
KOL KADIMA

The Voice of the Memphis Jewish High School

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Bamidar

1 Sivan, 5767
Candlelighting 7:40p.m.

May 18, 2007
Havdalah 8:41 p.m.

Schedule of Events

May 22 Review for exams
May 23 24 Shavout No School
May 28 Memorial Day No School
May 25,29-31 EXAMS
May 30 Computers must be returned

Head of School

Another eventful week has come and gone at the Memphis Jewish High School. I think we all feel time is swiftly passing in front of our eyes. Monday, the Memphis Area Council of Math Teachers met at the MJHS on Monday afternoon. They were quite impressed with the facilities and are anxious to hold future meetings here. Mrs. Indingaro is the past President of the Math Association and now serves as its Executive Secretary. Wednesday, we celebrated our Pioneer recognition evening and Yom Yerushalayim. The evening was lovely. Thank you to those who came and participated in our special evening. It was a perfect night to celebrate and recognize the pioneers of our school.

Yom Yershalayim is a relatively new holiday and therefore we have not developed unique customs and traditions as we have with other holidays. It is gradually becoming a "pilgrimage" day; when thousands of Israelis travel (some hike!) to Jerusalem to demonstrate solidarity with the City. This demonstration of solidarity is of special importance to the State of Israel, since the international community has never approved the "reunification" of the City under Israeli sovereignty, and many countries have not recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish State (The United Nations "partition plan" of November 1947 assigned a status of "International City" to Jerusalem). Mr. Gellman made sure we were connected to this holiday by special programming and lessons he conducted with our students. Mr. Gellman made a special presentation and led a discussion in regards to the various Gates of

This week we read the Parsha Bamidar. This is the beginning of the fourth book of the Torah. In this parsha Hashem directs Moshe to take a census of the Jewish people. In doing so we learn that there is a distinct way to count our fellow man. It is important to make sure that we are not viewed just as a number, but that each human being has significance. The process involved having leaders conduct the census in which they learned about their families. There is a personal component to this instruction. We learn that the twelve tribes were made up of large and small families. We learn about different leadership abilities and assignments. The goal of this Parsha is make sure that we elevate the people from merely a statistic to a position deserving of empathy and compassion.

Thursday we had a surprise visit from Ambassador Ayalon. He took a tour of our school and visited with our students. Courtney and Mrs. Traffas wanted to reprint the yearbooks so we could have documentation of his visit. Just kidding, but we did take several pictures.

I hope everyone has a chance to read and enjoy our MJHS Yearbook. It is a perfect pictorial story of our first year. Mrs. Traffas did an amazing job making sure our history was documented. Courtney Thomas matured and learned much about responsibility in her function as the Yearbook Editor. A special thank you to all that were involved.

Dean of Jewish Studies

This week we celebrated **Yom-Yerushalayim**, Jerusalem day. This year we mark 40 years since the unification of the city during the six-day war (1967-2007). This is a very meaningful day in the struggle for national self-definition.

I'd like to share with you an Idea based on something I read this week by Rabbi Emanuel Cohn.

The fact that both Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence day) and Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem day) occur in the period between Pesach and Shavuot, known as Sefirat

HaOmer, the counting of the Omer, is very significant. Indeed the journey we take from Pesach to Shavuot is the one from physical freedom to spiritual freedom, from the Exodus to the Acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It is a meaningful coincidence that the Israeli Independence Day, which signifies our physical and political independence, falls in the BEGINNING of the Omer period (two weeks after Pesach), while we celebrate the liberation and reunification of Jerusalem - an event of more spiritual character, since it stands for another cornerstone in the future reestablishment of the Kingdom of David in the Land of Israel - towards the END of the Omer (one week before Shavuot).

It seems, however, that the greatness of the "timing" of these two new festivals can be understood at an even deeper level if we reflect on the historical background of the mourning period during Sefirat HaOmer. The Talmud states the following incident:

"Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples extending from *Gevat* until *Antipatris* [two border towns in ancient Judaic territory] and they all died during one period because they did not treat each other with respect. And the world was left barren of Torah until R' Akiva came to our Rabbis in the south and taught the Torah to them. They were R' Meir, R' Yehudah, R' Yosef, R' Shimon and R' Elazar ben Shamua; and it was these later disciples who upheld the study of Torah at that time."¹

The Talmud later states that R' Akiva's students died between Pesach and Shavuot. The impact that this disastrous event had on the Jewish people can not be grasped. Not only the loss of so many young Jews, but also the potential Torah which was lost as a result, almost endangering the survival of the Oral Law, are both part of this unbelievable tragedy. Indeed this event left its signs on the Jewish community, and soon thereafter mourning-customs arose, such as refraining from marrying and not cutting one's hair between Pesach and Shavuot. Later on we find a tradition based in Spain and in the Province to shorten the mourning period till the 33rd of the Omer (Lag B'Omer).

On the other hand there is another custom of Ashkenazi origin that starts with the Omer-mourning customs only on first of Iyar lasting till Shavuot. The Rabbis try to explain this custom as a

"mutation" of the old custom with a different time frame, implying that the 33 days of mourning for R'

Akiva's students start according to this second custom on Iyar first. However, this explanation is not convincing from a historical point of view and it seems that the background of this second custom is not the tragedy of R' Akiva's students, but rather a totally different incident!

In the year 1096 the first crusade, aimed at conquering the holy land from the Muslims, was spreading rapidly through Europe. Thanks to historical accounts we are able to track the rioting route of the rabidly anti-Semitic crusaders: "On the **8th of Iyar (May 3, 1096)**, the crusaders surrounded the synagogue of **Speyer**; unable to break into it, they attacked any Jews they could find outside the synagogue, killing eleven of them. One of the victims, a woman, preferring death to conversion, the only choice left open by the crusaders, inaugurated the tradition of freely accepted martyrdom... On the **23rd of Iyar (May 18, 1096)** Worms suffered a similar fate. The crusaders first massacred the Jews who had remained in their houses, then, eight days later, those who had sought an illusory refuge in the bishop's castle. The victims numbered about 800; only a few accepted conversion and survived, the great majority choosing to be killed or suicide rather than apostasy... When the crusaders, led by Emicho, arrived outside the town of **Mainz** on the **3rd of Sivan (May 27, 1096)**, the burghers hastened to open the gates. The Jews took up arms under the leadership of Kalonymus ben Meshullam. Weakened through fasting, for they had hoped to avert the disaster through exemplary piety, the Jews had to retreat to the bishop's castle; however the latter could do nothing for them, as he himself had to flee before the combined assault of crusaders and burghers. After a brief struggle, a wholesale massacre ensued. More than 1,000 Jews met their deaths, either at the enemy's hands or their own. Those who managed to escape were overtaken; almost no one survived. A comparable disaster occurred in **Cologne**, where the community was attacked on the **6th of Sivan (May 30, 1096)**... There had been more than 5,000 victims." (Encyclopaedia Judaica)

This is the horrible account of the catastrophe of the first crusade. As can be seen, the major destruction of Jewish communities along the Rhine River occurred between first of Iyar and Shavuot. As a result of it, many Ashkenazi communities adopted the custom to mourn in this period, and not from Pesach till Lag ba'Omer, as the older custom dictates.

¹ Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 62b

It seems as if Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim receive a deeper meaning in light of the above mentioned historical tragedies, the death of the students of R' Akiva and the pogroms of the first crusades. The physical-political independence achieved by the Jewish people on Yom Ha'atzmaut might have a healing quality for the destruction of the Jewish communities in

Western Europe during the crusades. On the other hand, Yom Yerushalayim and its spiritual content might be a consoling reaction to the loss of the Torah Scholars of R' Akiva.

Indeed, at first glance the period of the Omer looks like one big plague, but when we "enter the land of Canaan" and "dig deeper", we realize that the realization of an independent Jewish State in our time is a "treasure of gold", a beautiful gift we have to cherish, and maybe through the miraculous shine of this "gold" the tragedies of the past receive a different perspective. In modern Israel the old circle of mourning has finally found a consolation.

Happy Yom Yerushalayim and Shabbat Shalom

Parsha

Provided By: Courtney Thomas

Parshat Bamidbar deals with laws and history of the *Mishkan*, or tabernacle. This *Mishkan*, which was later the temple and synagogue, was meant to serve as a permanent substitute for the Heavenly Presence that rested on Sinai. By making the *Mishkan* at the center of the nation, both spiritually and geographically, Mount Sinai would be among them at all times. As a symbol of their closeness to *Hashem*, they would camp around the tabernacle and show their dedication to both the *Mishkan*, and *Hashem*. This parsha is mainly on the laws and commandments of keeping and safeguarding the *Mishkan*, and the conduct of the *Kohanin* and the *Levites*, especially when they transport and dismantle it. G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age which was about 20 to 60 years; the tribe of Levi, which came to the number of 22,300 males, are counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary, replacing the firstborn, who were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to redeem them.

DEAN OF GENERAL STUDIES

Just last night we had the chance to recognize and honor the accomplishments and contributions of our students. The get-together was splendid: there must have been almost 60 people in attendance—parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and other well-wishers. Ms. Weissman, Head of School, led off with a stirring speech linking the mission of our school to the essential task of teaching the Law and the way of life of Judaism. Next up, our Student

Council President, Monte Eiseman, told us how strongly he felt the challenge of pioneering a new school, making our venture a real *adventure* for him and his peers. Mr. Gellman and I followed with the presentation of the special Kadima awards and then the teachers took their turns at the lectern presenting certificates to their outstanding scholars.

After the formalities, the audience was invited to visit the art gallery Carol DeForest had set up in our soon-to-be Chemistry lab. She had transformed the empty shell of the classroom into an interesting walk through the students' year of projects, and the attendees lined up to see what the kids had been up to all this time. There was more planned, though, but the attraction of the art exhibit was so strong that people had to be coaxed back to the reception. There our guests were treated to cakes and cookies, platters of fruit and soft drinks of all kinds. But it was also here that the 2006-2007 yearbook was unveiled by editor-in-chief Courtney Thomas. It is an excellent book, this first yearbook—full of action, color, personality, quotes . . . you really should see it. We'll have copies here at the school in the library, and you can also find those select few who received their own copy and ask to visit them at their homes.

I think everyone was impressed: with the yearbook, the art, the reception, and especially the pride on display everywhere. Our founders, Jack and Marilyn Belz, Mark and Sally Wender, and Andy and Jan Groveman, were there with their families, with the new awards dedicated to them, inscriptions in their personal yearbooks attesting to how much they mean to us, their larger family. It was a night to remember.

Here are the special awards and their inscriptions:

The Andrew Groveman Leadership Award

This Award is presented to the student who has demonstrated a willingness to take charge when the going gets rough, and to step aside and coach when others seem to be managing well. This student sees challenges as blessings and has discovered that worthwhile opportunities require risk-taking. This student initiates positive action and leads by serving. This Award is named after Andrew Groveman, one of the founders of MJHS, who demonstrates this commitment to others and possesses these leadership qualities.

The Belz Character Award

This Award is given to the student who has demonstrated, by actions and thoughts, character—integrity, honesty, dignity. This student has a sense of what is right, and is responsible and honorable. Both Jack and Marilyn Belz, major benefactors of MJHS, embody these qualities and intend this award to go to the class *mensch*.

The Weissman Loyalty Award

This Award is given to the student who cares about the well-being of others. Like Adrian Weissman, MJHS first Head of School, this student is loyal. Beyond school, community and country, this student harbors a devoted attachment to and affection for the whole human race and asks the hard questions regarding policy and truth. This student never asks, ‘why should I care?’ but rather, ‘what can I do?’

The Wender Service-Over-Self Award

This Award is presented to the student who has made a significant contribution by committing to action to help where a need is perceived. The ideal of selfless service—sharing one’s time and energy, with no expectation of reward or recognition—is the moral underpinning of our society. This Award is named after Mark and Sally Wender, MJHS founders, who have given selflessly to this School and community.

The Jan Groveman Spirit Award

This Award is given to the student who has demonstrated energy and enthusiasm for Memphis Jewish High School. This student seeks ways to get others involved in promoting the aims and goals of the School, and is constantly striving to improve morale. Like Jan Groveman, a founder of MJHS, this student has a disposition of firmness, resolve, and commitment.

And remember, you can always find out more at our school’s new website. Go to <http://www.mjhschool.org> for a real treat!