

"EACH ONE IS PRECIOUS"

Headlights

Fall 2013

Vol. 5 No. 2

SHINING LIGHTS: JEWISH EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL CHALLENGES



BUILDING DEDICATION

SUNDAY, JUNE 8TH | 12 NOON

ARTHUR SCHREIBER JEWISH EDUCATION DAY
AS PROCLAIMED BY CINCINNATI, GOLF MANOR AND AMBERLEY VILLAGES





Editorial

B”H You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet

The Jewish peddlers of yesteryear survived by travelling from town to town. But when they were finally able to acquire their own places, they created the likes of Gimbel’s, Macy’s, Filene’s, Marcus, Bloomingdale’s, and Lazarus of Columbus.

During their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Jews had a traveling sanctuary, but looked forward to being settled in their homeland and building a permanent Temple, a central point of light and holiness for themselves and for the entire world.

JEEP also endured a seven year period of “wandering.” We traversed the city daily, helping thousands of people with challenges and disabilities access Jewish education and connections, achieving greater success and happiness. With friendship, support, compassion and spirit, our friends often become more in touch with their souls—their miniature inner Temple, and more at home in the world as well.

But without *our own home*, we could only do half a job. Now, with the Cohon Family Foundation’s generous gift of the Arthur Schreiber Jewish Education Center, the business of JEEP can really take off. In addition to going *out* to people, we are now able to invite people *inside* to nourish themselves educationally and spiritually, their own unique home base, a place to connect and recharge. From one thousand people annually, we envision, with G-d’s help, assisting two thousand or more people annually in the coming years.

All this has happened through the generous support of many hundreds of individuals and organizations, to whom we are exceedingly grateful and offer our heartfelt blessings.

For thousands of years the Jewish people have worked to make the world a place of justice and kindness, a place that G-d is proud to call home, what Judaism calls “Moshiach and Redemption.” Today, if the wind is right, we can sniff a new world: This year Israel became the world’s largest center of Jewish population—for the first time in 2000 years. More and more cures are being discovered for “hopeless” illnesses. I can give charity instantly to someone in Australia or join a Torah lesson with thousands of people around the globe.

Most importantly, each personal redemption that we experience brings the final redemption a step closer. Winning our own inner struggle to do the right thing, sharing an inspiring insight or experience, helping another succeed at their challenges, or helping build an organization that facilitates personal success through Jewish education, every victory helps.

Please join our—and your—celebration, the dedication of the Arthur Schreiber Jewish Education Center on Sunday, June 8th at noon, and Jewish Education Day as proclaimed by Cincinnati, Golf Manor and Amberley Villages.

About JEEP

Jewish Education for Every Person

OUR VISION: A Jewish community in which **every person** has access to our spiritual inheritance and can use it to reach his or her full potential.

OUR MISSION: To help local people with special needs access Jewish education and connections to empower them to better overcome their life challenges.

JEEP SERVES:

- **Children** and youth with learning and other challenges
- **Seniors** in nursing homes and those who are homebound
- **Adults** with disabilities • **Patients** in hospitals
- **Alcoholics and addicts** wishing to obtain or maintain recovery using Jewish spiritual tools and support

Please visit us at Jewisheducate.org

Feel free to contact us about *Headlights* or Jewish education.
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Jewish Spiritual Tools
for Meeting Life’s Challenges

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Save the Date: June 8, 2014, 12 noon:

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JEEP’s mission is to empower local people with challenges and disabilities by helping them access Jewish education and connections, presented in ways which they can best use to increase their successes and improve the quality of their life. JEEP currently serves 1000 clients annually:

- children and youth · patients in hospital · residents of nursing homes · adults with disabilities*
- people who are substance dependent or face similar challenges*



Baking, Shmoozing and Creating Halom House enrichment program takes off

JEEP has launched an exciting program of activities for Halom House, the Cincinnati Jewish community's organization that provides residential services for adults with developmental disabilities. With the generous support of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, JEEP has developed a twice weekly program of crafts, music, movement, Jewish holiday celebration, cooking, science and nature exploration, all carefully designed to be safe, stimulating and appropriate for this special group of people. The residents come to

the JEEP's Arthur Schreiber Jewish Education Center in Golf Manor for one session, and the second takes place in the Halom House Blue Ash facility.

Wendy Sue Steinberg, a veteran special education specialist, leads the sessions and is delighted with the warm and special camaraderie that is developing with the group of participants, who are "absolutely delightful." "Three residents came to the initial meeting," Wendy Sue said. "But they

enjoyed it so much that they told their friends, and the enthusiasm quickly spread. Now everyone comes, and really likes the feeling of community that's developed. We've done a variety of Purim crafts and cooking, and are now doing Pesach projects. Last night we focused on healthy foods, and everyone loved it. The staff also seems to really enjoy this time; they come to the table and are able to interact with the residents in a relaxed way. Everyone chats and participates, in a warm atmosphere."

Wendy Sue is thrilled that "everyone meets me at the door and runs to the table, eager to begin. And each meeting ends with one

of the residents regularly telling me, "I love you. Thank you for coming."

Kathy Shannon, Halom House director, comments, "Wnedy's activities brings our Jewish traditions and holidays to life! So Sundays and Mondays have become very important days in the lives of our residents. It's what makes one day different than another; it becomes ritual. And this Wendy ritual makes it possible to share one of their deepest needs, which is a connection with others. Those of us who work with individuals with developmental disabilities know the pain of isolation better than anyone. Wendy assists in embracing the very stages of our residents' lives. Through meaningful activities

and ceremonies Wendy nurtures a love of our faith and traditional Jewish values. We are grateful to the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati and JEEP for making this program possible."

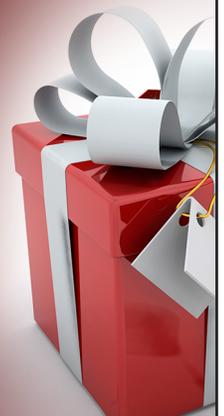


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The Death of Phillip Seymour Hoffman

By Rea Bochner

Addiction is a dreadful disease. As an addict, I know.

When I read that Phillip Seymour Hoffman, the Oscar-winning actor, had died of a drug overdose, I felt like I'd been sucker-punched. All I could think was, That could have been me.

You wouldn't know it from looking at me, with my long skirts, scarved head and the gaggle of kids in the back of my minivan, but I am an addict. I have been one, I believe, from the day I was born, and I will be one until the day I die. Despite being clean, sober and "abstinent" for almost a decade, I am not cured of the disease of addiction. I simply have a reprieve, one day at a time.

Many people, including a number in the medical establishment, would take issue with my calling addiction a "disease." For those not afflicted with it, the ones who can leave a half-full glass of wine on the table, it would seem to be just a question of willpower:

If someone has a problem with drugs, they just shouldn't take them. A plus B equals C.

But let me assure you, from someone who has crawled her way up from the depths, that addiction is not a matter of willpower. When it comes to that bite, drink, smoke, or shot, I don't have a choice. I may manage to claw my way through a few days without them, white-knuckled and shaky, but unless I have the support structure I need in place, I will always go back and use again.

And again. And again. Until it kills me.

Allow me to illustrate.

My drug of choice is food. As early as I can remember, I ate differently from everyone else I knew. I ate copious amounts of it. I dug it out of garbage cans. I stole it from other people. I snuck it and hid it. Naturally, I was obese by the time I was ten years old. I didn't want to be fat, and my classmates' teasing ripped me to shreds. I resolved, over and over, to lose weight. And yet I couldn't stay away from the food. I didn't know how to deal with the myriad of feelings I had, the pain, the anxiety; I had no tools to cope with life. Eventually, I would find a carton of ice cream in the freezer, desperate for something that would numb me out. With the first

bite, there was a rush of relief as the feelings dissolved. By 16, I weighed 250 pounds.

Desperate to stall the steep incline in weight, I started purging. It made me feel "in control," despite being unable to stop eating

**ADDICTION IS NO
DISCRIMINATOR,
IT TAKES NO
PRISONERS.**

everything in sight. But one night, during a purge, the food got caught deep in my throat and I started choking. I couldn't breathe – I couldn't even make a sound. For a few long moments, I was sure I was going to die.

Please God, I prayed silently. Please don't let me die like this. I promise, I'll never do it again.

Miraculously, the food dislodged. I could breathe again.

Five minutes later, I went back downstairs for something to eat.

After college, I fulfilled a lifelong dream of working at two of the most successful film production companies. I wanted to make a name for myself there, work my way up, have the kind of success I knew could be mine if I just put my all into it. But within a few months, I was calling out sick every day so I could stay home and binge. I would eat myself sick, resolve not to do it again, and then go out, sometimes minutes later, to buy more food.

I barely showered or got out of my pajamas. I was obese, alone, isolated, ashamed. Everything I touched spun out of control. I would wake up and cry, exhausted by the prospect of another day of battling myself. I knew, somehow, that I was the problem, but I could no more control myself than I could a tsunami. I wanted to live my life, to be a functional human being. I wanted to stop. But I had no choice.

I desperately hoped that I could find some magic pill that would give me the power I needed to control myself. I consulted medical professionals, who I assumed would get the root of the problem.

"What happens," I once asked a doctor at a world-renowned weight-loss center, "if there's a chocolate cake in the kitchen that's calling to me from downstairs and I can't not eat it?"

She stared at me blankly. "Just don't eat it."

She might have well have told me not to breathe.

Once, I met a man named Nate. He was, handsome and highly intelligent. He was also an alcoholic. Almost every night would find him drunk at the local bar, ranting nonsense at everyone, his eyes glassy and melancholy.

One night, Nate staggered over to me, looked me dead in the eyes, and said, "I know you."

I laughed him off. "I know you, too, Nate..."

But I knew that wasn't what he meant. He recognized the



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same beast in me that was tormenting him. I looked into his sad eyes and was chilled to the bone: it was like looking at myself.

It was exactly how I felt this week, seeing Phillip Seymour Hoffman's face next to the headline announcing his death. According to reports, he had been clean and sober for 23 years before he relapsed. 23 years he lived without a drink or a drug, even as he became one of the most famous and respected actors in the world. He had a partner and three children, and a successful career. He had everything to fight for. But he didn't make it.

I was blessed to find recovery ten years ago in a 12-step program, which has literally saved my life. I've developed a structure of support has enabled me to live through some of life's most intense transitions - marriage, birth, and death - without needing to eat compulsively or use drugs. But Hoffman's death reminds me that I can easily go right back where I was. It was never the food or the drugs that were my problem; I am my problem. I still have to battle a disease that can kill me, every day, for the rest of my life.

Recovery means being fully present for every single experience, from the sublime to the harrowing, without anything to take the edge off. And I'll tell you, life on this side is hard. Not only do we in recovery have to deal with the challenges of everyday living, but we do so with one hand on the cage that holds our demons. Even when the compulsion to use is lifted, there is always that impulse, to pick up again. If I'm not vigilant, I will forget. I'll forget the desperation and the fear and the horror, and I will convince myself that it's okay to have just one. Just this one time.

One of the most painful parts of my disease was the isolation in a world that doesn't understand addiction, which regards us as weak people who make poor choices. I am not morally corrupt, or lazy, or lacking willpower. I am imperfect, to be sure, but I am just as decent and ambitious a person as anyone else. I am a wife, a parent, a professional writer. If, God forbid, I chose to go back into my addiction, it would not be because I am a bad person. It would be because I am a sick person.

Addiction is no discriminator; it affects people of all ages, races, colors and creeds. And, as we see with Mr. Hoffman, it takes no prisoners. If we are to help those struggling to overcome addiction - and there are many of us in the Jewish world -



our view of what addiction is needs to change. When we hear that someone is battling cancer, God forbid, the community mobilizes to help. When we hear that so-and-so's daughter just went to rehab, however, it means whispers behind palms, speculation about who is to blame, and avoiding eye contact when you see her parents at shul. But addiction is just as serious and lethal a disease as any. And, more importantly, it's no one's fault.

I don't blame Phillip Seymour Hoffman for his death. He, like me, had an incurable disease he had to battle for his entire life. I can only hope that others like us will find the help they need, along with people who understand and have compassion for them, so that they can have a chance to recover.

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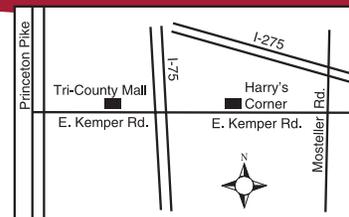
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From the JEEP files: A day in the life of a roving rabbi

by Rabbi Levi Fuss, JEEP chaplain

Story #1— A Jewish ending

“On one of my volunteer chaplaincy visits to the hospital, I met Stan, an eighty-year old man in the ICU. Only two days earlier the doctors had been sure that it was the end. They had given a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) order. But then, Stan’s wife decided to override the order. Soon after, Stan had the anticipated cardiac arrest. The medical team resuscitated him, and proceeded to stabilize him and put in a pacemaker.

In addition to visiting and providing friendship and support to the couple, I just had a feeling that there was something more that needed to be accomplished, some other reason that I was there. We schmoozed for a while, and the wife brought up the fact that her husband had decided that when his time did come, he wanted to be cremated. I gently informed her that cremation was not the traditional Jewish way. She wasn’t Jewish, but was very respectful and accommodating of her husband’s traditions. She responded, “Oh. I never really thought about it, that this might not be the Jewish way. Listen, I want to do what’s best for him, but of course, also what he wants.”

She proceeded to ask him again, and discuss it with him. He also had been unaware that the Jewish tradition is burial. Once informed, he agreed, that he wanted to have a proper Jewish burial.

Within a short time, Stan recovered enough to be discharged from the hospital, and was able to return to the comfort of his home. And our short interaction at a critical juncture will make a difference at the end of his hopefully long and satisfying days.

Story 2: Since Moses

Today, I visited an assisted living facility that I have been visiting regularly for several years.

As I went through the lobby, I saw a man that I had never met, reading the Israelite. I went over and asked him, in a friendly manner, “Are you Jewish?” “Yes!” he replied. “How did you know to come here and visit me?” he went on with great excitement.

As we started schmoozing, he told me that he had been actively involved in an area congregation for approximately 70 years, helping with the High Holiday services. He enjoyed sharing incidents related to that and other interesting stories about his life. He kept interjecting with, “Wow, you’re amazing. A traveling rabbi, coming here to visit me—keeping the Jewish flame alive. I can’t go to the synagogue. It means so much to me that Judaism isn’t just there. You’re bringing Judaism here, to me, way out here.”

Then Herb asked what I was holding, when he saw some Hebrew letters on the small book I had tucked under my arm. I showed him it was a small Chumash, a book of the Torah. He hadn’t seen or held one in years, since he’d been in the facility, and was very excited to just feel that sense of connection. “This is the book,” he kept saying, “it goes all the way back to Moses. I just feel good looking and it and reading a bit.” We shared a few

insights from the upcoming Torah portion.

Herb was so thankful. He enjoyed a respite from his loneliness, and being able to share company and conversation. He was thrilled to be able to begin to form a relationship with a friendly rabbi who had the time and interest in being there for



him. He relished the connection and we parted with him eagerly anticipating my next visit.

Herb mentioned that he is an avid chess player, and would love to have someone come and play with him. If any readers have a little spare time to brighten up a senior’s day, and want a good mental exercise and challenge, please call Rabbi Fuss at the JEEP office, and we’ll set up a chess partnership.

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Connecting on the Trail

There were about two dozen people on Rabbi Moshe Cohen's Torah Hike. Most had hiked a lot. Many had prayed. But not with a specifically Jewish focus.

Cohen, suddenly took off down the trail at a rapid pace. The hikers set off behind him, chattering happily on this sunny morning. They walked for five minutes, their conversations growing louder. But oddly, Cohen was quiet.

Then he stopped. When the hikers caught up to him, Cohen told them to walk for another five minutes, this time in complete silence. What a simple exercise, but how powerful the impact. It's amazing what one hears as the mind quiets down. The rustling of a tree branch. The crunch of a foot as it meets the earth. The pounding of one's heart.

For Cohen, that small, still space is one where G-d can be encountered.

What makes his walks Jewish is not the encounter with nature — that, he says, has a universal power—but how he guides his groups to respond by reflecting on the teachings of rabbis who loved the outdoors, such as Nachman of Breslov and the Baal Shem Tov.

"In the wilderness, it's hard not to experience awe," he says. "And as our rabbis explained, the gateway to G-d is awe."

Ruth Stone joined on a Torah Trek in a desert in Utah. She describes hiking to the top of a stone arch and standing with more than 50 others. "That moment was so spiritual, looking up at the arch, seeing all those Jews standing together," she says. "I think it's perfectly fine and appropriate to find a connection to G-d outside the synagogue walls, as well as inside."



Tips for Choosing a Hebrew School for Children with Special Needs

By Meredith Polsky

When your child has special learning needs—or any kind of physical, emotional, or behavioral challenge that impacts learning—finding a suitable religious education can be a challenge.

For those of us who look towards an afternoon or Sunday Hebrew School to provide our children’s Jewish education, particular challenges may arise. First of all, show us a child for whom 4:00 p.m.—after a full day of a structured secular school environment—is an optimum time for learning, and we’ll show you a dozen more for whom it’s not. At 4:00 p.m., most children exhibit some type of “special learning need.” For those with an actual diagnosis, though, these tips may come in especially handy:

1. Does the Hebrew School or the synagogue have a written statement on their inclusion policies, or a special needs task force or committee? If they do, they have already given this issue a decent amount of thought and you won’t be the first person they’re hearing from about a child with special needs. If they don’t, it doesn’t necessarily mean they don’t care about inclusion. You may, however, find yourself in the position of “trailblazer” as you help your child navigate the school (and vice versa).

2. What’s the Hebrew School’s track record on including children with special needs? Ask for specifics. If your child has an auditory processing disorder, ask how they have accommodated other kids who struggle in similar ways. How many kids have there been in recent years whose special learning needs were a reason for leaving the program? This will give you a good idea about what extent they expect your child to meet their needs, versus how far they are willing to go to meet your child’s needs.

3. What kinds of supports does the Hebrew School have in

place? Some programs employ a learning specialist or a Hebrew resource room teacher. You’ll want to meet with those people personally to learn about their approach to teaching. Some programs will tell you that because their classes are small, they are able to accommodate many different kinds of learners. That might be true, but small class size does not, in and of itself, equal a true understanding of special needs. Sit in a couple of classes and see

for yourself. Do the structure of the class and the methods of teaching match your child’s learning needs?

4. Speaking of sitting in on classes—if a school says they don’t allow that (“It causes too much disruption to our students” or “If one parent sits in, every parent will want to” or anything else you might hear) that’s usually a red flag. A school that’s proud of what goes on in their classrooms should want to shout it from the rooftops.

5. Ask about the classes and the general schedule. Find out what a typical class size is, and if

they place a limit on how many children can be in a class. Get a sense of what the students do in the classroom. Are they split into groups based on ability? Do they typically learn only as a whole class? Do students get pulled out for support in Hebrew when needed? Is there a system for providing extra support in the classroom? Are there a lot of transitions (classroom to start, sanctuary for prayers, all-purpose room for music, etc.)? Some children thrive on “shaking things up;” others will struggle with constant changes.

6. Who are the teachers? What percentage of them are trained as educators? How long have they been teaching? What’s the level of teacher-turnover at the school? To what extent is the school committed to professional development? What percentage of professional development sessions focus on learning differences among students? Hebrew School teachers who are trained educators are often more likely to understand the nuances of learning differences.

7. What is the synagogue’s approach to the bar and bat mitzvah ceremony? Even though this milestone might feel a long way off, finding out about the process could provide a lot of insight. Is every student expected to do roughly the same thing when it comes to the bar or bat mitzvah? Are there options to choose from (such as a shorter service, less emphasis on Hebrew, or other accommodations to meet the needs of different learners)? If there doesn’t seem to be leeway here, it’s unlikely that children with moderate to severe learning differences make it through their Hebrew School program.

8. How do you feel when you walk into the Hebrew School? If it doesn’t feel warm and welcoming to you, it probably won’t feel



“Harry was there for me every day for 67 years. Now I want Kaddish to be said for him every day for eleven months.”

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that way to your child either. When we look at a school's ability to accommodate diverse learners, attitude is an important starting point. Hebrew Schools and synagogues that espouse a "can do" attitude towards accepting every individual speak volumes about their willingness and ability to create a successful environment for your child.

The path to finding the right religious education for your child won't always be easy. You might meet people along the way who don't yet understand how your child's participation will make their community stronger, and how your child's individual gifts will create a more vibrant Jewish education for everyone. But you will also meet people who renew your faith, strengthen your resolve, and accompany you on your journey. Good luck!

This post is part of a joint series with Kveller & Matan during Jewish Disability Awareness Month. Through advocacy, education and training opportunities Matan empowers the Jewish community to include children with special needs. For more information, visit their website, matankids.org.

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Jeep News

You're Invited! JEEP celebrates new center with Gala Building Dedication

Sunday June 8th, 2014, 12:00 noon, will be a special celebration for the entire community. The formal dedication of JEEP's new center, the Arthur Schreiber Jewish Education Center will take place, with speakers, entertainment, refreshments, and a Judaic art show and sale.

JEEP is grateful to the Cohon Family Foundation for sponsoring our new center. Rabbi Baruch Cohon, of LA, CFO of the Foundation



and life-long friend of Arthur Schreiber, may he rest in peace, will accept the Rabbi Eliezer Silver Memorial Award and will address the gathering. Rabbi Cohon is a multi-talented cantor, speaker, musician and entertainer. Dr. David Novick of Dayton, internist and a foremost expert on addictions, will share insights on addiction and recovery with his uniquely sharp sense of humor. City mayors will proclaim Arthur Schreiber Jewish Education Day and the Halom House Drumming Circle will provide musical entertainment, led by Scott Miller.

Please join us for an inspiring and entertaining afternoon, and celebrate JEEP's milestone, the acquisition of a beautiful new home that will enable us to help thousands more people with challenges and disabilities to access Jewish education and connections.

Spreading Purim Joy Around the 'Nati

Purim is a holiday made for reaching out and connecting, Jewish fun and pride. Wide-eyed, red-lipsticked princesses and mustached superheroes flying on a buzz of excitement. A day of joyful celebration, with very user-friendly observances, like giving *Shalach Manos*—baskets of edible goodies to friends. What's not to like?

JEEP is dedicated to bringing the celebration to those who can't get out to a Purim party. This year Rabbi Levi and Devorah Fuss organized ten groups of volunteers to fan out and visit twenty locations, bringing costumed visitors, Purim goodies and celebration to over 150 people. Fifteen nursing homes, several home and hospital visits, including nineteen megillah readings took place, with true friendship and sharing. We are grateful to Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, Atara Girls' High School and Yeshivas Lubavitch of Cincinnati for partnering with us to spread the joy.

Miriam Goldstein brought Purim baskets to residents of a dementia ward. Her training as a social worker came in handy, helping her create a memorable experience and sense just where and how to connect. "I visited Lou, a resident confined to his bed, who had very limited movement," Miriam recalled. "I approached the bed and gently wished him a Happy Purim. At first Lou grumbled and asked me to leave. While wanting to respect his wishes, I thought I'd try just a bit to push through his resistance. I took out a large wooden gragger and said, 'This sound may bring back happy memories.' Then I swung it. When Lou heard the sound, I saw a smile break that lit up his face." Miriam mused and said, "That moment made my whole Purim. Even though Lou was in such a limited and difficult situation, he responded to and participated in



one of the most special parts of Purim—the joy.

Aliza Wucher, Director of Development at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, brought four upper elementary girls with her to deliver baskets to a retirement home. The mutual joy is apparent on the pictures of the smiling girls and residents. Aliza shared that, "Although the girls were nervous at first, they got used to it and were pleasant and cheerful to the men and women they met. The residents loved seeing their costumes and talking to them about their hobbies and interests. I was so proud of the girls for doing this tremendous mitzvah."

Rabbi Fuss and Rabbi Karp offered a hearty thanks and praise to the volunteers. "These generous people took time out from their own busy day of celebration to bring Purim to many who might have otherwise missed out."

Cincinnati Jewish Recovery Update

The CJR community continues to grow, in quantity and quality, as our sense of friendship and mutual trust deepens. Monthly events celebrate Jewish holidays and Shabbat meals, and weekly learning sessions give us tools and insight. Many folks in recovery enjoy private learning and counseling sessions that fit their individual needs and schedules.

December— A festive Chanukah dinner was shared as we discussed how a little light can indeed push away vast darkness. The flickering menorahs in the window of the center provided perfect illustration.

January— A Saturday night get-together focused on storytelling. Jewish stories enrich our lives and recovery with their

ample examples, lessons and food for thought.

February— We stepped into Adar, the two months of added joy, with a brunch in which everyone discussed and shared how joy means so much more than a superficial, “I’m happy” smile plastered on our faces, but is a choice and an attitude to learn to embrace and work on.



March — A gala Purim party featured Cat in the Hat, a clown, a nurse, a hippie, and other sundry creatures. A megillah reading with succinct explanation, a delicious Purim meal, sincere sharing of our experience, strength and hope, mutual support and blessings of strength were savored by all.

Coming next: Sober Passover Seder— Monday, April 14th . Call 733-4400 or email rabbi@jewisheducate.org for details.

Voices from the CJR community
(details changed to protect anonymity:)

“I resisted coming to JEEP events for a long time. But now that I’m here, I’m really glad, I feel the caring. It’s good.”

“My best friend keeps telling me what a difference he sees in me, since I’ve been hanging around you guys. I am more centered, at peace with myself and my Jewishness, which I’ve struggled with for years.”

“I’ve been in recovery for a long time, but I still struggled to find a place where I could really connect with Judaism and recovery at the same time, in the same place, with the same people. This is very important to me.”

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Our goal is to obtain and maintain recovery while integrating the spiritual Twelve-Step approach with a greater understanding and appreciation of our Judaism. For those interested in such a pursuit, we invite you to join us.



Seniors: Beginning our Journeys

By Jacquelyn Dwoskin

Ed. Note: In our Chanukah issue, we shared another article that focused on Abraham and Sarah, and their openness to each stage and day of their lives. This article focuses on a deeper perspective that both Abraham and Moshe brought to their later years.

With people generally living longer lives today than in the past, many have sought to articulate a unique spirituality for those facing the questions, challenges, and joys that come with old age.

In Genesis (25:8), we learn that the patriarch Abraham died at age 175, having reached a “good ripe age, old and contented.” In Deuteronomy (34:7-8), we learn that Moses died at the age of 120, with eyes “undimmed and vigor unabated.” Both men set out on their transformative journeys at older ages. Abraham was 75 when he left Haran. Moses was 80 when he led the Israelites out of Egypt.

There are many references to the decline and challenges of growing old in Jewish texts, but these references clearly teach us that there is good in old age, that there is health and strength. Do these texts point to a spirituality of Jewish aging? Can growing older be a time when we do not end our journeys, but begin them?

Embarking on the Journey

Spirituality, at its core, is the sense of connection that goes

beyond one’s sense of self, the ultimate of which is the relationship between G-d and humanity. Both Abraham and Moses hear God’s call. Abraham is told, “Go forth from your native land and from your

WE CAN ACCEPT OUR LIMITATIONS, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY CONNECTING TO WHAT IS LIMITLESS.

father’s house to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1). Moses stops to regard the wondrous sight of the burning bush (Exodus 3:3) and hears God’s call, “Moses, Moses,” to which he answers, “Here I am.”

Our forefathers begin their most important journeys as older men. Abraham hears G-d tell him to go forth. Moses hears G-d calling his name. In beginning a spiritual journey at an older age, both Abraham and Moses have accumulated multiple life experiences. They have passed through childhood and adolescence. They have worked and married. They have been part of a community and family. Both men hear G-d’s commanding voice.

Being older, is Abraham more open to and willing to set forth

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on a radically new path? Being older, is Moses more sensitive, has he become quieter within himself that he can stop and look and hear? In learning from these great and holy men, we might ask, does reaching an older age bring unique ability to explore and experience spirituality?

Commanded Not to Feel Old

There is a phrase attributed to the Hasidic master Reb Nachman of Breslov: Jews are forbidden to feel old. He doesn't say, it's better to not feel old, he uses the very strong language of forbidding Jews to feel old— that is, static, done, stagnant or complacent.

Abraham and Moses challenge common notions of growing old. Rather than have their peak life experience as young men, they come of age as old men. Abraham dies with full days; Moses dies with eyes undimmed, with the ability to see and understand things clearly, and with vigor, with vitality. By following G-d's call, both men have gone beyond the limits of their expected routines. They are able to venture into the unknown. They become leaders, transforming themselves and others in the process.

While we always possess a unique and unbreakable relationship with G-d, old age presents the possibilities of reaffirming this relationship, of perhaps hearing the call in a new way, the opportunity for spiritual transformation.

The spiritual transformation offers strength and vigor that go beyond the purely physical, and may have little to do with our physical states. As we grow closer to the limits of life, there is work for us to do that will benefit the next generation.

Connecting to the Limitless

Abraham, the first elder described in the Torah, answers G-d's call.: "Go forth, Go to yourself." As Abraham's children, we have the opportunity to try to tune into and integrate G-d's voice calling us, and G-d's challenge to us. There are few older adults who do not recognize the challenges that come as we age. We can accept our limitations, while simultaneously connecting to what is limitless, for God has no boundaries. As we grow older, we may be uniquely able to feel this truth.

We may often experience diminished physical capacity, and the knowledge that our own lives will end. And yet, on a spiritual level, what we are capable of understanding that transcends the physical experience.

The first person to follow G-d's voice is Abraham, an elder. Our first elder does not live in retirement, but rather begins a journey and continues to grow, learn, and achieve. He

grows from individual to starting to develop a nation bound to G-d. Therefore, Reb Nachman can tell us that we are forbidden to feel old or stagnant, even if we are old in years.

Moses is willing to stop and see the miracle of the burning bush. Moses too responds to G-d's challenging call. His answer is clear: Hineni, I am here. He leads the Jewish people out of slavery into freedom. This elder does not remain a shepherd, but also continues to grow, learn, and achieve.

Older adult spirituality has a unique place in Jewish tradition. Older ears may be distinctly able to hear and follow G-d's call to them, urging them to venture forward. We must continue to forge new paths for ourselves, and for those who will follow us, well into our good old age.

Jacquelyn Dwoskin is a Professor and Project Specialist in Gerontology at Nova Southeastern University Fischler School of Education and Human Services.

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