkeh, can I ask you one last thing?"

"Of course."

"Can a woman rabbi read from a Torah?"

"We are trained just as any rabbi would be."

He pulls up floor boards and opens a crate from which he lovingly lifts a Torah. Her cover is tattered, yet the text is beautifully intact. "We gather each week to kiss her. But none of us can read even one word. We open the Torah and look in. That is all. We know no prayers, no words, we just look."

I imagine he will ask me to read from Torah. Instead he asks: "Could you teach us to read a few words? We could memorize them and open to the right place and fulfill the mitzvah of reading the Torah. Could you do that?" Would you read for us? Could you teach a few words that we might read even the same thing each week?"

My turn to lose it emotionally; I see boxes of food from the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in his kitchenette. Clearly they do receive support from the international Jewish community, yet the Torah has remained a secret? He catches my glance.

"No. We don't want our Torah taken away to a larger community. We don't want to move to Israel. We are caretakers for this site; to us this is holy ground too."

For hours we practice one line of Torah, I select the *Shema*, because it is also a foundational prayer for a Jews, about listening to the Oneness of all surrounded by verses about loving. Tonya writes out transliterations. It is not enough; they want to chant it properly. We practice and practice.

The sun is setting. Highway robbers are no longer uncommon in the dissolving Former Soviet Union (FSU), it is time to leave. In my pocket dwell a few hundred dollars for *tzedakah*, dollar bills given to me by my rabbinical students for charitable distribution during the trip. I offer it to help the little community.

All recoiled visibly in refusal. "We live modestly, we have food and shelter, we care for each other...Save it, there are those in greater need. Now we can fulfill the reading Torah - that is a gift!"

Another adventure associated with a subsequent Project Keshet teaching trip to the Former Soviet Union.

 Former Soviet Union #2 

Messy Antics

Messianism usually strikes me as one of our worst ideas. One that not only hasn't panned out, it has backfired on us. Colleagues sometimes tell me they have affection for the wistful stories and lovely songs and prayers of hoping for, waiting for the messiah...because they are beautiful evocations about the human capacity for hope.

Lots of things can be beautiful. I wonder if a people also needs to know when to change the product line.

About once a year I go to the Ukraine as a volunteer rabbi to teach mother-daughter workshops for Project Keshet. It was just before Pesach, so naturally we made plans for a model seder. I emailed the groups: "What should we bring?"

Their response, "Bring Passover food."

So we brought matzah and kosher wine. Right? Well, it turned out not to be what they wanted. They meant to bring the whole meal. The women took me to the market in, I believe it was Berditchev. "See the problem?" They pointed to the empty stalls, the rotten apples and wormy nuts and not a bit of karpas (green matter for the seder plate) to be found anywhere.

Across the way I saw an Eastern Orthodox priest. "Look, a colleague!" I pointed him out enthusiastically while Tanita translated almost simultaneously for me. The women's faces paled as they saw me head off toward him. "Nyet, Ravvin, nyet!" They called out in stage whispers. (No, Rabbi, No!).

"*Far vus nyet?*" I responded in my ridiculous yet often effective concatenation of Yiddish and Russian. Assorted explanations of the dangers of the newly re-emerging Eastern Orthodox church and assorted evangelical western groups acting as predators on their children emerged. The basic points: not likely to be a nice guy, stay away.

I thought maybe I could go over to his place, experience a mass (service), and compare notes on working locally...who knows. The women were getting panicky and pulling on my clothes toward some really ratty looking planks of very, very trefe pig heads.

So we finish what little shopping we could really do and on the way out my basket of soggy walnuts for the *charoset* (apple/nut mixture to simulate mortar from the bricks of slavery) gets pitched over by a little child running by. I bend down to re-gather the walnuts and accidentally rear-end someone behind me. We both swirl around and it is.....you guessed it, the Eastern Orthodox priest. Replete in black hassock, tall hat, and a gigantic crucifix at my eye level...a very tall man.

My translator Tonya gulps and I hear her go into her usual spiel: "What a pleasure, sir. Allow me to introduce Goldie Milgram, a woman rabbi visiting from America." He speaks one sentence and I see the blood running out of her already skim milk complexion and spots of hot pink blooming on her cheeks.

"What did he say?" She is very nonplused. Come on Tonya, I'm paying you to translate for me, "What did he say?"

She tries to spit it out. . . and finally does. "Reb Goldie, whas he said was, 'How does it feel to still be waiting for the messiah after thousands of years?'" (She herself was raised Eastern Orthodox.) She is obviously embarrassed at his inhospitable greeting.

I look at him and say something like, "I don't preach messianism. We made a mistake putting out that idea. I believe the one thing we know for sure is that the world to come is the world we leave to our children. That's something we can work on together and right now. No lines, no patiently waiting. Not so far from here, Reb Nachum of Chernobyl pointed out that the word messiah in Hebrew can be understood as *mae-siakh*, from conversation. If peace is to be brought, it is through person to person understanding."

He looks at me, speaks and Tonya translates him as saying: "I knew there was no such thing as a woman rabbi" as he swirls around and departs with haste.

Several visits later, after Project Keshet has established over 150 Jewish women's job-training and Jewish learning support groups throughout the FSU, I find the following travelogue on my hard drive that was sent from Russia:

 Former Soviet Union #3 

Rock of Sages

Uglich is not an error message; Kostroma is not the scent of coffee on a cool Volga morning, nor is Rybinsk Russian for rye bread. These are actually towns along the Volga which date back to the 11th and 12th centuries. The great unifying factor of all peoples, tourism, has begun to retouch these remote aging regions of societies gone by, gone bad, and now regenerating hopefully in the fertile elements of decayed communism.

We, some 200 women, residents of the Former Soviet Union and of North America, have just invested a week together on a very modest ship, traveling down the Volga River. Eighteen hours of daylight yield lush green vistas above which flicker alternately ramshackle and palatial domed/turreted Russian orthodox churches and wooden or red brick *dachas*, summer houses of the Russian poor and Mafioso.

If mosquitoes tell tales, then the townspeople quickly realize we are far more than an overblown raft of tourists; this is a Project Keshet trip and societal evolution is the subject of our daily workshops, studies and ceaseless networking. Women's chatting is like a form of sonar - we bounce ideas, experiences, feelings, hopes, vital information and dreams off of and to each other quickly, subtly and effectively. Faster than the internet, this women's gathering has access to body language, a fleet of on-board translators, the ability to add an adjacent woman rich in talents, experience and range of influence into a discussion, and a week of steady access to each other.

I am writing this reflection from Amsterdam, Netherlands, where a friend passes me an email about how Jewish women are meant by G*d to reign over the home, not society. Hmph. As Enron and Russia's Yukos scandal leaders prevail in the headlines, most newspaper pages address multi-national bottom lines. Meanwhile, Project Keshet women muse 600,000 orphans to be found in a single region of the FSU, 1.2 million teens with AIDS, pandemic trafficking in women, and villages with over 50% of inhabitants being widows due to early male deaths from alcoholism. Why must real men must be Talmud scholars, economic work horses (and cannon fodder), what comes of those denied intimacy, inner journeys and time at home?

On this voyage respectful pluralism prevails, almost all of us are Jews - from secular to observant, most everyone an experienced change agent and cultural creative - we are funders and founders, authors, artists and musicians, investors, healers and social workers, clergy and academics; all of us passionately intent on helping to forge a healthier human future. Most significant to me is Nellie

Shulman, the first woman rabbi born in the FSU, who now serves in Belarus. She also has major administrative responsibilities for the Reform movement which is about to bring rabbinical students in as two-year community interns. Very friendly, honey-tone voiced and politically astute, she unabashedly wears short black belly button-revealing this-is-not-your-grandfather's Judaism hip hugger pants and t-top.

A question for the reader: If you attended, what did you learn about navigating the journey called life in Hebrew school? Part of what is most radical about our work is that the liberation theology within Torah is a thirsted for and acclaimed nutrient in the lives of our FSU travel partners. We study Torah daily on the boat, not initially to find out what Rashi thought and how our mancesters built rabbinic Judaism on the text, but rather as a prism to share the Torah of our lives and find new revelations through the power of study in community.

For me the greatest surprise of the voyage is a turn-about, our FSU counterparts lead the Torah study, asking questions uncommon to classical methods. While they now study at the Steinsaltz Institute that won't allow women rabbis to teach, they also have studied for almost a decade with other women on this voyage – the poet Merle Feld, Rabbi Eleanor Smith, Tamara Cohen, Debbie Friedman, myself and many more. I like to believe that we inoculated them against the tyranny of pure patriarchy. And oh how this shows in their sessions – while too often I see what is missing in a teaching – in the FSU women's teaching I so kvelled at what was present. They asked:

What do you feel when you read this text? What are the qualities being demonstrated by the characters? What dialogue appears missing? What questions do you have for those in the text? Which items might be symbols – when a rock is a pillow, is it then also a seed of higher consciousness? At one point Hagar and Abraham texts are presented with what the declaration told to us is a core Project Keshet mantra – “no woman of means is ever struck twice by a domestic partner.” She won't be sent out – she knows how to walk away.

Project Keshet's micro-lending program allows women to attain some means by establishing small businesses – one example: a \$2000 loan gave one woman the leverage to hire less fortunate women to plant the seeds of a nursery that feeds her plant shop, which she sees as soon having a café, and perhaps a second shop.....she has even made up souvenir ceramic bells for us, “loss leaders” – a marketing idea she found at the ORT Keshet computer training centers, a project initiated on the principle of giving women access to computer skills could open up a world of possibilities, and it sure has!

Headlines on our return to Moscow are about an icon from the Russian Orthodox church that has resided since the war in Chicago and now it has been returned; thousands line up to cry and worship in its space. This is the chill that runs through these changing times. Russians will tell you the government hasn't really changed those who sought power before and survived are back in office. Democracy shmocracy, communism, bommunism, it's all the same – the rich get richer and the poor, poorer. Rabbi Nellie Shulman is also concerned by the rapid re-growth of the Russian Orthodox Church, she finds almost none of the priests are open to inter-faith dialogue – they believe themselves to possess the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

Our key is not one of blind faith; one thing a Jew knows for sure is that the world to come is the one we leave to our children. We teach not doctrine, but method, offering a lens called Torah, Shabbat, and hope born of inviting the commitment of every generation to find new meaning through this common lens for the sake of the human future. Some 1.2 million Jews live in the FSU, there are now hundreds of day schools, synagogues are being reclaimed and refurbished daily and all of G*d's eggs are neither in the basket of the forces of assimilation, conflict and disenchantment in America or the Middle East – a Process beyond our ability to grasp can be felt here. Many on the trip, like me, looked around us in awe at the re-awakening of our people in the land of our grandparents and marveled as they declared: “Anti-Semitism? No. Here it is a good time to be Jewish.”

St. Peters Blurb

Early on.

Square jaw. Defiant eyes. Short dark hair. Tall. He seemed disappointed as we met, as though due accolades from us. "Don't you know who I am?" he asked.

"Yes, you are "x"; sent by friends of ours who know you from when you lived in the states. They said you are a fascinating person whom we'd enjoy meeting as part researching the Reclaiming Peoplehood chapter for my next book. Thank you for greeting us here in Prague."

His shoulders seemed to suddenly sag and a lost, almost sad look crossed his aging features. We walk a ways until he explains with renewed posture, "I am the spy who was exchanged for Scharansky."

Fortunately, we're not college students, or he'd have been even more disappointed. Most of them have no idea of the ardent substance of many readers' college years, working to free Soviet Jews. Most of the Jewish students I addressed last week on several college campuses had not even heard of Golda Meir.

Do you remember when the Soviet Jewish civil rights activist Anatoly Scharansky was exchanged for a "Russian" spy? It was on the Glienicker Bridge, linking East and West – Berlin and Potsdam. In 1978 Scharansky was tried and convicted on charges of treason, espionage, and anti-Soviet agitation-- charges he always denied despite nearly eight years of harsh treatment, including torture by hunger, cold, and solitary confinement. He served nine years of a 13-year sentence, with a book of psalms as his companion. There were front page newspaper photos of his exchange. It was the stuff of cloak and dagger movies; each man slowly walking from his opposite end of the bridge. He came to symbolize Soviet oppression of religion and minorities.

I was incredulous and felt surprised to note anger rising within. "You were a spy? Against my country? For Russia? Why would you want to hurt America?"

"I don't believe any power should get too big in the world." "The exchange with Scharansky was my idea," he continued. Someone was trying to have me murdered in prison and I asked my lawyer to see if the Russians would trade me for him. You see, I am a Czech national though I worked for the Russians. I wasn't sure if they would help me get out, though they can be honorable about their spies; but would they help free a Czech? I'm not sure why, but they did."

His wife "y" comes in. Also a Czech national she was a US citizen working in the New York City diamond district for 20 years. Today she heads a PR firm in Prague. They live well, out in the suburbs, in view of huge dachas (summer homes) of rich Russian black-marketeers.

I ask if she misses America. She tosses bobbed blond locks and her blue eyes flash like steel. "Oh yes. They held me, but could never prove anything. Still, part of the negotiations to free my husband required giving up my US citizenship."

"Your life, Goldie," a therapist once told me, "would be turned down as the plot for a soap opera on the grounds of implausibility."

Today "x" says he is awaiting final details on two opportunities, a visiting professorship to teach world politics at a British University and a TV special in Israel where he and "Natan" Scharansky could meet in person and reflect on that era.

They proved kind, creative and thoughtful hosts.

Later on in the trip a curious, related event would emerge.

Part of the summer-long teaching/touring included a rabbi gig on a cruise ship around the Baltic. This brought me back to Russia a few weeks after working in Moscow with Project Keshet; only this time to St. Petersburg. It is my first not-specifically-Jewish trip to Russia, this stop is simply to view fine art at the astonishingly ornate Rococo-style Hermitage Museum where Dalis, Picassos, Renoirs, Rembrants and much more art "liberated for the people during the war" still reside.

The immigration officials that meet cruise ships are usually pretty casual characters. But my passport raised eyebrows and I was asked to follow the agent to a special room. There, he turned on the classic bright light and barked his question: "Do you know a Russian in Prague?" Happily, I'm someone who wouldn't startle even if you dropped a glass window behind me. So I answer truthfully: "The only people I know in Prague are Czechs and American ex-pats." He persists, louder with the same question. On round, let's say, seven, he bellows: "Why were you in Russia several weeks ago? Then in Prague and now you are back. Why?"

"I'm a rabbi on the cruise ship this time; last time I was working for a women's non-profit group, Project Keshet."

He jumps up and I do startle. He pumps my hand warmly, "Project Keshet, why didn't you say so right away – my wife is active with Project Keshet!"

Barukh HaShem. Thank G*d. But go figure some cold war spy is still being watched by the Russians.

I head out onto the docks where the tour buses are long gone. Woe. Wander over to some crates to sit down for reflection on next steps and happen to read the label on the crate, which I wrote down and word for word read as follows:

From: "q", [name deleted cause I don't won't key word search grief], Ukraine
To: Atomic Energy Commission of Iran, Tehran, Iran

My therapist, lo those many years ago, she was right. Am I being watched? Will this accidental seeing of these boxes get me in trouble again some authorities? Is the Prague spy being watched any any who meet him/them even by chance? Will it be clear that I'm just a curious person?

So today. I'm was about to send off this posting and realized I didn't know how to spell the name of the bridge they crossed. Do a Google search and several references came up that refer to "x" and/or "y". Things like his being sought in connection with the case regarding falsified documents regarding the death of Princess Diana.

"Mohamed Al Fayed has launched a \$6m legal action in a US court against three men claiming CIA connections who tried to sell him forged documents purporting to prove that Diana, Princess of Wales, and his son, Dodi, were murdered in a Buckingham Palace-approved MI6 assassination plot. Named in the legal action are[and] "x", a notorious Czech agent during the cold war, [is] being pursued by the Austrian authorities. "

Nor did I realize "x" became so famous that he appears under the definition of Espionage on the web as one of the only known moles to penetrate the CIA and about whom, the internet trail reveals a whole book has been written by Washington Post and Wall Street Journal correspondent Ronald Kessler. *Spy vs. Spy: Stalking Soviet Spies in America*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988. The book review recounts the story of "x" and his wife "y", whom Kessler interviewed in 1987. In 1965 they orchestrated a phony defection from the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service, after which Karl became a naturalized U.S. citizen, worked full-time for the CIA beginning in 1973, and continued as a contract agent after 1977. He spoke four languages, earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from Colombia, and spent many of his weekends as a "swinger" at spouse-swapping parties with "y". By 1982 the FBI's counterintelligence squad was getting suspicious. In 1984 "x" admitted that he had been spying for the East all along, and in 1986 "x" and "y" were traded for Natan Sharansky.

Oh dear. AOL is just now reporting the death of Christopher Reeves. I can imagine what he might have said about our experience with Karl and Hana, because only a few months before his accident I got stuck on a ski lift at Copper Mountain on a bright sunny end of ski-season day for an hour and a half. My random seatmate got the same terrible sunburn as I; we were burnt like chickens in a broiler. But we engaged in conversation non-stop about snowflake crystals and other miracles of creation. At one point I introduced myself by name and the fellow answered: "How refreshing to have this conversation. My name is Christopher Reeves."

Nu? Do I engage in much popular culture? So I asked what Christopher does for a living. "Act in movies, I play Superman for example. What do you do?"

"Rabbi."

"A rabbi?! Fascinating. These days it's so hard to tell who you really are with."
Blessed be the memory of Christopher Reeves - mensch, artist and activist.

Belgium and Holland



If This Is Tuesday

Brussels, the old city, the town center. Walking briskly to catch a train back to Amsterdam. Coming upon streets lined with bistros. The aromas are sensuous tortures for one enroute.

Well, perhaps a later train can be taken.

"Garcon, (waiter) – perhaps a bouillabaisse, could you hold the mussels?"

And hold the calamari?

And, also hold the shrimp?

Please also hold the clams?

But do go heavy on the sole and salmon."

"Peut etre vous etes Juifs?" (Perchance are you Jewish?) He inquires.

"Mais ouis, bien sur". (But yes, for sure.) I reply.

"Pas de problemme, il y a queque moments." (No problem, it will be a few minutes.)

Half hour goes by.

An hour later most everyone around me has been eating for some time.

Hour and fifteen minutes, new arrivals are also eating.

Hour and thirty, contemplating where to grab some nuts enroute to the train.

He arrives, elegantly removes the lid of a tureen elegantly set before me, steaming its fennel-scented ambrosia.

And, a loaf of bread beside it, with, is it icing? Yes, blue icing announces, "*kasher v'shabbat shalom*". (Kosher and [wishing you] a peaceful Sabbath.)

"Le chef, il est Juif aussi?" (Is the chef perchance Jewish too?) I inquire.

"Mais oui" (But yes).

"Could you ask him to come by my table that I might thank him properly?"

Oui, oui.

Somewhat older than I, in tomato-stained whites, he arrives. He explains it was a difficult decision, what to do. He is so angry with God since the war; he practices no Judaism at all. Because really, what's it for anyway? Meaningless, archaic, but you can't run from being Jewish in Europe, a Jew is a Jew.

But fear not, he made the fish soup in his mother's kitchen, fully kosher, three blocks away. But he thought first to give me a shrimp broth, a vengeance thing. But then paused, and wonder what it would be like to do his first intentional mitzvah since the war. And this thought felt like a certain glowing.

Well, it's not so easy for me to be consistent with kosher, so this is a great mitzvah you have done. I am enroute to a sweet Shabbat in Amsterdam and looking forward to the rest.

He frowns and notes he drives his team in the kitchen seven days a week. He wife is angry he works so much.

What are you avoiding that you work seven days?

Silence.

Is there something the two of you cannot speak about?

Silence, then how did you know that? Our son killed himself.

And the guilt between you has become a monument made of silence?

You are each mourning separately.

Silence.

I had a religious childhood, yeshiva training, he mentions and continues, what if Shabbat came back into our home?

He leaps to kiss me on the cheek, I will treasure the residual tomato stains on my traveling cloak. So sorry! Would never have kissed, or perhaps even spoken to a male rabbi. Something has shifted, something new is known, this is a great day.

He went to his kitchen, I, to the train.



Getting On My Kees

Kees Hodde is a precise and precious man. (Pronounced "case") The medical researcher whose discoveries helped the foundations for modern neuroscience, he is a serious oboist, and also has minutely restored a medieval canal house in Amsterdam. Ania, his wife, is known for her acclaimed large scale photographic works, originally from Poland, she is a child of Holocaust survivors. Dear friends, they are hosting me in Amsterdam this trip. While Ania goes to Germany for an opening of a dear friend's photography exhibit, Kees proposes that he and I head into the countryside to attend a lecture by his favorite cellist and orchestra conductor, Yanos Starker at a university in a rural town called Tilburg. Never heard of him.

Ah, but the lecture topic is "What is a Masterpiece?" Like a moth to the flame of my own perfectionism bugaboos, I'm drawn to go. Can he tell a person when to stop and know something is finished? Besides, Kees is brilliant and conversations sparkle with important ideas, so the long ride through beautiful farmlands will be fun. The lecture is being given by the Nexus Institute, which turns out to be one of Europe's most important centers for intellectual and cultural debate. Sounds healthy.

Janos Starker is from Indiana University it turns out. We had to both go across the world to connect?

Why is he here? Hungarian born, a Jew, he speaks about the Holocaust in giving his personal history, interesting, given websites with his biography seems to skip over that time period entirely. He describes music as his religion, what unites in beauty and understanding. Oh? He won't be playing for us? He finds himself too old for the excellence to which he aspires!

So what can a cellist do other than play? Dr. Starker teaches master classes to musicians in pursuit of excellence. One can buy tickets and sit in, listen, learn, observe. His lecture is punctuated by the use of videos of his self-assessed best performances in order to underscore each point he makes. Exquisite. There are ten points that comprise a masterpiece according to Starker. Here is his model for what a piece requires to make the mark for him, see what you think:

1. Timelessness
2. Unity – the whole piece evokes a sense of eternity
3. Balance – there is a tension between inevitability and predictability
4. Challenging - physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually
5. Offers contrasts that yield intensity.
6. Indestructible (i.e. despite interpretative performances by others.)
7. Purity and simplicity.
8. Originality; opens doors to new possibilities for others.
9. Enriches the life of the listener
10. Serves humanity, more than entertaining.

Then, as great masters do, he brings on his protégé to play for us. A fellow from South America; nothing special as he plays some grand masters, but then comes his own composition – a weaving of musical phrasing from his native land with his instrument, the cello. Something new, balanced, challenging, pure, simple, original, with a unity that evokes eternity and enriches my life, that serves humanity through a brilliant ethnic integration of pathos and passion emerges. We are transported, our bodies transducing the sublime. Alas I don't remember his name!

I'm no longer a "rebbe" on the road, in two weeks time I'll be head of Jewish life at the 92nd St Y in New York, the first and largest Jewish center in the world. A place, I'm told that strives for consistent excellence. So in the mysterious way of things, the Starker lecture comes as a lesson for this transition, when better to contemplate, what is a masterpiece?

Israel



Pappa Wheelie

Goldie:

Hafokh is the term used to order the incomparably delicious Israeli-style coffee latte we had only a few weeks ago. Essentially it means upside down, but has many nuanced uses.

Hafokh is also the term many Israelis use to speak of their current lives and politics.

Hofokh is how my heart, mind and spirit feel after returning from Israel to America.

In Torah, as a word, *hafokh* hardly happens (hmm, sounds like a line from My Fair Lady). *Hofokh* appears as the root term for when G*d shifts the winds and blows the locusts into the sea, ending that plague when Pharaoh initially recants. The root *hafokh* appears again, a bit later, when Pharaoh's attitude shifts back and he comes chasing after the Israelites as they are crossing that very same sea. That time *hafokh* also happens, as the waves drown the pursuing Egyptians.

Yes, the *Ruakh HaKodesh*, Life's Winds, blew us to Israel for a month and then immediately, I went off to teach in Arizona and Barry stayed in Philly for the next phase of launching of his first book, "Communication Skills that Heal: Toward a New Professionalism for Medicine," via a Public Radio interview. [Tune in via the menu link at <http://www.processmedicine.com>].

Now we're back in Philly, delighting in Pesach and pondering, where and how a Jew is meant to live.

Both in Arizona and Israel, very different kinds of exquisite deserts are in full bloom. "Stamen!" shriek the brilliant colors of each desert flower as they extend passionate welcomes. Or, as my Hubbatzin Barry's extensive world-wide South African family and friends say wherever and whenever we land at their sides, "Stay man!" Stay? It sure was intensely difficult to leave Israel.

I, for one, feel like the middle *matzah* from the seder plate – one half of my soul here in the Diaspora, and somewhat 'out of order (seder)' from already yearning for the experience of completion as a Jew I felt so strongly this time in Israel.

Perhaps Israel is the *afikomen*, and it takes all of Diaspora Jewry to make up the other half? Last time I visited Israel the population was about 3 million, today it is over six million, 2 million under age 18 - the streets and parks are vibrant with young families.

We happened to be there during field trip week for the public and private schools. Every wonder of nature was teeming with school kids, (sadly with half of the teenagers smoking), which led to this encounter:

-A high school teacher helped us up the smooth stone banks of the wadi. We walked along together as he explained the crucial importance of such field trips so that every Israeli child knows and respects

the land. He asks Barry and I where we're from and what we do. Upon hearing I'm a rabbi, he says, "I was raised religious but I'm not anymore, it doesn't speak to me." So Barry replies, "I've reconnected through the story of Moses at the burning bush, by reading G*d's words there: *ehyeh asher ehyeh* not as "I am that I am" but as "I am becoming what I am Becoming," or "I will be what I will be," I experience the idea of G*d as role modeling for us the concept of SELF as constantly evolving and not being a fixity. We are all 'becoming what we are becoming,' like your students, like yourself, like Israel."

The teacher stops in his tracks, tells us his parents were born in Morocco, and he never heard this wonderful interpretation from them or in school. As a native Hebrew speaker, he muses, 'Why didn't I see this before! Is there more of this approach I can learn?'

21-25% of Israelis call themselves Orthodox, the hunger among most of those we met for accessible, meaningful Judaisms proved during our visit to be as thirsty as the land. Most don't know an alternative with integrity is even possible.

Another day.

Soothing rivulets bathe our hot feet as we walked upstream towards a plateau that will overlook the Dead Sea. Yours truly is wearing a red hat and a red long sleeve sun repellent shirt, pants rolled up over calves. I frolicked beside a pool filled with girls in long sleeved pale blue shirts and long black skirts and black stockings, all soaked to the knees, having the time of their lives.

"What do you do in America?" one such girl asks me, "*Ani rav.*" "I'm a rabbi."

"You mean you make *shidduchim* (matches, men and women)," gently, she corrects me. She's in for a surprise. "No. I am an actual rabbi, for weddings, *gittin* (divorce documents), teaching, prayer, counseling, answering shaylas (religious questions) and such."

We walk along silently, navigating rolling dry rocks under a relentless sun blessedly tempered by a sweet spring breeze. Perhaps 15 years of age, she keeps turning as though to eye my huge red hat with curiosity and finally inquires: "In America are there now red hat *hareidim* (ultra-Orthodox Jews) and women rabbis?" I chortle, "No, even in America a hareidi woman can't yet be a rabbi, I'm from one of the more liberal Jewish groups. Are you hareidi?" She laughs and calls out to her classmates a few yards ahead, "The American thinks we are hareidi! No, we are modern Orthodox from Ashkelon! We wear light blue shirts. Don't you know?"

Nice try on her part, but I know the ultra-Orthodox Beis Yaakov girls' schools dress their students precisely as she and her friends were attired.

French Jewish tourists were prominent during our visit, some recounting brushes with anti-Semitism; many were buying apartments as 'insurance'. Tourism is up 70% in Israel over last year, those we met told us "we no longer feel safe in Moscow, Paris, New York City, or Madrid, so why avoid Israel?"

This time we didn't want to go on yet another Israel mission to learn or listen - left, right or center - this time we wanted to look, listen and feel all on our own. The trip was actually instigated by my father, Sam Milgram, who, at age 86, is an alert, radiant-with-wonder wheelchair-dwelling World War II veteran who never wants anything for himself. Poppa has, for ever-so-many years, been primary care-taker for my mom who has Alzheimers. In January, when mom, Leona Fradin Milgram, ceased to recognize any of us, dad astonished us by saying: "Now that your mom doesn't know me, before I die, the one thing I want to do is finally experience Israel."

What a gift, to hear a parent's deepest wishes and to be able to fulfill it. We leapt into action, with an 86 year-old, waiting wouldn't be prudent. Besides, we'd been yearning to go back, I hadn't been for 18 years - mostly out of shame and ambivalence, Barry not for 14, and we've certainly been every where else!

A good bit of research yielded a guide with an accessible van and electrified scooter-type wheelchair accustomed to locating accessible bathrooms, entrances and sidewalk ramps throughout the country. Did you ever take a young child to Disney Land? You can't do that happily if you go with adult judgmentalism, so too, we who have been many times to Israel, suspended that part of ourselves and experienced Israel through my dad's eyes.

In the Meaning and Mitzvah conference call courses I've been teaching, our studies yielded the realization that the mitzvot of *ahavat HaShem*, love of G*d and *yirat HaShem*, awe of G*d, together form a mobius strip of higher consciousness when one begins to understand and practice them. In just this way through Dad's eyes Israel came alive anew for me, as though G*d is indeed the glassblower (per the High Holiday liturgy) and in our hands – yours, mine, and especially the Israelis – has been placed the tender and infinitely challenging *mitzvah* of continuing to create a gem in the diadem of creation, Israel.

Pappa was with the signal corps during World War II, his unit had the first portable radar used in a war. They were given coordinates to reach in order to transmit. Then they were given coordinates for three days furlough. When they reached those coordinates it was a town, stunned by the human skeletons piled high and similar ones staggering through the streets, my dad didn't see the truck coming with its German driver that would crush his lower body against a wall.

I never heard the true story of his injury until this trip; he'd always sloughed off our questions. In every hotel lobby I would find him late at night chatting with the omnipresent security people, some who themselves had been wounded in action. For a moment I was irritated that dad might miss a tourist site because of all the talk, then I listened in and realized they were healing each other, by retelling and commiserating about what they wouldn't or couldn't have told their families.

Imagine Poppa, with the memory of the walking skeletons of Auschwitz engraved on his very body, arriving to imbibe a heady new brew, history *hafokh* - millions of Jews of greatly varied backgrounds and vociferous opinions dwelling surprisingly coherently in a space somewhat smaller than New Jersey.

For two weeks Dad was with us, rolling along joyfully, other times nodding off, and, when necessary for access, using a walker. While we would stay on to teach and be most shifted by visiting family, friends, students and colleagues throughout the land, with dad we had a scenic tour of most every bathroom and many a stunning view of nature and the density of fascinating and well-interpreted archaeological residue from the regions many sequential empires.

While dad was with us in Jerusalem, there was one glitch; all of a sudden he popped a wheelie. My heart about stopped. He had revved up his wheelchair on a downward sloping sidewalk, come to the lip of the curb and playfully just kept going. Fwoop, he rounded up into the air and then landed splat, utterly *hafokh* (tush over teacups as some say) in the street. Israelis came running to help him from every direction, even taxi drivers leapt from their vehicles to make sure he was ok. Dad just dusted himself off, popped back into his seat and said, "Thanks! Just needed to try that once." You see, he'd never before accepted to use of a wheelchair, preferring to stick primarily to the kitchen at home. He sure was giving it a hefty test drive!

Two of Pappa's best buddies flew one of Israel's four planes in the War for Independence. We learned at Israel's Air Force Museum that the trick was how the Israelis kept repainting the planes different colors to make it look like there were many planes. They also learned to put whistles in soda bottles and drop them without explosives – the sound resembling bombs caused those below to scatter. Israel did build its own fighter jet in recent years, but it turned out to be too expensive to sustain. One hears fear creep in as the docent says this; to be dependent on the nations has proven dangerous for us.

History *hafokh*, only for real. Our people have dreamt about it, chapter nine of the playful novel turned sacred text, *Megillat Esther* is one other place to find a few instances of forms of *hafokh*, when

the rite of reversal has happened, and the Jews take office, marry royalty, and are allowed to defend themselves by royal decree no less.

Purim *megillah* (special scroll) reading at congregation Kol HaNeshamah, affiliated with the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. The reader is a black-hatted male Hassid, oops, no actually he's a woman. The room is packed with those fulfilling the mitzvah of hearing the megillah chanted. The day before, we danced in our masks from New Orleans at a party at Rabbi Ruth and Michael Gan-Kagan's. Next day, Barry heads through the extensive security points into Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda Street which has been turned into a spectacle of color, music, entertainment, smiles. Israel's every immigrant group is out in celebration – Ethiopian – South American – Moroccan – Yemenite – Russian and more. Perhaps the most engaging part he described is a troupe of Druze musicians and dancers with their shrill ear-piercing flute-like instrument, rhythmic drumming and hypnotizing folk dancing.

Barry's pix from Purim reveal the intense diversity of this society – a true ingathering of our people from every society. As it happens, I find an internet café and no sooner set up to get on line then the security guard a few feet from where I am seated near the door leaps to his feet, grabbing the hands of a man. In seconds on the ground are the man's jacket and a vest so heavy the guard can barely lift it. The guard from the café across the street comes running, waiters herd patrons out a side door and the last thing I hear at the scene is a girl, about five years old asking her mother in Hebrew "Ima, (mommy) does it hurt to be blown to bits and will a kiss make it better?"

Mah laasote (what to do)? Accept with the equanimity of those around me that these things happen and walk down a block to the next café and unsuccessfully try to get online again. The fellow to my right says, "Say, did you give a lecture at the neo-Hassidism conference in NYC two years ago?" Actually, yes. The fellow on my left says, remember, we met in Kiev going through customs? Also yes, a Project Keshet trip.

Israelis we meet are relieved the murders in the Jericho prison were apprehended before Purim, before Hamas could fulfill their intent to release them once international surveillance would leave later in the week. We were also in coastal Netanya's streets full of becostumed youth, toddlers, babies, during our visit this week to cousin's Basil and Joyce Geller. Woe if they were to be attacked on Purim, the horror glazes my soul. It's all so odd to me, 18 years ago I slept over, hosted by an Arab family in Jericho, ate fragrant grapefruit-like huge palmelas (sp?) there, visited the archaeology. No more an option. Now Jericho is known for casinos. At the Arab town near Jerusalem, Abu Gosht, while dining with friends Donna Friedman and her beloved Nalini, an Israeli Arab restaurant proprietor tells me how thrilled he is the Israelis have razed the Jericho prison, "Will likely increase my Palestinian family's investment in the casino business many-fold if the prison is really gone."

Perhaps what *hofokh* really means is, "shift happens."

Ben Bag Bag in the Talmud said: *hafokh ba, v'hafokh ba d'kula ba*. Turn it (Torah) and turn it for everything is in it. As the scroll turns, these days Egypt advertises heavily for tourism in the Israeli press and even on billboards in Israel. Even a cool peace, is good. Let's pray for more. We'll try to write another travelogue to cover the second half of our trip and introduce you to the wide range of family, colleagues, friends, issues, innovations and characters we met.



Olive Oil and Popped Eyes

9 am . We're on Barry's cousin Stanley and Tami's rear terrace in the county of Hof HaCarmel in the moshav [gated community, sometimes with common educational, agricultural or industrial activities] known as Ein Ayala. The Mediterranean Sea is minutes away, the west bank 18 miles away.

Yesterday, strolling past the communal shop and the nursery school, we come to his five acres of four varieties of olive trees he has grown from scratch (it takes four years for a new olive tree to be ready for harvesting.) Now 55, father of four children, and married to a vivacious former Israeli theatre director, he made *aliyah* from South Africa at age 19, served in the military and got a life.

It is springtime here and Stanley Barkan, whose day job is as senior scientist in the digital photography department of a Kodak subsidiary in Herzliya, leaps into the air in joy at the density of olive buds which signal a bumper crop year after last year's bust. In a storeroom he shows us stockpiles of homegrown extra virgin oil. To remove the olives from their branches one milks the branch, running it between your hands so that the olives fall into the netting below, or a certain kind of rake can also be used. A neighbor rents time on equipment for preparing and pressing. The term "virgin" must be earned through special protection afforded the olives and a rush to press them while fresh and unspoiled.

Stanley's love of the trees is shared with Arab neighbors in the next town, agricultural know-how flows both ways. The military has passed a strict law against interfering with Arab olive trees and Israelis view the much-reported occasion of an infraction on this some years back as a colossal sin, as much of a sin as the cowardice of those who used the grove as cover to attack security patrols who would otherwise have passed through without incident.

On this moshav, individual families work their own lands or industries, as in kibbutzim as well, many work in the cities, and only infrastructure such as street maintenance, a grocery store, a *gan*, (nursery) for young children and revenues from rental of land for a gas station on the adjacent major road is communal. In this increasingly overcrowded country that is slightly smaller than New Jersey, Israel's population went from 1.6 million in the early 1970's to over 6 million today. Today many moshavim and kibbutzim [collectives of various sorts] are selling lots for homes to build built with the option, but not requirement, of moshav membership.

Within view of Stanley's home are trees of every variety - palms, poplar, fruit trees - figs, pomegranates, almonds, loquats, lemons, oranges, avocados, oceans of banana trees. Earlier this morning we wandered another moshav member's banana groves surrounded by nets intended to lightly increase temperature and thwart animals. Baby bananas form within the flower itself, they arise from under each petal of the huge (one foot and larger) Israeli-engineered banana flowers (photo).

It is incredible to grasp that it was here, virtually right here, that my maternal grandfather contracted malaria and blessedly did not die, though most of his friends did who here drained swamps at the turn of the century; Zaydeh Binyamin Fradin, arrived penniless, escaping pogroms that took the lives of most of his family, though a wife and child he left behind would later emerge after he had remarried. Deemed worthless swamp by Arabs residents of higher adjacent lands who had arrived in the area when the Ottoman Empire swept into the region, they cheerfully sold it at what they saw as great gain to the Jewish refugees whose funds primarily came from Diaspora donations. Sure, we learned this in Hebrew school, to see it and meet the generations who survived because this was done, wow.

Tami's eyes glow as she describes the secular *bat mitzvah* she created with her daughter. A circle of women met in the woods for blessings, wisdom telling and sharing of Jewish understandings by her daughter. She tells me how much non-religious Israelis crave such meaningful connections to their heritage. Her son and husband are hard at work at the family tree project mandatory around *bar/bat mitzvah* age in Israeli public schools, they have created small biographies for family members worldwide; an impressive, deep and unforgettable part of becoming *bar mitzvah* for this lad.

Our Jerusalem host, Barry's longest-held friend, Dennis Diamond, fascinates me. South African born, today Dennis has reinvented himself as a high end designer. His esthetic thrills me - glass, stone and metal blend and meet to create flowing calm and coolness while inviting encounter. His home is a former school building in the Bacca section of Jerusalem. But he hasn't kept the building for himself, each floor is home to a different branch of his family; daughter grown now with a lovely grandchild

and sweet husband, a trauma therapist who himself was the only survivor of an attack on his military unit in the last war. Dennis' mother is in another unit and his sister and family immigrated while we were there were assigned yet another apartment. Such a model might be seen to draw its inspiration from the surrounding Arab towns, often parents build a home with the upper floor complete and the ground floor left unbuilt save for the supporting struts – not for poverty's sake, but rather so their children can finish the unit in accord with their own taste when they are ready.

Dennis didn't start out as a designer. He briefly went to medical school with Barry in Cape Town, South Africa and dropped medical studies when he realized it wasn't the field for him. Instead he did what I did when I decided against becoming a physician; he went into Jewish communal service and soon became head of the Jewish Board of Deputies, which is essentially the South African version of the Jewish Federation phenomenon. When, from 1972-1975 neo-Nazis were circulating vicious anti-semitic and Holocaust denying books there, Dennis resolved to use a law requiring truth in publishing to stop the incitement to violence against the Jews, but to win he would have to prove the Holocaust happened!?

Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, had just been released from 20 years imprisonment. Dennis corresponded with Speer, asking "Would he come to testify?" "Yes." Speer was ready for attention to the nature of his work. Ultimately Speer wrote and signed a document validating what had transpired, saying he had been looking for a way to speak about it. Dennis indicated he was never able to determine through his encounters whether Speer was a sociopath or more a young man who'd been utterly caught up in a vision of what seemed right to him at the time. Speer cast himself in the latter light. The case was won and the document was subpoenaed for the recent Holocaust denier case in England that was won through the aegis of Rabbi Deborah Lipstadt.

The Wall.

I feel so sad at the Kotel, the sacred site that was part of the Western Wall of the ancient temple of King Solomon that once served as a focus for Jewish life during times when animal sacrifices were believed to be an essential way to communicate with G*d. At the Kotel the women's section appears far smaller than on earlier visits. Separate entrances to the entire site will soon be in effect; to the dismay of advocates of gender inclusiveness. Some are vocally upset about that plan, an Israeli Zionist youth group approaches the plaza just outside the worship area at the Kotel and enter as a coed cluster chanting about unity, their verses tell of men and women who care together for the country and walk holding their banners aloft and they do not disburse to separate sides but rather pray in the plaza behind the prayer section where mingling is still possible. Country-wide we meet Israeli men who say to us, "There should be a section for men, for women, and also for "we"?!"

Things weren't always so restrictive. In 1973 early one morning, I donned wore my *tallit* and laid *tefillin*, only this time at the Wall. Some showed curiosity, none reviled me. Today I'd be stoned, with rocks, chairs and anything else the self-assured could lay their hands on.

Another memory arises, sweeter. Long ago with a boyfriend, walking to the wall very late at night and it is empty save for two Chassidim. There was simply one dressed as a Karliner Chassid male on one side of the *mechitzah*, partition between the genders at the wall, and one Karliner woman on the other. Some say the Karliner Stoliner Chassidim, known for their screaming style of prayer, are the guardians of the Wall and that they always have at least one person there. I stayed in the shadows as they prayed, to allow them the spiritual intimacy of this rare, moment of the usually tightly crowded space being completely silent and empty. Then, to my surprise each stepped onto a chair beside the *mechitzah* and they kissed, a sweet scene; hard to imagine it happening today.

The many Chassidic groups, a phenomenon of ultra gender-role segregated Jewish sects that are highly visible because they prefer dressing in their own nuanced medieval-looking styles and living in strictly Sabbath observant neighborhoods, began about two hundred years ago, quite a recent phenomenon when one thinks about it. They are named most-often for the towns of their founders' original domain; see if you can guess the most recent group: Biane, Munkacz, Modzitz, Rimnitz,

Sadiger, Karliner, Dushinsky, Bostoner, Chabad Lubatvitch, Breslov, Bubov, Ger, Viznitz, Puppa, Belz, Satmar.

Ein Hod.

L'havdil, "by contrast," the opposite extreme would be to drive or train the hour across Israel to Ein Hod, a long-standing art colony which has grown extensively since my last visit, many of the older stone houses, some from Roman times, sport galleries with unusual woven, painted or ceramic works. Here we meet a browsing couple from Pretoria, South Africa, subsequently Canadian nationals, who made *aliyah* [moved to Israel] in August.

"Why did you come here?"

"In Toronto the anti-Semitism felt terrible. We had money, a lovely home, good jobs, but meaningless lives. Here we can enter an important conversation with our lives."

"What conversation?"

"How to develop the Jewish state."

They have chosen the town of Zichron Yaakov to reside for its small size, hilltop perch with sweet breezes, proximity to and view of the Mediterranean Sea, and history, this is where Baron de Rothschild established the first colony of our people for the modern state. I feel so guilty not to have made *aliyah*, to put my life on this line that says if humanity means to be humane, Jews get to have a land too.

Israel is by no means the Disney Land by the sea. Extreme poverty and astonishing affluence appear side-by-side. There is more hospitality-consciousness among businesses than we remember, yet one cannot generalize. At the car rental agency (suggestion, in Israel stick to brand Western names, alas we didn't) the ladies in the front office are polite engaging and helpful. Behind the scenes, when picking up our brand "x" car, the half dozen men sitting in that office are of a much lower strata of society, one with his feet on the desk, cigarette in hand, engrossed in a computer poker game. So when Barry returned to exchange our pre-battered, dysfunctional vehicle, having called twice to forewarn, he is looked over as if he'd come off the sole of someone's shoe and asked what he wants, Barry explodes. This woke the attendant up, well, to the point of resulting in a suggestion we come back another day.

Goldie tried some diplomacy, resulting in a brand new car within an hour, which alas, as we drove on our way, had only a quarter tank of gas! Not sure who won that round.



Sending Smoke Signals

Goldie: What does one do when wanting a bottle of cold water in Meah Shearim? Enter a corner market, of course. The checkout person is an elderly bearded man with a lit cigarette in his hand. The whole shop reeks of smoke. No use complaining to his supervisor, he too is puffing away as children and pregnant woman jostle in the narrow aisles.

I can't breathe around cigarette smoke. So aloud I say in Hebrish (Yiddish/Hebrew), facing no one in particular, "So what happened to the mitzvah of *shmirat haguf* (care of the body)? I'll wait outside."

Barry gets angry that I've broken the Star Trek prime directive of non-interference in another's culture. But,

Outside the "smoke" shop, two women of the Meah Shearim neighborhood approach to express appreciation that I'd spoken up. They head an initiative now before several important rabbis to issue a halachic prohibition against smoking. (England has outlawed smoking in all public places). Some rabbis have done this in other towns and countries, but not here.

Today ended preciously, with a visit to the home in the hills overlooking Jerusalem of Yoram Getzler, a dear friend and faithful correspondent. Yoram's partner runs a business making Kosher tofu and directly experiences all the types of graft that the various *kashrut*, "kosher," supervision systems are reported to provide. Their home is a serene backdrop to Yoram's work in the streets as a policeman and in the trenches of the media as head of an internet broadcast experiment together with an entrepreneurial friend of ours from Woodstock, NY, Steve Orenstein. We also saw Steve in Tel Aviv, newly his home home town, and it is really something to see a man, wife and daughter transplanted to Israel with such joie de vivre for a life full of meaning.

Goldie: Since our arrival a few weeks ago, Palestinian women have held a West Bank march for women's rights as they fear Hamas will institute a rigidly patriarchal fundamentalist Islam. Hamas begrudgingly sends representatives to the rally for a bare few minutes. Once showcased as a leading face-to-the-western world, the academic Christian Palestinian Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, told me, already perhaps twenty-five years ago that she would not likely ever be able to live in the Palestinian state she was fighting for, she would likely remain an Israeli, because she would never consent to wear a chador or berka (head/face/body covering) and she was sure Islamic fundamentalism would prevail when the state would be formed. A *hijab*, according to an Islamic retailer I looked up on the web is a full headscarf wrap, a chador is a full-length, over the head, black women's garment, and a berka is the face veil. Various regions have differing styles for these.

No less uncomfortable for me are the Jewish men who won't meet my eyes or read my body language – how can a woman lead or get elected or be understood in such settings? Why this return to reducing us to serving as the prized object of one male that must not be viewed by other males in any way? Why do some women endorse and adopt such behavior by men?



Bab not Drab

We're heading north and yet another cousin of Barry's Selwyn Scher and his wife Irit host us in a beautiful planned community, Kochav Yair, smack against the narrow border at the neck of Israel between Jordan and the Mediterranean. The road we meander so as to observe rare wild flowers such as velvety black pocketed fly catchers is beside the border fence with Jordan. Gun shots ring out all that night from the adjacent Israeli Arab village, terrorism? No, their way of celebrating a wedding – aiming guns to the sky and firing. Alas, what goes up does come down; not always with benign results.

Not all Arabs follow Islam, some are Christian, some are Bahai, and some are Druze. I'm amazed to see the prosperity of the Druze villages in Israel. They seem to have beautifully kept homes and extensive, attractive shops with no shortage of original loomed pieces and ceramics. Especially wonderful are the roadside "convenience" hearths where carpets are spread and women fashion fresh pita over cast iron curved pans and *lebna*, a yummy slightly acrid spreadable white cheese can be bought and spread with jam for an instant organic snack amidst the regions abundant ancient olive groves, beside sheep and rams, horses and often dogs, who go where ever they please. Druz follow a break-off tradition from Islam, formed in the tenth century in conjunction with Greek Philosophy, Gnosticism and Christianity, they accept the seven Noachide Laws and have their own prophetic lineages and a primary religious site is the grave of Moses' father-in-law, Yitro.

We move on. Haifa, a port city, spreads out at our feet to the sea, seemingly an intentional setting for the gem-like Bahai Shrine and its precise, terraced gardens which arrest the eye with their breadth

and beauty. In college I entered that shrine by a back gate, where the bus dropped me off, only to discover it was closed that day. Unfortunately someone had shut the door behind me and I spent the night trying to sleep on a carpet and was briefly arrested the next day for trespassing. Today, I would finally learn much more about the Bahai, such as the Bahai shrine holds the remains of The Bab, who was executed in Iran in the 1800's for his growing religious influence after he predicted a new messianic figure would arise; an idea heretically discordant with Islam's centrality of Mohammed and doctrine of Islamic perfection. The Bab's grave is a pilgrimage site for those who follow Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahai's founder, enshrine near Akko, who claimed and attained the new prophetic role according to their beliefs.

Some 2000 Bahai have been put to death in Iran and other Arab lands for persisting in the practice of their faith. Our guide indicated the Bahai facility is the international learning center maintained under a generous diplomatic status accorded by Israel out of compassion for the persecuted Bahais. He explained to us that the Bahai year has nineteen months and each day of the week and each month has an associated G*d attribute, splendor, beauty, justice, and such; their eleven holy days commemorate historical events in the development of their tradition which they describe as having complete equality between the sexes, but somehow rationalizing that for them homosexuality is completely prohibited. The few I've met emphasize the brevity of their prayer requirements, their nineteen day daylight fast each March, their universal concern for education and peace, and what amounts to an evangelical bent toward establishing their faith world-wide.

In Haifa we are seeking Barry's Auntie Sara Breslin, over ninety of age, who proves to be a most pleasant crone living in a geriatric center. We arrive to find her surrounded by doting children and grandchildren. Despite short-term memory loss, she immediately identifies Barry. Her voice matches her baby brother, Percy Bub's. Tears spring up as the exile of our people strikes me so – Percy in Canada, his children in the US and England, other family members spread from South Africa to Israel to Australia. A filament of loving light and determination to support and know each other seems to glow at each reinforced node of connection made possible by our journeys.

Israel #5

Shannana

We welcome Shabbat with a meditation walk down a hillside in Tzefat with beloved colleague and noted Kabbalist/artist David Friedman who helps us notice that with each grade of purple that deepens in the sky:

First one hears the birds and then they go to sleep.

Then one hears the cows and then they go to sleep.

Next the howling of the jackals and they also go to sleep.

And finally one hears the Breslovers – and they don't ever seem to go to sleep!

A Carbach-music-based shul meets in a building that perches atop one side of David's lovely restored ancient home and gallery of vivid, precise and somehow ecstatic paintings and posters. Every kind of *kippah* is to be found davenning here – fellows with thin and fat furry striemels, disk and bowl-like black *kippot* and a number of rainbow *kippot*, as well, and through the window I see a familiar face from Berkeley, Reuven Goldfarb a founding member of the Aquarian Minyan chanting with eyes raised on high and his wife, an innovator of Hebrew letter movements called *Otiot Chayyot*, not far away. The crowd is to the point of overflow and a colorful fabric *mechitzah* separating men from women praying stretches into the street, behind it women of every stripe rock rhythmically the infinite strollers that cradle much of the Jewish future.

Tzefat is strewn with *melech moshiach*, "King Messiah," signs proclaiming the anticipated return of their most recent rebbe from death as the messiah. The Breslover chassidim differ, of course, as Chassidim will. Some of the Breslov subgroups advocate the meditative recitation of a phrase Reb

Yisroel Ber Odesser, born at the turn of the 20th century and recently deceased, found at age 17 during the Fast of Tammuz, in a letter hidden in a book in his home. The letter is said to have been sent from the grave by Reb Nachman of Breslov and read:

It was very hard for me to descend to you, my precious student, to tell you that I benefited greatly from your service. And to you I say, my fire will burn until the coming of the Messiah -- be strong and courageous in your service -- Na Nach Nachma Nachman Me'Uman. And with this I shall tell you a secret: Full and heaped up from line to line, and with strong devotional service you will understand it. And the sign is: They will say you are not fasting on the 17th of Tammuz.

Some street singing Breslovers told me if we all say the sacred phrase together, "the messiah," will come. Some believe it to be the Song of Redemption that Reb Nachman predicted for bringing the messiah. The phrase:

Na, Nach, Nachma, Nachman M'Uman

is graffitied widely in Israel. Ceases to be cute or clever after a while and just became defacing of property to this viewer. What does it mean? *Na* means "please," *m'*, "from," and Uman is the town where Reb Nachman of Breslov, founder of the sect, originated, so presumably all who call on the messiah are calling on him. Shows how hope really does spring eternal.

Yehudit Goldfarb invites me to join her tour of galleries being shown to friends from the states. Most of the art is too commercial for my tastes, and the candle factory has already closed for Shabbat so I can't pick up their legendarily beautiful braided Havdalah candles for the ritual to end the Sabbath.

At last, my attention is arrested by one potter. A 'sixties person', his glazes tell stories with shapes that lift my spirit. Each piece is a combination of elegant and hardy, and commercial simply can't be applied to the ancient stone shack in which he works and vends. His story enchants. He was enroute to study glazing in China as a younger man and stopped in Israel and fell in love with Tzefat and stayed. Next week he fulfills his dream of studying glazing in China; his eyes luminesce as he speaks this anticipation of a dream fulfilled. Behind him a small pitcher of perfect line and proportions captures my attention. He explains the grand master who taught him how to make the spout; the handle is a Roman design, the flowing decorative lines his own approach. On archaeological digs one finds many a broken off handle, the occasional spout and sturdy base; never did I before give thought to the spirit of the potter or the Potter.

Further north ones enter the year 749 CE. Had you been here then, those marble columns the height of early sky scrapers might have come crashing to the ground right before your eyes as the broad intricately laid stone road rippled in the fullness of an earthquake left a cite of over a million and a half abandoned. From 1470 BCE the region was settled – ancient Egyptians, Cannanites, Greeks, Christians and then Arab conquerors until the earthquake ended any real action. Dubbed Synthopolis early on and known now as Bet She'an, the excavation is breath takingly huge and so substantial that one is able to truly walk through the Roman/Byzantine ruins and experience what the city might have been like. The amphitheatre sat 8,000, there were bathrooms, actual bathrooms; the bath house was steam heated – you can see the system virtually intact there; mosaics remained. And then there is a 'tell'; a huge hill of an archeological excavation that goes back to Cannanite times.

Nearby we tour the Beit Alpha synagogue with a Zodiac mosaic in the floor bearing Zodiac names in Hebrew, indicating an acceptance and integration of the concept with Judaism that surprised scholars when it was found in 1928. Although astrology later fell out of favor in Judaism and has only recently returned in some quarters, the Talmud is full of relationships to the stars; even the term *mazel tov* refers to astrology, it means "may your event occur under a good (auspicious) star (configuration)."



Brigadune

The Bedouin Market in Beer Sheva, everyone says we must go there. No camels in the parking lot but lots of women with full chador, black head/face coverings, over embroidered black dresses that cover all, are sitting on the hot black tarmac behind their Mercedes trucks chatting animatedly on cell phones.

Cars are parked for miles in the market lots. Music comes from an old VW microbus, pleasant, Hebrew, perhaps holy, we're drawn to it. A young Breslover Chassid pops out bearing prayerbooks, pamphlets, cd's. I've been wanting a *siddur*, "prayer book," with the text of *Tikkun Chatzot* in it – the short explanation is that this is a prayer process to be said in the wee hours of the night to help bring healing and healthiness to this world; with a flourish he provides it. We dance a bit, not touching, just delighting in a simple moment of playful connection on the blistering day. Not three minutes of Jewish geography and we know a dozen people in common. But the Bedouin market beckons – it's a typical flea market with mostly cheap plastic toys and clothes from Asia color really for the multicultural blend of buyers and purveyors from those wearing hassidic garb to tank tops, to colorful Ethiopian headwraps, to Bedouin embroidery; it is a good place to buy roasted nuts and dried fruits bulk rate and we sure did.

Barry has yet another cousin living here in Israel, right in Beer Sheva, Laura (Schultz family). She came from America as a dentist and describes quite a different dental culture than in the states, more reactive than pro-active. Her new husband served with Israeli intelligence and takes us through the extensive, user-friendly Air Force Museum. Two of my father's best buddies, both still living and now in their nineties, flew one of Israel's four planes in the War for Independence. We learned at Israel's Air Force Museum that the trick was how the Israelis kept repainting the planes different colors to make it look like there were many planes. They also learned to put whistles in soda bottles and drop them without explosives – the sound resembling bombs caused those below to scatter. Israel did build its own fighter jet in recent years, but it turned out to be too expensive to sustain. One hears fear creep in as the docent says this; to be dependent on the nations has proven dangerous for us. Desert air is much tougher to take; little do we realize it's going to be even more intense as we head south.

Kibbutz Lotan has among many fascinating folk, Daniel Burstyn in residence, a long-time email correspondent with a penchant for meaning and spirituality and his vibrant wife Eliza Mayo. Lotan is beside the Jordanian border, a watch tower casts the only available shadow in the blistering heat. Daniel has spent the night on guard and is patently exhausted as we walk to the dining hall for the traditional communal meal. Volunteers, sixteen perhaps to twenty-six year olds are at work in the blazing sun building beautifully sculpted mud walls; this Reform-movement affiliated kibbutz also feature a huge, carefully crafted birding refuge with well-built blinds for observing the birds that are not there (they seem to have moved South permanently, flock, stock and barrel). Offering a workshop on Torah here was remarkable, everyone who came was so thirsty for meaning, to connect, to maintain their individuality while joyfully Jewishing. A nearby Jewish meditation and study center, sort of an ashram closed last year, the leader was sleeping with the students and predictably, it all crashed. Same thing will happen soon to his friend's center in Jerusalem. Gracious, is it this easy to be a prophet?

Lotan also offers a charming youth-oriented environmental education center complete with an environmentally sensitive, organic demonstrator toilet, and, more economically productive, a dairy that sells all of its milk to the country's bottler of particularly yummy chocolate milk. Oddly, the dairy is not free-range, a simple testimony to market conditions perhaps. The guest lodges are comfortable and residents very friendly. The powerful endless erosive power of the desert winds at every moment joining force with the merciless sun undo almost as one watches the painstaking efforts of kibbutzniks to hold onto their hopeful foothold on a land that wants to run back into the anonymity of the dunes.

We went on to some of the many national parks. Mitzpeh Ramon features boggling vistas over a massive crater that is used to teach the profound lessons of erosive processes. Avdat National Park, from 30 BCE, on the ancient Spice Route between Petra and Gaza holds Nabatean, Hasmonean, and Roman remains of a one time metropolis with acropolis, temple, impeccably double catacombs, wine press, and the range of cold, warm and hot roman baths and even fourth century churches.

Eilat proves shocking. Huge hotels obfuscate the waterfront now and scantily clad teens chain-smoking abound and seem to include no small number of sex workers. The scuba reef is not what it once was, we should have taken a boat trip out farther to experience the fullness of the under water wonders. Our Vila Kibel host is South African, the apartment we have let for two nights is spare but reasonable, adequate and unfortunately, shaken much of the night and day by the infant and toddler cries of a huge vacationing Orthodox family. The owner speaks of being appalled to find young girls brought in for sex by tenants and remembers fondly times before a whole generation of traumatized youth fearful for their future arrived. He like so many we spoke with miss the days of the *halutzim*, the pioneers, who just worked as hard as necessary to get a land and a life.

The best Eilat moment is a local couscous place where for a song food is piled high amidst local families and truck drivers who know it's there. We can't go to Petra or into the Sinai, a high terrorism alert is in place and sadly, the next day a hotel bombing is front page news there.



Transition, transition!

We have to scoot up north again because I have a teaching to give in Hila, near Maalot, high in the Galil.

The news today is disturbing; Katushah rockets have fallen near Ashkelon and not too far from our next stop, a moshav high up in the Galil. A vibrant educator that I met while teaching at the huge Limmud Christmas week conference at Nottingham College in England, Ilana Levy, issued an invite to visit and teach Torah in her program in Northern Israel. Turns out she is newly turned Jewish educator-in-training – she recently closed the spice factory she ran for many years and has long run an alternative school for young children. Ilana is passionately creating an alternative to denominational Judaism in Israel, based on open-minded, open-hearted study of sacred texts, music, and friendship. Her husky boyfriend, Yuval, greets us on arrival and supplies me with a rock from the Dead Sea covered in natural salt formations and a jar of honey from his kibbutz. We delight in the cool breezes from the not-too-far off Lake Kineret, Sea of Galilee. We can see the border where Hizbollah terrorists lurk just inside Lebanon a few miles above; spooky.

The teaching with Ilana's multi-facted chevra goes deep. Her moshav is only residential now; they no longer have their own industries. A doctor, nurse, scientist, builder, shopkeeper, mother, writer, artist are among the participants. I've brought them a bit of Talmud to consider. Which asks: "What if the time for prayer arrives, and you are on journey on your donkey, and you can't get down. What should you do?"

"This line is the truth about Israel, exclaims one of them. If I would pray, and I wouldn't, how can we ever get down from being vigilant to just pray?"

Another rejoins: "But what is the donkey?" Perhaps it is my stubborn self, that keeps going in the same familiar groove and I'm afraid to get down and open my heart and discover a new possibility."

We continue in the text. "Get down if you can. And if you can't? Turn yourself to face in the direction

of Jerusalem. And if you can't turn yourself? Then turn your heart toward the Holy of Holies."

"What is this turn yourself nonsense?" One cries out, "This is legal mumbo jumbo!"

"No, I think they know that if you are caught in a life pattern and can't stop, that even turning a little shows you something more than where you were heading." The doctor has spoken, he looks a little odd. So I ask him, "What are you getting from this text?" He replies slowly, "I hadn't thought that, if a person looks away from the tractor beam of their trauma and lifts up their voice in heartfelt prayer at seeing something else for a change, it could be powerful."

The mother wants to speak. "Why turn toward Jerusalem, I'm thinking that when all Jews align ourselves on the same central point; we add ourselves to community and even when alone, you're never really all alone."

The artist IS excited by the geometry of Jews worldwide focusing on one point. She adds another element to our study, "Why did I become weepy when you read, turn your heart toward the Holy of Holies? For me, the Holy of Holies is not some room at the center of the Temple, the Holy of Holies for me is family, connection, honest relationships filled with enduring love."

For each person, the phrase touched a different precious point.

What is your Holy of Holies? Can you turn your heart to receive support and insight from a different direction than where you customarily look, even when you can't seem to leave the groove of your present path?

Goldie: I did that, pray for guidance, align myself with all of our people in prayer, facing Jerusalem, from every place that we landed during the Rebbe on the Road Travelogues, I pray for where to be of service next. And then came a shock, a position in New York City, Director of Innovative Jewish Programming for the first and largest Jewish center in the world, the 92nd St Y. How could it be so clear? Such a direct calling? To be sedentary? To leave my own now well-worn groove as a peripatetic rabbi and my more than a decade of service as a "web reb" at ReclaimingJudaism.org?

The offer of employment arrived an hour before Passover *seder*, just after we returned from Israel to the states. Within weeks of that offer Israel would be at war, as she is today, Katushah rocks raining down on her from Hizbollah devotees willing to martyr themselves and murder any who stand in the way of a purely Islamic Middle East and Israeli troops trying their best to take out the incredible armamentarium of the terrorist group backed by Iran and Syria. Imagine if we had Americans who owned such armaments and rained them onto Mexico or Canada. Unimaginable?! Such is the Middle East. And in England, this week they foiled a presumed Al Quaida plot to topple ten airliners from the skies. A bit less travel seems well indicated in such times.

But beloved hubbatzin Barry is set to head to New Zealand and Australia to teach his innovations in medical communications skills this fall – are we meant to separate for so long? How will we stand it? I know, we'll write each other travelogues of our separate experiences – that will tell a new story - my *aliyah* to New York City and Barry's *yeridah*, descent, to way down under.

You can stay tuned – send an email to rebgoldie@gmail.com if you want to receive the next set of travelogues in real-time, live from wherever we are. Blessings to you especially, on your life and path.

Adams.....	
Patch.....	33
Aging.....	61, 65
Alaska.....	1
4th of July.....	68
Arctic Terns.....	65
cruise.....	63
Enchantment Bay.....	72
glacier.....	69
Glacier Bay National Park.....	70
Gold rush.....	66
Haines Island.....	71
Juneau.....	65
Ketchikan.....	73
rainforest.....	65
Resurrection Bay.....	72
Seward.....	74
Sitka.....	73
Skagway.....	67
Tlingit Peoples, totem poles.....	64
Valdez.....	72
whales.....	65
white water rafting.....	72
Wrangel.....	63, 64
Wrangel, petroglyphs.....	64
Aleph.....	
Kallah.....	17, 156
Aliyah.....	179
Alzheimers.....	127
Alzheimers Disease.....	174
Amsterdam.....	
Beit Ha-Chidush.....	103
Anne.....	
Brener.....	80
Appalachia.....	3
Aquarian Minyan.....	181
Argentina.....	3
Aristides.....	
Dino.....	55
Jason and Natalia.....	1
Juliette.....	121
Natalia.....	53
Arizona.....	
Cottonwood.....	21
desert.....	173
Flagstaff, Black Bart's Restaurant.....	19
Flagstaff.....	19
Flagstaff, Jeanette's B&B.....	19
Grand Canyon.....	19
Jerome.....	20, 21, 22
Jerome, Arizona State Museum Branch.....	23
Jerome, The Surgeon's House Bed and Breakfast.....	21
Lowell Observatory.....	19
Phoenix.....	114
Phoenix, Cancer Survivors Park.....	24
Phoenix, Desert Botanical Gardens.....	25
Phoenix, Fine Art Museum.....	24
Phoenix, Heard Museum.....	25
Phoenix, The Improv.....	25
Ruach HaMidbar.....	114
San Carlos Apache Reservation.....	115
San Francisco.....	19
Scottsdale.....	25
Sedona.....	20, 21
Tuscon.....	114
Tuscon, Madeira Canyon.....	114
Art.....	49, 52, 79, 154, 171

Art.....	
Alex Grey.....	50
Frank Lloyd Wright.....	115
Kiefer.....	121
National Gallery of Art.....	120
tallit.....	52
Yo Kalisher.....	113
Art Deco.....	24
Ashland, PA.....	2
Ashrawi.....	
Hanan.....	180
August.....	
Joe.....	126
Auschwitz.....	7
bar mitzvah.....	1, 118
Bar Mitzvah.....	62, 64, 70, 72, 82, 150, 177
Barkan.....	
Stanley and Tami.....	176
Barnett.....	
Kenneth.....	111
Bat Mitzvah.....	90, 100, 141, 150, 151, 152, 160, 177
Beitman.....	
Adam.....	7, 46, 52, 61, 90, 91, 118, 146
Mark.....	1, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 70, 71, 74, 77, 78, 83, 87, 90, 96, 97, 99, 101, 110
Belgium.....	
Antwerp.....	107
Brussels.....	170
Oostende.....	105
Bernhardt.....	
Sara.....	22
Bet Devora.....	154
Bien.....	
Ania.....	156
Boot Hill.....	9
Booth.....	9
Bosnia.....	7
rape camps.....	102
Braveman.....	
Michaela.....	119
Steven.....	119
Breast cancer.....	37
Breslin.....	
Sara.....	181
Brody.....	
Rabbi Seth.....	50
Brooks.....	
Marcia.....	31
Bub.....	
Bennie.....	20
Danny.....	77
Gary and Colleen.....	8
Helen.....	136
Jeff.....	118, 122
Jeremy.....	134
Leah.....	138
Megan.....	141
Percy.....	138, 181
Robin.....	122
Sheila.....	118
Burstyn.....	
Daniel.....	183
California.....	11
Big Sur, Esalen.....	33, 34
Cape Town.....	41
Carmel.....	32
Carmel, Mission.....	34

Carmel, Point Lobos State Park.....	35	Denver, Domo Japanese Restaurant.....	10
Crescent Beach.....	41	Denver, Zoo.....	9
Ferndale.....	40, 41	dinosaurs.....	14
Ferndale, Kinetic Sculpture Museum.....	42	Durango.....	115
Ferndale, The Victorian Inn.....	40	Glendwood Springs, Colorado Hotel.....	15
Long Beach, P'nai Or Community.....	118	Glenwood Springs.....	15
Monterey, aquarium.....	35, 119	Grand Canyon.....	1
Napa Valley.....	38	Grand Canyon, white water rafting.....	19
Napa Valley, Domain Winery Restaurant.....	39	Julesberg.....	9
National Redwood Forest.....	42	Littleton.....	9
Northern Coast.....	40	Sterling.....	9
Pasadena, Huntingdon Library Gardens.....	118	Strategic Air Command Museum.....	15
Pescadero.....	36	Tattered Cover.....	13
San Diego.....	11	Colorado.....	
San Francisco.....	37	Fort Collins.....	11
San Francisco, cable cars.....	37	Congregational Dynamics.....	38
San Francisco, China Town.....	37	Contra dancing.....	33
San Francisco, Green Street Mortuary Band.....	37	conversion.....	5
San Francisco, John Pence Gallery.....	37	Conversion.....	67, 103, 140
San Simeon.....	33	Cooper.....	9
Santa Barbara.....	30, 31, 32	Jan.....	11, 13
Santa Barbara, Italian Sidewalk Painting Festival.....	30	Country Music.....	123
Santa Barbara, Tienda Ho Clothing Store.....	32	Country Western Hall of Fame.....	123
Santa Barbara, Upham Inn.....	30	creative process.....	5
Santa Cruz.....	35	Cruise.....	63
Santa Cruz, Chadeish Yameinu Congregation.....	35	cuttlefish.....	9
Canada.....		Czech Republic.....	
British Columbia, Natural History Museum.....	76	Prague.....	167
Hebrew classroom.....	103	Danish.....	41
Vancouver.....	25, 27	Davidowitz.....	
Vancouver, BC.....	26	Dr. Lucy.....	102
Victoria, B.C.....	76	de Vries Robles.....	
Carlebach.....		Carola.....	105, 106, 108
Rabbi Shlomo.....	151	Death.....	62, 66
Cassidy.....		Depression.....	57
Butch.....	16	Des Moines, Iowa.....	5
Cemetaries.....	41, 42	Devore.....	
Cemeteries.....	44	Marilyn.....	115
Centralia, Pa.....	2	Diamond.....	
Chadeish Yameinu.....	35	Dennis.....	177
Chasen.....		Rabbi Gail.....	43
Margaret.....	58	Dinero.....	
Chess.....	96	Steve.....	45
Chicago.....	1	dinosaur.....	13
Great Fire.....	5	Divorce.....	62
Christianity.....	164	Dosick.....	
Christianity.....		Rabbi Wayne.....	32
martyrs.....	99	Dubowitz.....	2
Saint Kiere.....	98	Dubowitz.....	
Saint Steven.....	98	Jean.....	2
Women's Church.....	99	Les.....	2
Churchill.....		dust-bowl.....	8
Winston.....	22	Earthquake.....	72, 77
Civil War.....	124	Earthquakes.....	31
Cleveland.....	1	Earthquakes.....	
Clinton.....		Jerome, Arizona.....	22
Hillary.....	19	Education.....	58, 140, 141, 152
Closure.....	91	boundaries.....	157
co-housing.....	11	Creative ideas.....	18
Cohen.....		wild west.....	20
Rabbi Howard.....	67	Elat Chayyim.....	118
Tamara.....	166	Elat Chayyim Retreat Center.....	105
Colorado.....	14	Emanuel Camp.....	117
Boulder.....	10, 11	England.....	
Chautauqua Mountail Trail.....	11	English Channel.....	101
Denver.....	8, 12, 13	Environment.....	150
Denver Opera House.....	11	Esformes.....	

Chazzan Robert.....	135
Ezra.....	
Ibn.....	160
Family.....	78
Feminism.....	
women rabbis.....	174
Florida.....	
Everglades.....	62
Focusing.....	118, 147
Food.....	
Chinese.....	14
Fradin.....	
Benjamin.....	177
France.....	
antisemitism.....	174
auto da fe.....	105
Black Plague.....	105
Chartres, cathedral.....	105
English Channel.....	101
Loire Valley.....	102, 105
Mt. Saint Michel.....	105
Normandy, German Cemetery.....	101
Normandy, Omaha Beach.....	100
Normandy, US Military Cemetery.....	101
Paris, L'affaire des Billets.....	105
ritual murder.....	105
Roen.....	95
Roen, Notre Dame Cathedral.....	96
Tour de France.....	109
Frank Lloyd Wright.....	5
Frank Lloyd WRight.....	35
Freud.....	
Dr. Sigmund.....	154
Friedman.....	
David.....	181
Friendship.....	78
Gabriel.....	
Cindy.....	11, 156
Yaakov.....	11, 79
Gardens.....	89
gay.....	7
Gendlin.....	
Dr. Gene.....	118
Geogria.....	
Atlanta.....	125
Georgia.....	
Atlanta.....	129
Atlanta, Alon's Bakery.....	125
Atlanta, High Museum.....	126
Atlanta, High Museum of Art.....	126
German.....	7
Germany.....	7, 8
Berlin Wall.....	7
Berlin, Anna O.....	155
Berlin, Bet Devora.....	154
Berlin, guide Iris Weiss.....	155
Berlin, Library memorial.....	153
Berlin, Rabbi Regina Jonas.....	154
Dusseldorf.....	13, 81, 102
Dusseldorf, Great Synagogue.....	103
Dusseldorf, mikveh.....	104
Dusseldorf, Rabbi Michael Goldberger.....	103
Hamburg.....	155
Hanover.....	155
skinheads, neo-Nazis.....	102
Gestalt.....	1, 6, 33, 38, 147
Getzler.....	

Yoram.....	180
glacier.....	11
Glacier.....	68
God.....	8, 15, 17, 26, 36, 49, 50, 51, 52, 74, 85, 102, 113, 116, 119, 121, 122, 123, 149, 151, 166, 173, 174
God.....	
depression.....	53
Goetenberg, Sweden.....	8
Gold.....	
Rabbi Shefa.....	15, 26, 54, 78, 90, 156
Gold rush.....	66
Goldbarb.....	
Yehudit.....	182
Goldberger.....	
Michael.....	13
Rabbi Michael.....	81, 104
Goldfarb.....	
Reuven.....	181
Gordon-Zaslow.....	
Devlorah.....	42
Gotenberg.....	8
Gottlieb.....	
Rabbi Lynn.....	114
Grafstein.....	
Rabbi Ayla.....	114
Grand Canyon.....	1
Greene.....	
Susie.....	115
Gross.....	
Nadya and Victor.....	38
Guttman.....	
Rabbi Fred.....	128
HaCohen.....	
Rabbi Menachem.....	151
haircut.....	6
Hammerschlag.....	
Carl and Elaine.....	114
Handicap.....	
accessibility.....	175
Hanukkah.....	75
Harwin.....	
Fred.....	50, 51
Sara.....	50, 52
Sara and Fred.....	158
Hassidism.....	
Breslov.....	183
Havdallah.....	85
havurah.....	12
Havurah.....	
National Havurah Summer Institute.....	15
Hawaii.....	
Pearl Harbor.....	38
Heard Museum.....	25
Hegins pigeon shoot.....	2
High Holidays.....	7
Hillesum.....	
Etty.....	107
Hiroshima.....	6
Hodde.....	
Kees.....	171
Hoffman.....	
Rabbi David.....	139, 141
Holland.....	
Amsterdam.....	13
Holocaust.....	6, 81, 85, 102, 150, 153, 162, 172, 175, 178
Holocaust.....	
Auschwitz.....	102

hidden children.....	111	environmental education.....	183
hidden Jews.....	106	fruits.....	177
Omaha Beach.....	100	Galilee.....	184
Hot springs.....		Haifa, Bahai shrine and religion.....	180
Glenwood Springs, Colorado.....	15	handicap accessibility.....	175
Hungary.....		Hertzaliya.....	177
Budapest.....	150	Hila.....	184
Budapest, Dohany Synagogue.....	150	Hizbollah.....	185
Budapest, Jewish ghetto.....	150	Hof HaCarmel.....	176
Danube River.....	150	Jericho.....	176
Environmentalism.....	150	Jerusalem.....	176
Reform Jewish community.....	152	Jerusalem, Bacca.....	177
Icebergs.....	72	Jerusalem, Meah Shearim.....	179
Idaho.....		Kibbutz Lotan.....	183
Hot Springs.....	14	Kineret.....	184
identity.....	6	Kohav Yair.....	180
Illinois.....	5	Kol HaNeshamah.....	176
Chicago.....	5, 6	kosher supervision.....	180
Chicago Art Deco.....	5	Mitzpeh Ramon National Park.....	184
Chicago Frank Lloyd Wright.....	5	moshav, Ein Ayala.....	176
Des Moines.....	6	Movement for Progressive Judaism.....	176
Fermi National Laboratory.....	5	Nature Preservation Society.....	16
Intermarriage.....	151	Netanya.....	176
Ireland.....	97	olive farming.....	177
Abbey Leix.....	99	Orthodoxy.....	174
Belfast, Rabbi Gedaliah Silverstone.....	102	Peace Now.....	16
Brae.....	99	population.....	177
Cahir.....	99	Purim.....	175
Cashel.....	99	rental cars.....	179
Celt and Norman villages.....	98	sex trade.....	184
Dalkey.....	99	Sinai.....	184
Dunmore East.....	99	smoking, cancer.....	179
Enniscorthy.....	99	terrorism.....	176
Glendalough.....	99	Tzefat.....	181
Jerpoin.....	99	Tzefat, Breslov, Chabad.....	181
Joyce and Shaw.....	99	Tzefat, Carlebach Minyan.....	181
Kildare.....	99	War for Independence.....	175
Killkenny.....	99	Western Wall, Kotel.....	178
Laoghaire.....	99	Zichron Yaakov.....	179
Meeting of the Waters.....	99	Italy.....	
poverty.....	98	Tuscany hill towns.....	8
Saint Bernadette.....	98	Japan.....	10
Shenkill.....	99	Jerusalem.....	
Waterford.....	99	Carliner Stollen Chassidim.....	178
Wexford.....	99	Jewish Practices.....	
Wome's Church.....	99	tallit.....	84
Isaac the Blind.....	160	Jewish renewal.....	1, 156
Isaacs.....		Jewish Spi XE.....	113
Dr. Gordon.....	142	Jewish Spiritual Practice.....	
Islam.....	137	Blessing first flowering tree of spring.....	143
Israel.....	3, 16, 173	divorce, \.....	63
Abu Gosht.....	176	Emet, truth.....	127
Air Force Museum.....	175	hashgakhah pratit.....	136
Arab-Jewish industry.....	177	kippah.....	52
Arabs, Druze, Bahai, Christian.....	180	meditation.....	113
Avdat National Park.....	184	mezuzah.....	141
Bedouin.....	45, 47, 48	minchah.....	43
Bedouin women.....	183	mitzvah.....	16
Beer Sheva, Bedouin Market.....	183	prayer.....	52
Beit Alpha Synagogue, zodiac mosaic.....	182	praying for the ill.....	65
Beit She'an.....	182	tallit.....	52, 65
coffee.....	173	tallit and tefillin.....	178
diversity.....	176	Wedding, shomer, shomeret.....	115
Druze, lebna cheese.....	180	housekeeping.....	43
Eilat.....	184	Jewish Spiritual Practices.....	
Eilat, Vila Kibel.....	184	aliyah.....	177, 179
Ein Hod Art Colony.....	179	bar mitzvah.....	118

bat mitzvah.....	160	Lange.....	
beit din.....	104	Bilder von Cladio.....	154
beit din, courts.....	103	lawns.....	12
conversion.....	103	Leavey.....	
Conversion.....	140	Rabbi Bonnie.....	140
devekut.....	17, 33	Lerman.....	
el maleh rachamim, funeral prayer.....	101	Liz.....	81, 83
eruv.....	102	Lerner.....	
hand washing.....	17, 113	Tatyana and Michael.....	103
Havdallah.....	27, 42	Limmud.....	
Head covering.....	134	Gallil.....	184
hitgashmiut.....	132	Nottingham.....	184
hitlahavut.....	33	Lipstadt.....	
Kabbalah.....	50	Rabbi Deborah.....	178
Kaddish.....	84, 127	Lithuania.....	4
matzah.....	173	Keln and Shavli.....	133
mechitzah.....	181	Locher.....	
mechitzah, separation by gender during prayer.....	139	Frouke.....	111
meditation.....	17	Gerrit.....	109, 111
messiah.....	165	Jouke.....	111
messianism.....	182	Nimjke.....	111
middot.....	18	Tzeitl.....	111
mikveh.....	104, 115, 127	Lubavitch.....	140
minyán.....	38, 82	Malay.....	137
mitzvot.....	17	Mandela.....	
Modeh Ani.....	53	Nelson.....	137
Modeh Ani, morning practice.....	36	Mark.....	
mourning.....	80	Beitman.....	87
One Hundred Blessings Every Day.....	53	Marriage.....	83
Otiot Chayyot.....	181	Masem.....	
Passover seder.....	146	Caren.....	128
Rosh Chodesh.....	127	Mayo.....	
salvation.....	149	Eliza.....	183
seder.....	173	McCarthy.....	
sephiroth at wedding.....	115	Mrs.....	99
Shabbat.....	75, 139, 156	Theresa.....	98
Shavuot.....	113	Medicine.....	47, 58, 126, 137, 142, 148, 155
shema.....	101	Meditation.....	17, 18, 90
siyyum.....	89	Messianism.....	164
tefillin.....	101	mezuzah.....	13
teshuvah.....	117	Mid-life.....	79
tikkun olam, social justice.....	17	Mikvah.....	115
Tisha b'Av.....	80, 81, 105, 159	Mikveh.....	116, 127
wedding.....	115	Milgram.....	
yizkor, memorial service.....	27	Dr. Samuel.....	100, 101, 174
Jonas.....		Leona.....	116, 127
Rabbi Regina.....	154	Leona Fradin.....	174
Kaballah.....	121	military installations.....	6
Kaddish.....	127	Mining.....	
Kagan.....		gold.....	22
Michael.....	147, 176	museum, Arizona.....	23
Kalisher.....		Minneapolis.....	8
Yo.....	113	Minnesota.....	8
Kaplan.....		Miraj.....	32
Aryeh.....	127	Missionaries.....	73
Chazzan Richard.....	157	mistakes.....	8
Rabbi Mordecai.....	97	Mitzvah.....	48, 82
King.....		hachnassat orchim, welcoming guests.....	99
Reverend Martin Luther.....	129	kavod ha-met.....	41
Klapheck.....		shmirah.....	41
Elisa.....	153	shmirat ha-guf.....	41
Kook.....		Soup kitchen.....	85
Rabbi Abraham Isaac.....	150	taharah.....	41
Krassen.....		zachor.....	41
Rabbi Miles.....	156	Zachor.....	27
Kummer.....		Mitzvot.....	
Rabbi Judy.....	142	ahavat hashem, yirat hashem.....	175

tikkun olam.....	119	New Mexico.....	
Museum.....		Albuquerque.....	114
Anne Frank.....	109	Jimenez Spring.....	116
Berlin Jewish Museum.....	153, 154	McCarthy era.....	112
National Gallery of Art.....	120	Saguaro Cactus.....	113
Museums.....		Silver City.....	112
Country Western Music Hall of Fame.....	123	Silver City, Chinese.....	113
Israel Airforce Museum.....	175	Silver City, mining.....	112
National Memorial to the Unborn.....	126	New York.....	
Oudtshoorn Museum.....	133	Berkshires.....	117
Nachman of Breslov.....	128	Elat Chayyim Retreat Center.....	105
Letter of Reb Yisrael Ber Odesser.....	182	Manhattan.....	108
Nachmanides.....	159	New York Theological Seminary.....	96
Nachum of Chernobyl.....	165	Woodstock.....	180
National Parks.....		North Carolina.....	
Arches.....	16	Asheville, Biltmore Estate.....	143
Bryce Canyon.....	20	Greensboro.....	126
Capital Reef.....	18	Novick.....	
Grand Staircase Escalante.....	18	Rabbi Leah.....	33, 35
Sunset Crater Volcanic XE.....	19	nuclear bomb.....	6
Tuigoot.....	21	Ohio.....	
Native Americans.....	2, 45, 73	Cleveland.....	3
Alaska.....	68	Cleveland Clinic.....	3
Apache.....	115	Cleveland Gestalt Institute.....	5
Arizona.....	114	Cleveland Museums.....	4
Athabaskan, Eskimo.....	68	Warren.....	2, 3, 4
Canada.....	76	Oklahoma.....	5
Heard Museum, Phoenix.....	25	Or Shalom Congregation.....	26
Navaho.....	17	Oregon.....	
Nuu-chah-nulth.....	76	Ashland.....	42
Pueblo.....	21	Ashland, Bloomsbury Books.....	43
Pueblo village, Arizona.....	21	Ashland, City Park.....	43
Pueblos.....	20	Ashland, Shakespeare Theatre.....	43
Tlingit.....	64, 67	Ashland, Spam Parade.....	43
Ute and Pima.....	115	Columbia River Gorge.....	51
Nebraska.....	1, 8, 9	Corvallis.....	79
Nebraska.....		Crater Lake.....	49
North Platt.....	8	Depoe Bay.....	77
Omaha Zoo.....	6	Eugene, Country Fair.....	158
Omaha, Strategic Air Command Museum.....	6	Jacksonville.....	44
Netherlands.....		Jacksonville, cemetery.....	44
Alkamer.....	111	Medford.....	44
Ameland.....	105, 109	Medford, Zohar Glass.....	44
Amstel Tuin.....	108	Mount Mazama.....	48, 49
Amsterdam.....	108	Mt. St. Helens.....	77
Amsterdam, Anne Frank House Museum.....	108	Newport.....	78
Amsterdam, Beyt HaChidush.....	107	Orcas Island.....	158
Amsterdam, graffiti.....	108	Oregon Brewers Festival.....	86
Amsterdam, Jewish Museum.....	107	Oregon Shakespeare Festival.....	42
Amsterdam, Makom Or Zarua.....	107	Portland.....	50
appelgebak, apple cake.....	111	Portland, earthquake.....	77
astronomer in South Africa.....	134	Portland, Japanese Garden.....	50
Beren en Zee.....	111	Portland, Multnomah Falls.....	51
Bergen.....	111	Portland, Oba Reference.....	51
bicycling.....	110	Portland, Powell's Book Store.....	51
conversion to Judaism.....	103	Portland, Rose Festival.....	51
grave, Spinoza's wife.....	159	Thornewood Castle B & B.....	86
herring.....	110	Orenstein.....	
Holocaust.....	106	Steve.....	180
Portuguese Cemetery.....	106	Pakistan.....	12
Ruach Hadashah.....	107	Pappenheim.....	
Spinoza's mother's grave.....	106	Bertha.....	154, 155
Nevins-Goldman.....		Passover.....	146, 148
Brian.....	123	seder.....	164
Corianna.....	123	pastoral counseling.....	10
New Jersey.....		Pennsylvania.....	
Cherry Hill.....	91	Philadelphia, Wharton School.....	7

Pottsville.....	2	Dr. Laura.....	183
Pennsylvania.....		Schwartz.....	
Berks County.....	2	Chazzan Neil.....	123
Centralia.....	4	Seattle.....	
Gettysburg.....	106	Tacoma.....	86
Mt. Airy.....	11	Semanoff.....	
Philadelphia, Liberty Bell.....	7	Sylvia.....	100
Pottsville.....	4	Sexual abuse.....	27
Reading.....	24, 55, 61, 89	Sexual Abuse.....	54, 84
Perilstein.....		Shabbat.....	83, 156
JoJo.....	62	shame.....	3, 5, 6
physician.....	6	Shapiro.....	
Pony Express.....	8	Rabbi Rami.....	124
prairie.....	5	Shavuot.....	113
prayer.....	10, 74	Shema.....	13
Prayer.....	63, 65, 75, 79, 83, 143, 161, 163, 185	Shneyer.....	
Prayer.....		Rabbi David.....	81
amidah, geulah, redemption.....	105	Shulman.....	
concluding travel.....	94	Rabbi Nellie.....	165
El Maleh Rachamim, funeral prayer.....	101	Silverstone.....	
from the heart.....	107	Rabbi Gedaliah.....	102
Modeh ani.....	53	Smith.....	
Priestly benediction, birkat ha-kohanim.....	99	Rabbi Elanor.....	166
Project Keshet.....	1, 4, 5, 36, 147, 165	snake.....	11
Protea.....	134	Sod House Museum.....	8
Public Works Administration.....	21	South Africa.....	4, 77
Purim.....	176	Addo Elephant Park.....	135
Rabbi Gan-Kagan.....		AIDS.....	135
Ruth.....	176	apartheid.....	144
Rachmiel.....		Cape Colored.....	134
O'Regan.....	116	Cape Town.....	54, 125, 129
Raphael.....		Cape Town, aquarium.....	35
Gellah Rayzl.....	140	Cape Town, crime.....	130
Reb Levi Yitzchak.....	11	Cape Town, Groote Schuur Hospital.....	132
Rebbitzin.....	83	Cape Town, Jewish life.....	139
Reclaiming Judaism.....	185	Cape Town, maids.....	131
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.....	97, 107, 147	Cape Town, Marai Road Congregation.....	139
Reeves.....		Cape Town, Marais Road Synagogue.....	138
Christopher.....	169	Cape Town, Robben Island Prison.....	137
Reuben.....		Cape Town, Robin Island Prison.....	132
David.....	24	Cape Town, Table Mountain.....	131
Roosevelt.....		Cape Town, waterfront.....	136
Theodore.....	15	Cape Town, Woodstock, Trauma Center for Survivors of Violence and Torture.....	142
Rosh HaShannah.....	7, 117, 119	Cape Winnie Mandela.....	130
Rumi.....	92, 97, 108	cricket.....	133
Russia.....	2, 6, 7, 13, 39, 73, 74, 102, 141	crime.....	143
Atomic energy.....	168	diversity.....	145
Kostroma.....	165	emigration.....	178
Moscow.....	166	Franschoeck.....	138
Moscow, Russian Orthodox Church.....	166	fruit.....	144
poverty, prostitution, orphans.....	165	Garden Route.....	135
Rybinsk.....	165	healthcare.....	143
spies.....	167	Holocaust Museum.....	137
St. Peterberg, Hermitage Museum.....	168	Islam.....	144
St. Petersburg.....	168	Jewish cooking.....	138
Volga River.....	165	Judaism.....	82
Russia XE.....	165	Karoo.....	133, 136
Ruth.....	13	Karoo, San peoples.....	136
Sank.....		Kommikie.....	130
Abie.....	138	Maitland.....	82
Schachter-Shalomi.....		Malay.....	137
Rabbi Zalman.....	44, 147	Mbecki.....	135
Scharansky.....		medicine.....	142
Anatoly.....	167	Ohr Sameach Congregation.....	140
Scher.....		olive ranch.....	132
Selwyn and Irit.....	180	ostrich farming.....	133
Schultz.....	3		

Oudtshoorn.....	133	Lamentations.....	80, 81
Oudtshoorn, museum.....	133	Moses not entering promised land.....	84
Pretoria.....	140, 179	Noah.....	1, 71, 74, 80
Prince Albert.....	134	psalms.....	43
Reconstructionism.....	140	Psalms.....	15, 32
Robben Island.....	144	sacrificial system.....	4
Simonstown.....	129	Shavuot.....	26
Stellenbosch.....	132	tornados.....	5
Swartberg Mountains.....	134	Totem Poles.....	64, 73
Three Anchor Bay.....	138	Treadwell.....	
violence.....	142	Annie.....	91
Voortrekkers.....	20	Truth.....	127
Wine Region.....	132	Turpaz.....	
Space Shuttle Disaster.....	120	Shulamit and Moshe.....	151
Spain.....	34	Turquoise Island.....	7, 30
Catalonian resistance.....	160	Tzefat.....	
colonists.....	20	candle factory.....	182
Girona.....	159, 160	Ufberg.....	
Girona, Ibn Ezra.....	160	Elliot.....	36
Girona, Isaac the Blind.....	160	Sharon.....	36
Girona, Jewish Museum.....	159	Ukraine.....	124, 141
Inquisition.....	105	Petchora, Region Vinyitssa.....	162
Kaballah.....	160	Uman, grave of Reb Nachman.....	182
Speer.....		US Customs.....	25
Albert.....	178	Utah.....	7
spirituality.....	9	Bryce Canyon National Park.....	20
Spitzer.....		Capital Reef National Park.....	18, 90
Juliette.....	75	Grand Staircase Escalante National Park.....	18
Starker.....		Kanab.....	20
Yanos.....	171	Moab.....	13, 15
Staub.....		Moab, Arches National Park.....	16
Dr. Jacob.....	97	Mormons.....	20
Stein.....		Vanett.....	
Rabbi Margot.....	140	Louise.....	48
Steinhorn.....		Vietnam.....	7
Rabbi Jack.....	136, 140	Vietnam War.....	7
Steinsaltz.....		Virginia.....	120
Rabbi Adin.....	85	Abingdon.....	123
suicide.....	4	Abingdon, Barter Theater.....	123
Systems.....	37	Staunton.....	122
Taleisin West.....	115	visions.....	15
Talmud.....	27	Volcano.....	77
Tehillah.....		Volcano.....	
Nava.....	161	Arizona.....	19
Tennessee.....	143	Volcanos.....	49
Tennessee.....		Washington.....	
Blountville.....	123	Cascade Mountains.....	60
Chattanooga.....	123	Index.....	60
Chattanooga, International Towing and Recovery Museum.....	125	rural.....	156
Chattanooga, National Memorial for the Unborn.....	126	Seattle.....	8, 53, 55, 60
Country music.....	123	Seattle, aquarium.....	57
Lord's Landing.....	125	Seattle, barbershop.....	60
Murphreesboro.....	124	Seattle, Boat Locks.....	56
Murphresboror, City Cafe.....	124	Seattle, Boeing Field Air Museum.....	56
Nashville.....	123, 124	Seattle, business.....	59
Nashville, Country Western Music Hall of Fame.....	123	Seattle, Denny Regrade.....	56
Teshuvah.....	118	Seattle, Eitz Or Congregation.....	53
The Academy for Jewish Religion.....	4	Seattle, Freemont Solstice Parade.....	56
The Ukraine.....		Seattle, Green Lake Park.....	57
Shargorad, Winery.....	39	Tacoma, Secret Garden.....	87
Tisha b'Av.....	105, 159	Washington, DC.....	
Torah.....	99, 102, 109, 117, 118, 128, 141, 142, 150, 151, 157, 159, 160, 161, 163, 166, 173, 174, 176, 184	National Gallery of Art.....	120
Torah.....		Walter Reed Army Navy Hospital.....	101
Book of Ruth.....	16	Waskow.....	
Eating meat.....	31	Arthur.....	13
High priest's daughter.....	4	Wedding.....	115
		shomer, shomeret.....	115

Wegman.....	
Alan.....	112, 113
Weiss.....	
Iris.....	155
White water rafting.....	118
Wiener.....	
Rabbi Shohama.....	27, 53
Wilson.....	
Woodrow.....	122
Women.....	73
Women.....	
Wild Wild west prostitutes.....	22
Work.....	58
World War II.....	6, 100, 150, 155, 175, 178
World War II.....	
Auschwitz.....	102
Omaha Beach.....	100
Y2K.....	10

Yiddish.....	7
Yom Kippur.....	7
Zabow.....	
Pam.....	137
Tuviah.....	137
Zaslow.....	
Rabbi David.....	42
Zavow.....	
Dr. Tuviah.....	132
Zevit.....	
Rabbi Shawn.....	83
Zohar.....	
Avinoam.....	44
Shari.....	44
Zoo.....	
Denver.....	9
Zoos.....	6