

Mendocino Megillah



Mendocino Coast Jewish Community

January 2009 (5769)

15701 Caspar Road, Caspar, CA <http://www.mcjc.org> (707) 964-6146
 PDF Version: <http://www.mcjc.org/mjoldart/Megillah/MJMM0000.htm> Email: megillah@mcjc.org



Rabbi's Notes: This is for Deena:

I begin by noting that, after hounding myself and all of you for many years in search of life's meaning, just the other day I was driving along, my thoughts meandering as they do -- and suddenly a whole new framework occurred to me! Life doesn't need to be -- and maybe can't be -- meaningful. It needs to be *whole*.

Right now in our cycle of Torah readings we are in the latter part of the book of Genesis. And we notice right away that the life of the patriarch Jacob dominates the second half of the book. Where else in scripture does one find such a lengthy, detailed story of one life? Or one so rich in dramatic and moral tensions, so troubling and multivalent? (Perhaps only the story of David in the books of Samuel comes close in both detail and drama.)

I find myself noticing the beautiful, musical names of the weekly portions: *Vayetze*, *Vayishlach*, *Vayeshev* -- then the discordant-sounding *Miketz* -- then *Vayigash* and finally *Vayechi*. A life flows through these chapters:

In *Vayetze* ("he came out") Jacob is born the younger of twins, absconds with the blessing and the birthright of his rival and sets out into the world to find a bride.

In *Vayishlach* ("he sent") he falls in love (the first, or at least the hottest, romance in Torah) and becomes a man of means: wives, children, cattle, land.

In *Vayeshev* ("he settled") he is alone, wrestles, is wounded. Meets his estranged brother. Unbearable losses begin. His beloved Rachel dies. His favored son is killed by beasts. He attains a kind of sorrowful stillness.

[Let's wait a moment to talk about *Miketz*, which is altogether different...]

In *Vayigash* ("he approached") it is the void he approaches. Bereavement becomes central. All his children have gone. He is alone and hungry, sees only loss ahead.

In *Vayechi* ("he lived") all this is reversed. Jacob is reunited with all of his children, even the beloved Joseph, who was not slain by wild animals after all. Their needs are fully satisfied. Jacob arranges his own burial, blesses each child (well almost every child -- there is no blessing for the one daughter -- named, curiously, Deena) and, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, "lies down and is gathered to his kin." And here ends the book of Genesis.

You could tell the story much more briefly: fight, love, gain, lose, [the anomalous *Miketz*] despair and resolve..

What makes a whole life, then? A rich journey with important chapters. Growth, challenge, transformation. One might even say "*a good story*."

A "meaningful life," by contrast, sounds more static. A life occupied with virtue, inquiry, love -- these are the things of meaning. You could take a cross-section of a life at any point and say, "Is this meaningful or not?" Or, as we sometimes say to slackers (including, perhaps, ourselves) "What the hell are you doing with yourself anyhow?"

A full life, though, is about all its parts -- rich and poor, generous and withholding, strong and feeble. It's about the unattractive and unsuccessful parts as much as the successful ones. And it is about all those aspects flowing through the medium of time. Jacob might have been a better person if he worked out his sibling issues right away and got right on with living a life of service and study. But to live a whole life there has to be material. In the end of it all, Jacob had a very full blessing to offer each of his sons and grandsons -- because he earned every insight.

Now on to that matter of *Miketz*. *Ketz* is a special word. It means 'end' -- but not just any end. It means The End. *Ketz yamim* is the "End of Days." *Miketz* means "from

the end." Our parshah *Miketz* barely mentions Jacob, and its goings-on happen far from him. We might think of this chapter, with its incongruous-sounding name, as a kind of rabbit hole [or, Deena, a kind of hypertext] allowing us to drop through the story we thought we were hearing into another layer entirely. Jacob's son, Joseph, whom Jacob thought had died many years before, is in fact alive. At the beginning of *Miketz* we find Joseph in an Egyptian prison. Because of his personal intricacies, he undergoes a journey of his own. He is lifted from prison and becomes chief advisor to Pharaoh, administering the wealth of the kingdom. He has the insight to store grain against future famine. Meanwhile up in Canaan...famine in fact ensues. Jacob sends his sons down to Egypt to buy food. These are the same brothers who had faked Joseph's death, sold him into slavery and broken their father's heart. Now they are face-to-face with this Chief Advisor. Joseph recognizes the brothers, but they do not recognize him. He has the power of life and death over them. What will he do???

The story of Joseph is my favorite in Torah -- such a poignant, elegant tale. But this year I read it differently. It is the story of Jacob, really, more even than the story of Joseph -- *only Jacob doesn't know this part of the story*. From the perspective of Jacob the aging patriarch alone up in Canaan, sending his surviving children down into the maw of Egypt, he knows only bereavement and despair. But there is a larger engine to the story than what he knows, happening elsewhere than where he is, with factors in play that he can't begin to imagine. There is that rabbit hole of *Miketz*, "from the end," which drops us down into another layer, where a larger force-field is in play, a field which includes healing, reconciliation and regeneration, which will pull our hero, Jacob, into a reality quite other than what he sees for himself. At the end of his life he is surrounded by all his children and grandchildren, sustained with their wealth, and knowing that the story will go on beyond him. It's a better story than even Jacob knows.

We may think that we know the story of our own life, at least as it has played out to this moment. But perhaps there is more information *miketz* -- "from the end," down the rabbit hole, in hypertext -- than what we can see from our own vantage point. Maybe there are larger forces than those we see in operation as we fight, love, gain, lose, despair and resolve. Maybe, as we can see in Jacob's biography but he could not, those forces have to do with reconciliation and transformation across a larger playing field than even the terms of our individual lives. A good story indeed.

I should add that the occasion for this particular davar Torah was the first yartzheit of our dear Walter Green -- who certainly lived an epic life (weighted significantly in the direction of generosity, beauty and love.) In the story of Walter's long life we can see the larger forces of history, faith and transformation at play on his own lovely soul. And we can see today how the story of his years in the world continue to affect and transform us, even after he is gone. *Vayechi* -- he lives onward.

- Rabbi Margaret Holub

Mark Your Calendar For Tu' B'Shevat



The beautiful, holy, mystical holiday of Tu B'shevat falls on Sunday, February 8, and we will hold our annual seder of fruits and prayers for the earth that evening at 5:00 PM. Please let Margaret know if you are interested in helping to plan this year's celebration (937-5673 or mholub@mcn.org.) (mh)

Elder's Meetings

The Growing Older groups will meet in two different formats this month:

Wednesday, January 21st, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM (this is the corrected date)

For everyone interested in aging here on the Coast -- a check-in on our projects, thoughts for next steps and a chance to get to know each other better. We'll plan further for the public programs project (of which "How to Use Your Cell Phone" will be the first but not the last...), check in with each other about Roger Schwartz's friendly visitor program proposal and our various discussion groups. We've had a great start -- how should things go from here???

Tuesday, January 27, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

"Meaning and Purpose in Life Part 2" -- a continuation of the open discussion begun in January.

All are welcome (whatever your age -- as long as you are older than you were yesterday) to either gathering. Both will be at the shul. Bring a little something to share for lunch if you'd like (veggie, please.) If you would like a ride, please contact Margaret at 937-5673 or mholub@mcn.org. (mh)

Margaret To Participate In Interfaith Human Rights Seminar

Margaret has been invited to be part of the faculty for a weeklong seminar called "Faith in Human Rights" this

month at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley. She will be co-teaching with Sr. Marianne Farina CSC of the Dominican School at the Graduate Theological Union and Imam Khalid Sidiqi of the Center for Islamic Studies; Islamic Society of East Bay. She will also participate in a public interfaith panel on human rights and the issue of torture in Berkeley in April (details in future Megillah.) (mh)

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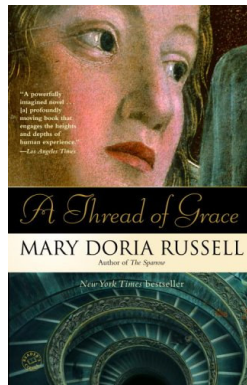
Kabbalat Shabbat

This month we will be celebrating our home Kabbalat Shabbat and dinner on Friday, January 9th at the home of Missy, Jesse, Jazmine, and Kayla Fiedler in Fort Bragg. Please call them at 961-1874 for directions and to let them know you are coming. In February we will be celebrating at the home of Mina Cohen and Jeffrey Berenson in Mendocino. The monthly Kabbalat Shabbat includes a song-filled short service that begins at 6:00 pm and is followed by a pot luck vegetarian dinner. If you would like to host this wonderful event in your home in future months, contact Mina at 937-1319. (mc)

MCJC Board Meeting Dates

The next MCJC board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 13th and then again on Thursday, February 12th. If you would like to attend a meeting please contact Raven Deerwater at raven@taxpractitioner.com so he can include you on the agenda. (mc)

Book Group



The book group will be meeting on Monday, January 12th at the home of Rosamond Gumpert Jorgensen. Please call Fran Schwartz at 937-1352 if you wish to join us. We will be reading Mary Doria Russell's book "Thread of Grace". This book is Mary Doria Russell's first historical novel, tracing the lives of a handful of fascinating characters. Through them, she

tells the little-known but true story of the network of Italian citizens who saved the lives of forty-three thousand Jews during World War II's final phase. In February we will be reading "Fabulous Small Jews" by Joseph Epstein. The book is available at Cheshire Books in Fort Bragg, where you will receive a 10% discount on MCJC Book Club books. (mc)



The Whole Mishpocha: Cheder

by Mina Cohen

We are excited with our new program starting this month with weekly classes for kids meeting at the new "cheder", Frankie's Ice Cream Parlor. If you attended Hebrew School or Sunday School I bet it wasn't at an ice cream parlor. This is an afterschool program for elementary school aged children and our teachers are Jessica Grinberg and Missy Fiedler who will be directing a wonderful art project you will see take shape at the shul over the next year. Stay tuned! If you are not currently on our mailing list and would like your child to attend contact Jessica at 937-2115. (mc)

January Tisch

We will come together for the Tisch Friday, January 30th at 6:00 pm. Come at 4:00 to bake challah and set up with the kids who will also be busy working on their project (see Family Stories). The Tisch is the last Friday of the month and is a great opportunity to celebrate Shabbat together and meet and greet with others in the Jewish community, "younger" and "elder". We provide the vegetarian dinner; you provide the "schmooze". (mc)

Megillah Thanks

Thanks to Mina Cohen for folding and mailing the December. While I edit the Megillah these days, Mina

makes sure that the hardcopy version is printed, copied and mailed out. Thanks Mina! If you'd like to help with this mitzvah that takes about 1 hour at home, contact Mina at 937-1319. (rge)



Shabbat Rainbow by Ann Becket © 2008
(Photo taken on the way to shul along Highway 1, Mendocino County)

**TODAH RABAH! (Great Thanks)
For The Following Generous Contributors Who in
the Last Month Helped Sustain Our Community**

Rena Blauner; Donna Camitta; Sharon and Frank Fanto; Claire Ellis and Chuck Greenberg; Eric Labowitz and Kathy Bailey; Fran and Roger Schwartz; Sharon and Mike Shapiro; Larry and Gayle Heiss; Irv and Rosalie Winesuff; Ira Rosenberg; Linda Jupiter; Mark and Deena Zarlin

Jonathan and Annett Lehan In Memory of Bert Lehan; Sharon and Mike Shapiro In Memory of Martin Ginsburg; Rachel Binah In Memory of Sydney and Eleanor Kellner; Bob Ross In Memory of Mark and Luba Ross.



Margaret's ecumenical Human Rights Seder was an interesting and moving event, attended by a variety of people from the greater community. The majority of participants described themselves as spiritual polygamists, which I have to suspect wouldn't have happened in many places outside of Mendocino.

My apologies to Eileen Lopate, who I failed to include in my list of MCJC mentor angels last month. Thanks also to Brona Lessen or letting me know about the omission.

Rachel Lahn's work will be shown at the Prentice Gallery in Mendocino with an artist's reception on December 13th at 5 PM. New work by Jackie Davidson will be part of a show at Partner's Gallery in Fort Bragg starting on January 15th.

Following the Shacharit service at the shul on Walter Green's Yahtzeit, Polly Green and Walter's daughter Nancy gave talks remembering Walter. Copies of what they said are available in the Recollections section of the MCJC website.

If you have Simchas (joys) you would like to share with the community, please email me.

- Bob Evans (rge) bobevans@mcjc.org

Ancient Art History, College of the Redwoods

If you are still interested in Mina Cohen's online Art History class this spring, the class is now fully enrolled. Mina can add you but you should contact her to do so at mcohen@mcn.org. This course requires access to a computer with internet access and high speed preferred. This course explores artwork from prehistoric time through the Middle Ages. This time includes the birth of all the world's religions including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Class starts January 20th.

Buddhist-Judaism or Jewish-Buddhism?

by Bob Evans

For many years, I have been struck by certain similarities between Buddhism and Judaism. It seems that in both systems many of the core teachings are parallel, and vary mostly in the lexicon and external trappings they employ. Our own Ira Rosenberg has written on this topic in some detail.

Some of the words that might be substituted for one another include:

Truth \cong Torah

God \cong Existence/Creation/Nature

Dharma \cong Learning

Mediation \cong Prayer

Meta \cong Chesed

Mara \cong Yetzer Hara

Nishama \cong Breath

Both traditions teach us to diminish the ego, to quiet and focus our minds and to live the right way (as tzadikim). Of course there are many differences as well. Most traditional practicing Jews would not have a Buddha statue in their homes, although most Buddhists would probably deny that it is an idol. Judaism teaches us that the soul transcends death, but with remarkably few details. Many Buddhist traditions teach that there is rebirth after death (and some of the Jewish masters believed in reincarnation).

While discussing these differences and similarities with Cindy (Mettika) Hoffman, she mentioned that she writes a column for the Fearless Mountain Newsletter (the quarterly publication of the Abhayagiri Monastery). It seemed like it would be an interesting exercise to try and adapt her writings to a Jewish perspective. The connections between Judaism and Buddhism are a huge topic, but I feel that Mettika's columns provide an interesting starting point.

From Mara's Desk: A Matter of Perspective

by Cindy Mettika Hoffman, revised by Bob Evans

The Yetzer Hara (the Evil Influence) has over the years been an important entity in my life. For whatever reason, and there are many, "the evil one" has whispered in my ear. His voice sounds just like mine or yours, if not seen and heard for what it is. Why just the other day I went to the café and planned to order a delicious and healthy salad and when asked what I wanted "cinnamon bun" slipped out of my mouth. The waitress asked if I would like that heated and I wondered why she would suggest that the salad would be heated. Then, I understood that Mara the tempter had lurked and that I could clarify, but didn't. In one fell swoop and slip of the tongue the Lord of Darkness provided the keys to craving, desire, sloth, fear, doubt, stubbornness, and ignorance. I have discovered that The Yetzer Hara thrives on making it difficult for me to discern between *needs* and *wants*.

The Evil One has a base sense of humor, which he manifests by seeking to corrupt, demote, disparage, disgrace, and depress others. Prayer and the study of Torah are antidotes to his whisperings and he really does not like being seen. In fact, he slinks away hissing when caught. And then we can have a good laugh at ourselves and the plight of the human condition. Some things I have learned, by catching the Yetzer Hara in the act, are that:

- We are all mortal and in the final analysis, those thoughts, feelings, fears and opinions which so obsess us in the here and now, are transitory;
- We can allow ourselves to feel our own suffering which in turn can release fear, and lead us to better love our neighbors as ourselves;
- We can allow ourselves to experience life as it is;
- We can improve our lives, our souls and repair the world through tzedakah (charity), tefilah (prayer) and gemilut chasidim (acts of loving kindness).

Last year after being diagnosed with an extremely rare blood disease, I underwent a treatment called monoclonal antibody therapy which is a 6 hour infusion that takes place every three weeks. Every fifteen minutes, the nursing staff checked my heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen level, and other vital statistics. I thought, with the Yetzer Hara's help, how kind and wonderful and thoughtful, and caring the staff was. Of course the Yetzer Hara suggested I not read the handout about the drug I was given, until a few weeks later. At the top of the form in bold letters was written **Mortadatodt (Azrael) May Kill You**. The nursing staff was indeed thoughtful and caring' but they were mostly interested if I were still living or had croaked while being infused.

I told this story to Ajahn Amaro (a Buddhist monk in Redwood Valley) who related a story by Ajahn Chah (an influential teacher of the [Buddhadharma](#) and a founder of two major monasteries in the [Thai Forest Tradition](#)) about a chicken who thought she was loved by her owner. The hen was picked up daily and rocked up and down. From the chicken's point of view she was loved and from the owner's point of view he was seeing when it was time for her to be part of a delicious and special Thai meal.

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« **January 2009** »

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 MCJC events are **bolded**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2 4:46p Candle lighting	3 10:30a – Shabbat Minyan Parashat Vayigash 6:16p Havdalah (72 min)
4	5	6 Asara B'Tvet	7	8	9 4:52p Candle lighting 6:00p – Kabbalat Shabbat - Fiedler	10 10:30a – Shabbat Minyan Parashat Vayechi 6:23p Havdalah (72 min)
11	12	13 Board Meeting	14	15	16 4:59p Candle lighting	17 10:30a – Shabbat Minyan Parashat Shemot 6:30p Havdalah (72 min)
18	19	20 11:00 – Elder’s Meeting (Projects)	21	22	23 5:07p Candle lighting	24 10:30a – Shabbat Minyan Parashat Vaera 6:38p Havdalah (72 min)
25	26 Rosh Chodesh Sh’vat	27 11:00p – Elder’s Meeting (Meaning)	28	29	30 5:15p Candle lighting 6:00p - Tisch	31 10:30a – Shabbat Minyan Parashat Bo 6:46p Havdalah (72 min)

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* = board member

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