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Historic Torah dedicated on USS Harry S. Truman

NORFOLK, Va. — A Torah scroll rescued from Lithuania has a new home aboard the United States Navy aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman. The carrier is one of the few U.S. Navy vessels to have its own Torah. Few ships are large enough to need one, said Sam Werbel, an organizer of a dedication ceremony attended by a crowd of 500, including some Holocaust survivors.

Several Jewish service members celebrated the event, taking photos with the heavy 26-inch high scroll bearing the words of the Hebrew Bible. About 5 percent or less of Lithuania's Jewish population survived the Holocaust. No religious artifacts, other than this Torah, are thought to remain of that country's Jewish population, organizers said.

On May 14, 1948, President Truman was the first world leader to grant diplomatic recognition to the newly reborn State of Israel. Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, thanked Truman with a Torah scroll that now belongs to the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

That Torah was on loan to the carrier and displayed next to the Torah that was dedicated.

Pan American Maccabi Games



Gary Post, in the red shirt was Hart Hasten's doubles partner. Post from Englewood Cliffs, N.J. and Hasten from Indianapolis participated in the Masters Plus 70 tennis competition. Although they did not win any medals in the doubles competition, they each won medals in the tennis singles. Hasten won the Silver medal and Post won the Bronze medal.



The 11th Pan American Maccabi Games were held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from Dec. 22, 2007 to Jan. 3, 2008. Five thousand Jewish athletes from 18 countries participated. For more information go to www.maccabiusa.com.

Media Watch



Hasidic wedding on *House*

By Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel

A recent episode of *House, M.D.* provides an outstanding – and telling – paradigm for television writing on Jewish themes. It is about a bride at a Hasidic wedding who faints off of her elevated chair during the spirited dancing. She suffers a broken leg in the fall, and shows signs of bladder problems.

We learn that this 38-year-old female, Roslyn (Laura Silverman, in a most affecting performance), is a *baalat teshuvah*, a returnee to Jewish tradition, who was once a producer in the music industry and a cocaine user. She embraced the Hasidic life and loves her husband Yonatan (Eyal Podell). During the wedding reception she thanks Mrs. Silver the matchmaker for bringing them together.

The episode was a pivotal one in the series, in that Dr. House (Hugh Laurie) must deal with his best friend, Dr. James Wilson, falling in love with a younger female colleague whose intelligence and ruthlessness House actually admires, and to which, along with her beauty, he had been attracted. Both because of the added emphasis on House's personal feelings and friendships, and because it was the last episode made before the writers' strike, this episode would have been significant no matter who the patient was.

That the patient has chosen Hasidic Judaism is, at first, too much for the Jewish member of House's medical team, Dr. Taub (Peter Jacobson), who has occasionally come up with some Jewish expressions in past episodes. Yet here Taub is front and center in confronting a Jewish religious heritage with which he is admittedly uncomfortable. When he and an African American colleague search the patient's home for toxic materials, Taub blurts out: "These people are crazy." The latter suggests that Taub might be self-hating. "I'm not self-hating," he protests. "I hate religious people who are out of touch with reality. You only marry someone you met three times if they're carrying a little mistake."

Writers Doris Egan and Leonard Dick, who are much to be admired for the dialogue and for the insights here, have the African American physician defend ritual and arranged marriage: "Romance is just emotional foreplay – candlelight meals, flowers, it's as much a ritual as anything these people do." He asks Taub: Why not "cut to the quick" with someone who "has the same values"?

Religious thinkers have defended ritual in this manner, using anthropological methodology to ask why Judaism is rarely treated as fascinating or compelling in academic or other politically correct circles. But the writers go further by having Yonatan, Roslyn's husband, rebuke a doctor whom he regards as patronizing: "You think it's sweet that I care for her modesty, but that it's archaic and ultimately irrelevant. Our traditions aren't just blind rituals; they mean something, they have purpose. I respect my wife and I respect her body." Unique in the annals of television is this suggestion that the rituals teach and inspire such respect. Such productions reach more people than the eloquent theologians, like Abraham Heschel, who depict the importance of ritual in this manner.

It should be noted that the writers give all due respect to ritual and to Judaism at the beginning, middle and end of the episode. Yet they also vent, and enable characters to vent, some barbs about Jews and Judaism. Dr. Taub does this a bit, but Dr. House does it more. The eccentric, cynical, acid-tongued lead character is the perfect mouthpiece for what usually passes as humor about Jews in TV writing. When the suggestion is made that Roslyn might have been poisoned, House suggests, "Cossacks could have poisoned her." He notes that "Hasidic women marry young so they can start pushing out little Hasidlings." He purposely mixes and matches religion, "Search her innards for bad cells and her home

for bad karma." He refers to her contemptuously as Hadasah. He laments, "The woman didn't just choose to keep kosher. She went directly to the extreme of Hasidism, a life of stringent rules. She became a masochist." At one point he calls her "Mental Yentl."

When Taub starts defending her, House says: "You drank the Manischewitz-flavored Kool-Aid." At one point, in his most obnoxious comment, House compares himself to God who gave the 613 commandments, using the Ineffable Name to describe himself and suggesting that the hospital is his temple. When House decides that a certain procedure is not necessary for Roslyn, he halts the stretcher with the words, "Stop that Jew." While examining her with his hands as he discovers her ailment, he teases, "You can tell all the ladies at the mikvah about this."

In order for House to make the kind of Judaism-deprecating, self-demeaning comments that Jews often make about other Jews in TV episodes, he has to be very learned in Judaism. While Dr. Taub does not know the meaning of the words, *Eshet Chayil*, "Woman of Valor" (Proverbs 31), with which, traditionally, the husband serenades his wife in the Friday night, Sabbath eve ritual, Dr. House knows the words well enough to offer a mocking interpretation of them. "She laughs at the future," he cites, "because she is an idiot." Her worth is not "far above rubies," for she will be dead if she doesn't do what he tells her to do.

It is almost as if writers Egan and Leonard fulfill their required ridicule of Jews and Judaism through Dr. House and, at first, by Taub, and then make sure that Judaism is defended by Yonatan, an African American, and a bisexual woman physician. Indeed, the implication is that to the extent that the characters affirm the latter, they are able to appreciate Roslyn's choice of Hasidic marriage.

The use of Dr. House as deprecator is effective here, if rather wishful. It would be nice, I suppose, if known Gentile eccentrics made disparaging or insulting remarks about Jews for purposes of shock value and entertainment. But over the last 20 years this role has been handed mostly to Jewish characters in television series. In *House*, Taub does only a little of the "Jewish" humor (or self-mockery) at the beginning, but actually becomes a defender of Roslyn and an admirer of her husband. It is, however, somewhat disconcerting to note that the writers operate under the assumption that a large quota of deprecation is necessary, even though they do a creditable job at handling this.

Interestingly, the writers also make a point of employing the Dr. House character as an articulator of Jewish teachings. Roslyn decides one Friday not to allow any more medical procedures, including an operation thought to be urgent, until she has been able to spend a Shabbat with her husband. Yonatan points out to her the clear mandate of the Torah that the saving of life supersedes Sabbath observance. She even ignores the intervention of a rabbi. Independently, Dr. House confirms that in Judaism the commandment to preserve life comes before all others. For whatever reason (maybe an identification of "Shabbat" with Friday night only on the part of the writers), Roslyn does not insist on a sundown to sundown moratorium on medical work. Still, the writers have their doctors move the sun, Joshua-style.

It is amazing how much Jewish ritual and terminology the writers are able to insert here in a painless manner – painless to the viewers, that is, but not to Roslyn. We even learn the term *lashon ha-ra*, "evil language," which refers to gossip and slander. And reference is made to the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) being said by one who thinks that he or she is dying. But what is the overall message here about Jews and Judaism?

Dr. House gets in a final word about that. When he suggests at the beginning of the episode that maybe Roslyn tried to commit suicide to escape from a constricting religious marriage, he is told that Hasidim regard suicide as a sin. House retorts, "In my world, sinners include Jews." House doesn't like his Jews too special, too holy. In this episode he insists that people cannot change – neither Roslyn, nor his best friend, nor the woman that the latter is dating. Yet somehow the Jewish woman, Roslyn, is a model of making changes in one's life and finding fulfillment in them. Even House seems a bit penitent. He assumes during one test that the pleasure centers in Roslyn's brain light up because of sexual stimulation at being touched by a handsome doctor, but then learns that it was prayer that had that effect on her brain. His sheepish look in this context is most effective acting by Mr. Laurie.

Writers Egan and Dick did some marvelous things in the framework of requisite TV writing on religion in general and on Jews in particular. But they did have to air the barbs and defend Hasidism in a politically correct way. They had to give their lead character all of the "outrageous" (actually, expected) lines about Jews and Judaism. Even so, they were able to suggest that Jewish rituals are effective at instilling values and helping people to change.

The real test of the respect of the *House, M.D.* series for things Jewish is the character of Dr. Taub. His *Star Trek* worshipping colleague has already challenged him to act on his sense that there is something valuable in Hasidic life. Taub asserts in this episode that no form of Judaism interests him. What will proceed from his mouth in future episodes? Will Egan and Dick be called in to keep him respectable?

Music of Temple Emanu-El

I urge readers to check out the website of the historic cathedral Reform synagogue, Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York, established in 1845 and known for over a century as the "Temple Emanu-El." For many decades Emanu-El was the pioneer in Jewish use of the media, as its Friday night services were among the first to be, and continue to be, heard on radio by thousands and thousands of commuters and home-bound individuals and by many others, as well. These services are broadcast over WQXR, the radio station of the *New York Times*, the newspaper run by two of Emanu-El's prestigious founding families, the Sulzbergers and the Ochs.

For the last year or so the Friday night and Saturday morning services have been archived each week on the Temple's

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impressive website, along with a listing of the composers of music in those services. The Temple has always had the finest cantors, choirs and organists in the country, not to mention one of the nation's best pipe organs. The current cantor, Lori A. Corrsin, continues a fine tradition and provides an inspirational and educational repertoire of fine synagogue music, classic and modern, formal and folk, all with glorious musical settings.

Recently I listened to a web file of a morning service on Shabbat Shira, "the Sabbath of Song," which this year was on January 19. I was most impressed with the eloquence, thoughtfulness and superb selections in Cantor Corrsin's "Sermon in Song," which featured Jewish music on the importance of Jerusalem to Judaism and to Jewish life. Also featured in this service was the congregation's gifted cantorial intern, Joshua Breitzer, a second-year student in the HUC-JIR School of Sacred Music, who promises to be one of the great cantors of his generation. Cantor Corrsin is a worthy mentor to anyone in her profession. Her vocal gifts and impeccable taste in synagogue music are superlative.

This program is historically significant, as well, because apart from Gustav Gottheil (author of the hymn, "Come, O Sabbath Day") in the 19th century and Judah Magnus in the early 20th, most of Emanu-El's rabbis for the first century or so in the temple's history were either non-Zionist or anti-Zionist. That did, of course, change about 50 years ago, but few have communicated the Jewish ties to Jerusalem with the grace and power of Cantor Corrsin. I am proud to say that at my request that program will be posted on the Temple website for a while, even though the policy has been to archive the services only week by week. You may access it at www.emanuelnyc.org. Click onto "Worship" and then "Broadcast of Services."

Temple Emanu-El continues to use the old *Union Prayer Book* and to conduct services in the classic Reform style. There is a dignity and integrity in the congregation's devotion to its own traditions and those of American Reform Judaism. I find it rather comforting that the service has not changed all that much since I first heard it as a college student over 30 years ago, during the time of Cantor Arthur Wolfson, of blessed memory. There is no question that the *Union Prayer Book* has the most beautiful English translations and paraphrases of any American Jewish siddur.

I often said as a student that while I wished that Temple Emanu-El did more in Hebrew, whatever was chanted was beautifully done. Now I am delighted that more Hebrew is done, that the beautiful chanting continues and that under Cantor Corrsin the repertoire has been expanded to Israeli and Middle Eastern Jewish music with the same artistry and dignity that has always made Emanu-El one of the great American Jewish experiences. Listen to that program on the web and tour the magnificent Temple when you are next in New York City. I must add that Emanu-El has a most enthusi-

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ing; Kabbalah, a mode of mysticism attempting to illuminate the connection between the divine and human worlds; and healing traditions from diverse ethnic and cultural heritages.

Degas in Bronze: The Complete Sculptures features Degas' complete works in sculpture, at the Boca Raton Museum of Art, until April 27.

The South Beach Wine & Food Festival runs Feb. 21-24. Some kosher products are sure to be part of the scene.

The great arts scene, which now is so much a part of south Florida, is due in large part to the pioneering work of Judy Drucker who, 40 years ago, formed the Great Artists Series and the Concert Association of Florida, working tirelessly to bring great music to the region.

On Feb. 13, Drucker was honored by Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) at their annual Gala Dinner, in the Westin Diplomat Resort, with the Light of Philanthropy Award. Renowned violinist Pinchas Zukerman performed, and among those attending was Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel.

As for kosher dining on the Atlantic coast, there are now literally dozens of fine establishments, serving casual to elegant meals, including sushi, Chinese, Italian, Thai and other cuisines. They also have take-out menus. Kosher supermarkets along the coast have fine take-out meals, too. ■

Thoughts

In the midst of winter, I found there was within me, an invincible summer.

-Albert Camus

astic, welcoming and knowledgeable tour guide, Hadassah Mushinsky, who spent some time in my neighborhood in Chicago.

Rabbi Gertel has been spiritual leader of Conservative Congregation Rodfei Zedek since 1988. A native of Springfield, Mass., he attended Columbia University and Jewish Theological Seminary. He is the author of the book "What Jews Know About Salvation." He has been media critic for "The National Jewish Post & Opinion" since 1979. ■

**EDITORIAL**

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the one she wanted, and some alterations were made. After the wedding, the dress was dry cleaned and returned.

I have seen this niece and her husband only three times since their marriage, when they were visiting in Indianapolis. That matchmaker did an excellent job! They seem very well suited for each other. They now have two sons and four daughters. To date, I have met six of the seven spouses of these nieces and nephews and all of them seem to be very good matches.

Jennie Cohen ■

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