

The Synagogue Journal

1856-2006

June 2, 2006

Contact us: historicaljournal@kanestreet.org

Shabbat Shavuot

View the Contents of Issue 22 at
www.kanestreet.org/historical_journal.html

Issue 22 Shavuot

In this issue ...

The journal looks at Shavuot customs through articles from 1890 to the present. The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported on "Shewes" or "the Laubhuettan holiday" (Ger. for hut with foliage), describing how Brooklyn Jews built temporary structures outside their residences for the Feast of Weeks, held Confirmation rites and "festooned" the synagogue with evergreens, palms and flowers.

Rabbi Goldfarb's 1935 "Shovuoth" message references the Nazi nations that "retrogress and sink back into to the barbarous practices of the dark ages." See Issue 20 for additional articles about Confirmation during the Goldfarb era.

Since 1993, Kane Street Synagogue has begun the holiday with a study session called Tikkun Lay! Shavuot. Rabbi Debra Cantor's 1996 message describes study as an obligation. "Receiving the Torah has never been a passive act," she writes. "The moment we receive Torah, we are bound to open it, to wrestle with it, and to transmit it to future generations." The evening usually begins around 8:45 pm with Ma'ariv services, followed by refreshments in the community room and presentations by the Rabbi plus several members. Each year we explore a theme with text from the Tanakh, Talmud, and medieval or modern literature. Discussion lasts until 12:30 or 1:00 am. Kane Street's collection of Tikkun study sheets is incomplete. Can you supply information for the following years in question?

1993 – Tanakh-A-Thon

1994 - ?

1995 - ?

1996 – The 613 Commandments

1997 – Loneliness and Intimacy

1998 – Kindness

1999 - ?

2000 – Envy: Jewish Wisdom for Taming
and Transforming the Nastiest Passion

2001 - ?

2002 - Human Nature: What Judaism
Believes about People

2003 – Jewish Responsibility to the Other

2004 – Choseness

2005 - ?

The 2006 Tikkun theme is "The Great Power of Jews in the World". Synagogue member Rabbi Josh Gutoff who organized the event asks, "Do our lives make a difference? The Rabbis taught that both holiness and desecration were categories of our everyday lives, and that in our mundane dealings with others we could point others either towards or away from the sacred. This Shavuot we will look at ... this enormous power placed into our hands." The journal includes a sampling of texts.

Carol Levin, Editor
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Brooklyn Eagle on 19th Century Summer Events of Congregation Baith Israel

“The Feast of Weeks. Confirmations in the Baith Israel Synagogue”

Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 20, 1885, Page 6

Provides details of the service and the names of the eleven boys and girls in the class

“Hebrew Notes”

Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 20, 1900, Page 25

This article on “Laubhauetten” (huts with foliage) relates that in Orthodox sections of the borough, “almost every yard will hold its tent made of branches and palm leaves... and In the evening the members of the family gather around a table in that odd structure, and after having listened to a prayer spoken by the head of the family, partake of a meal made up of the first fruits of spring.”

“Pentecost. General Celebration of the Great Jewish Festival”

Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 1, 1892, Page 4

The article compares Baith Israel’s Friday evening service to “scenes in ‘Daniel Deronda’ where the atmosphere surrounding the peculiar people is so clearly portrayed” to its Saturday Confirmation service with the one hundred fifty Sunday school students and “the congregation intoning the responsive portions feebly, like the responses in an Episcopal service when the congregation is small.” The article includes the names of the confirmants and the rabbi’s sermon on womanhood.

Shovuoth , *The Scroll*, 1935, Rabbi Goldfarb’s message

Rabbi’s Message *The Scroll*, June 1996, Rabbi Debra Cantor

Texts distributed at the 2006 Tikkun Study Session

Profanation/Sanctification of the Divine Name *Tractate Yoma 86a*,
Talmud Yerushalmi, Baba Kamma 4:3

Mishna Yoma 8:8 *Tractate Yoma 86a*, “Maimonides, *Misheneh Torah* Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 5:4

Excerpt from *The Ghost Writer* by Phillip Roth, G.K. Hall, publishers, 1980.

Ezekiel 36:22-36

Genesis 12:1-3; Leviticus 10:1-3 and 22:31-33; Numbers 14:11-16

About the Journal ...

The Synagogue Journal” is a one-year online publication at www.kanestreet.org/historical_journal.html, designed to highlight prominent individuals and events during the Kane Street Synagogue congregation’s past 150 years.

We welcome submissions of reminiscences, letters and photographs to help shape the BIAE story. For a list of upcoming Journal themes or to read past issues, see “Archives” located under the Journal banner.

Special thanks to: Rabbi Samuel Weintraub, Vivien Shelanski, Dugans Martinez and Jack Levin; Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™, Brooklyn Public Library; www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle

THE FEAST OF WEEKS.

Confirmations in the Bath Israel Synagogue.

The little synagogue on the corner of State street and Boerum place was tastefully decorated with choice flowers this morning and attended by a large congregation, including many children. The occasion was the commencement of the Feast of Weeks, or the day on which the Ten Commandments were handed down to Moses.

The Talmud was read by the rabbi, Dr. Ettfinger, and the Commandments by Master Emanuel Newman. All the service was conducted in Hebrew, the president of the church, William Bass, and the vice president, Louis Jacobs, assisting on the altar.

The following young people were confirmed: Hattie Jacobs, Sarah Newman, Theresa Seidenberg, Lena Taylor, Dora Newman, Becky Pulaski, Emanuel Newman, Samuel Phillips, Ralph Raphael, Nathan Sonnenstrahl and Henry Shrauer.

This evening most of the officials of the synagogue and friends of those confirmed will continue the feast at the house of the vice president, 1,074 Fulton street.

HEBREW NOTES

All of the Hebrew congregations are preparing for the Laubhuetten holidays, one of the prettiest of the Jewish festivals. Its celebration is in the nature of a spring offering, expressive of the gratitude of the human race for the coming of the season of the sprouting of the fruits of the field. Laubhuetten, or, as the orthodox call it, Shewues, according to ancient custom, should be celebrated in tents made of twigs and green. Hence the name Laubhuetten, which means a hut made of foliage. While there are services in the synagogues, the greater part of the festival is usually observed at home. In the streets where orthodox Hebrews live, such as Moore, Siegel and Varet, in this borough, and a number of thoroughfares in Manhattan, almost every yard will hold its tent made of branches and palm leaves. In the evening the members of the family gather around a table in that odd structure, and, after having listened to a prayer spoken by the head of the family, partake of a meal made up of the first fruits of spring.

PENTECOST.

General Celebration of the Great Jewish Festival.

**All the Principal Synagogues Open and
Confirmation Services Held—A Class
of Nine Young Girls Received by Rabbi
Friedlander — An Address Brimming
Over With Nineteenth Century Ideas
of Womanhood.**

This is the day of Pentecost, and in the half dozen or more Jewish synagogues it has been celebrated as it was before the gift of tongues with which Christians principally associate the day. But even the Jewish ritual has been modified with time and there was celebrated in several of the synagogues to-day a ceremony which neither Jesus nor Paul ever saw, namely, the confirmation of classes of Hebrew girls as members of the congregation, something after the manner of confirmation in Christian churches. Pentecost is the anniversary of the delivery of the ten commandments to Moses on Sinai, and as such it has been celebrated as far back as the history of Hebrew worship is known. But the confirmation of girls has only been introduced by Hebrew religious reformers in the last forty years or so. Boys have been taken into the congregation for centuries, but this service has

CONGREGATION BAITH ISRAEL ANSHEI EMES

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SHOVUOTH

Of all the festivals in the Jewish calendar none possesses greater charm, more poetic beauty and spiritual depth than Shovuoth.

Occurring in the spring season of the year, Shovuoth has come to be associated in our minds with the sweet scent of flowers, the pleasing sight of rolling green lawns and the abundance of trees and shrubs laden with multi-colored, fragrant blossoms.

On Shovuoth all Nature is decked in a new green holiday garb. The hidden forces of creation seem to have burst forth into new life, growth and activity. Everything seems to sing and to smile. At no other time does the glory of the Creator reveal itself in greater profusion than during this season of Divine Revelation.

But Shovuoth is more than a harvest festival. It also marks the anniversary of the great dramatic episode at Mount Sinai. It commemorates the proclamation of Israel's Magna Charta — the giving of the Ten Commandments!

This historic event is of great significance not only to the Jew but to all mankind because of the impetus it has given to the progress and culture of the entire human race and because of the immeasurable influence it has exerted over the thought, belief and action of man.

What a different complexion our world would have today were it not for the humane and ethical teachings of justice and mercy, love and peace, kindness and charity promulgated by our Torah, taught by our prophets, sages and scholars and universally adopted by all noble-minded people as the highest standards of human conduct and behavior!

While it is true that the utopian era preached by our prophets has not yet reached its ideal fulfillment, while it is true that nations frequently forsake their high ideals and yield to the baser instincts and lower passions of selfishness, prejudice, cruelty and hatred, while every now and then nations of the Nazi-German type regress and sink back into the barbarous practices of the dark ages, nevertheless the human race, as a whole, continues in its onward march towards progress and civilization.

May the ooze of true culture and universal brotherhood illumine the dark corners of the earth, where nations still live under the spell of evil passions and false chauvinistic pride, and may the Shovuoth of our day bring about a fuller and deeper appreciation of the high ideals proclaimed on Mount Sinai so many centuries ago.

LEND AN EYE

TO
I. IRVING WEISSLER

... And in this corner, we have moved your favorite columnist — Now he has more space to chat with you — (Give him a big hand ... right over his big mouth) ... In the merry, merry, month of May two hearts beat in three-quarter time and we have June brides in the minority ... GERTIE NOVECK and DAVE will become one on June 23rd — answering our query of the first issue "Is it really serious?" ... Congratulations to Bella Goldfarb who became Mrs. Irving Lehman on Lag Bomer ... Our advertisers came through big — enabling the powers that be to give you this large *Scroll* — They'll advertise — We'll patronize — HY LIBSON is an ace assistant to BEN BALINSKY on the ads ... PAGE ONE N.W.S !!! Y. F. L. REVUSICAL — "KANE STREET FOLLIES" June 1st and 2nd — You get two days to see it — Must be Super Colossal — In it RAYMOND LEBOWITZ will finally propose to ANNE MORRIS — publicity — The Revue will be the biggest event of the year and only 10c, for a reserved seat ... Junior Sisterhood went Broadway on May 1st — "PETTICOAT FEVER." The vehicle — and according to HERMAN M. SKLAR, "We were taken for a ride." — However, "THE OLD MAID" won the Pulitzer Prize for 1935 (It's about time she won something) — At the Ritz Theatre, the girls were bedecked in navy spring finery — svelegant suits and pascale hats outstanding — Theatre darkened — TOBY WEINBERG rustled papers — So DENNIS KING waited five minutes before speaking — LOUIS FRIES came in last — late — The GOLDFARB Family rode home in their new DeSons ... Latest member to join Junior Sisterhood is FLORENCE KAMINSKY — a laboratory technician — at present unemployed — Is there a doctor in the house who can use her services? ... MR. MAX BROWN returned from Palestine too late to be welcomed home in the last issue, so here's a hearty welcome to you M. B. — FLASH! HELEN BROWN may learn from over there in the FALL but not EVELYN — There's a heart throb in her life ... Another member of Y. M. D. went and did it — ARTHUR HERMAN wed MAE INGBER and dashed off to Atlantic City ... Rumor has it that when E. J. E. joins Y. M. D. there will be a revolution ... Counsellor JACQUES HERTZ is getting up in the World — Moved from third to sixth floor at 120 25th Avenue Street — Associated with him are NAT ROSENBERG and MILTON ROBINSON, all classmates — Lots of Luck, boys ... MURRAY SILVERMAN must be as busy with his Accident policies that he forgot the promises he made when he became President — Say when, MURRAY — That boat ride on June 23 ought to click in a big way ... MRS. ELIZABETH B. BROWN is visiting Bismarck for a few months and ELSIE B. now resides in New York ... Passover at the Synagogue was impressive — DR. GOLDFARB delivered a stirring sermon on "The Modern Four Questions" — The Youth of the Center were in the majority — BELA B. FRIEDMAN asked READER IRVING MIRSKY to make a "Mishebrach" for Junior Sisterhood — Gesture of a gentleman — or was it a diplomatic move to get the \$38.00 instead of \$45.00? ... Welcome to BUONO & BECKERMAN new printers of "The Scroll" — SIDNEY BECKERMAN is a Y. M. D. member ... Jewish Center has replenished its exchequer with May 1st collections ... DOROTHY REICHMAN knows how to tap dance, we notice ... Orchids and bunches of them to Messrs. GOLDBERG, ALEXANDER and LILLE, recently selected Life Trustees — Excellent hosts to the other Trustees — Dinner and Wine — Strictly Kosher — and a

(Continued on Page 31)

usually been performed on or near their 13th birthday. The girls, on the contrary, have been received once a year in a group, and for this service the feast of Pentecost, one of the great feasts of the Hebrew year, has been selected and the confirmation has become one of the chief features of the service. Many congregations have reached the point where they receive both girls and boys on that day, making but one confirmation service for the whole year. Both forms of service were observed in Brooklyn this morning. Among the synagogues where the feast of Pentecost was observed were the new and handsome Temple Israel, on Bedford and Lafayette avenues; Beth Israel, on Boerum place and State street; Beth Elohim, on State street; Beth Jeshurun, on Ninth street and Fifth avenue; the Temple Israel, in the eastern district, and Mount Sinai, at Bridge and Fulton streets. Between 15,000 and 20,000 Hebrews in the city are said to attend upon the services at these synagogues with more or less regularity. In most of them the attendance this morning was large, larger than at almost any other day in the year, and the services will be followed this afternoon by home feasting and family reunions.

The feast of Pentecost began at sundown last evening and the religious services opened at about that time with evening prayers, at which the attendance was generally light. At Beth Israel, on Boerum place, perhaps a dozen men attended this evening service, and the solemn chants, grave manners and genuflections brought to mind visibly the Jewish scenes in "Daniel Donronda," where the atmosphere surrounding the peculiar people is so clearly portrayed. The synagogue was beautifully decorated with palms, wreaths of smilax and clusters of cut flowers for to-day's confirmation. The sanctuary lamp, which never dies, burned above the altar, and Rabbi Friedlander, in his black gown and broad white stole, chanted the service in Hebrew. It was very brief and consisted of Psalms, prayers and a hymn from the Hebrew ritual, the congregation intoning the responsive portions feebly, like the responses in an Episcopal service when the congregation

is small. The scene this morning was very different. Every seat in the little synagogue was occupied by fathers, mothers and elder and younger brothers and sisters waiting to see the confirmation. In front were the 150 members of Rabbi Friedlander's Sunday school, and at 10 o'clock arrived they rose and sang the hymn "None Like God." During the singing the confirmation class entered from the rear and approached the altar in two divisions, that on the right of the synagogue being led by Louis Jacobs, president of the congregation, and that on the left by Isaac Lavisson, vice president. Beth Israel is one of the synagogues where girls and boys are confirmed separately, and to-day's class was of nine young girls, all in white dresses, with white flowers and ribbons and with long, flowing dark hair. The members of the class were Lily Frank, Florence Frank, Birdie Wolfson, Julia Morris, Jessie Stoman, Lily Weinberg, Rosa Wolfson, Annie Brahams, Rachel Jacobs.

As they ascended the stairs of the pulpit the members of the class recited a prayer in unison. Then followed a prayer by Libby Weinberg; an address by the rabbi; a hymn by the school, "There is many a flower on the pathway of life;" an examination of the class by the rabbi; the recital by the class in unison of their confession of faith; a prayer by Rachel Jacobs; a hymn by the school and the benediction.

The address of Rabbi Friedlander was notable because it breathed with the symbols and figures of the oldest religion an intensely modern spirit as to the career of women in this century. Part of it, indeed, sounded as if it might almost have been written by the president of a woman's club. The text was from Proverbs iii:16: "Length of days in her right hand; riches and honor in her left hand." He explained to the children the personification of divine law in the text and said:

As the images of the tremendously large luminaries, the sun, the moon and the stars, are seen in a small drop of dew, so is this solution of the immensely great problem of life, viz., how to secure happiness in this but very small fragment of scripture which I have selected for my text. Coming to the practicalities of life, the rabbi said: While you are being initiated as useful performers on the world's stage, let me acquaint you with the great drama of life, so that you may become familiar with that part which each of you will have to act. You know that your position in life will widely differ from that of your mother's and still more widely from that of your grandmothers. You live in an age when in many respects women have to undergo the same hardships and contend with the same difficulties of nature as men. You live in a period when women are not contented merely with being led by the men, but in almost every field of industry compete with the men and exercise a great influence upon the material, moral and intellectual progress of society. You belong to a generation in which the women as well as the men have to face the world's good and ill, enemies and friends, causes and effects, courses and ends. For that reason you must attain a careful preparation for life. You must equip yourselves with irresistible weapons to defend and guard you and all your walks through the bustling avenues which are now more than ever full of want and desire. And what are these weapons—gentleness, dignity, noble bearing, respectful demeanor; above all, womanly pride. What shall supply you with them? The divine law. You will soon begin to strive for some end. And while you are in pursuit of either knowledge or fame or dominion or friendship or love, while you are either in the precincts of your parents or custodians of your own court, either the dignified princess or the happy queen, remember my text: "Length of days in her right hand; riches and honor in her left hand." By holding to the divine law as your guide, the shadows of ill fate may appear ever so dark, the road of life's journey may seem ever so rough, you will nevertheless face it courageously, you will march on bravely, you will advance surely and you will triumph lastly; the shadows will pass away, the radiant moon will break out, the bright sun will greet you, when you will enjoy the glorious moon and happiness will be your lot.

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ABOUT THE COVER
by Frederick Terna

Three notable upcoming occasions, Shavuot, Lag Ba-Omer and Solidarity Sunday have one thing in common: walking!

In ancient days Shavuot was a pilgrim holiday and one went up to the temple in Jerusalem; later, Lag Ba-Omer was a time for a festive visit to the tomb of the second century sage, Simoon bar Yohai; and in our time, we walk again, when on Sunday, May 12th, we participate in Solidarity Sunday.

RABBI'S MESSAGE

"But Rabbi, I've already learned the *haftorah* and the blessings and

everything else! How come I still have to write a speech?" asked the Bat Mitzvah girl petulantly.

"Because," I explained, "You have something unique and important to teach us about your *parasha*. We'll all be listening to the same Torah portion that day, but no one will hear and understand it in exactly the same way as anyone else. Part of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah means taking responsibility for Torah - for learning it, for living it, and for teaching it to others."

I'm not sure whether I convinced the nervous adolescent girl sitting in my study that day, but I meant what I said. I truly believe that if the Jewish people is to survive and flourish, we must put Torah at the center of our lives. And that means we must each become teachers of Torah. Not only those of us who are rabbis or professors, Jewish educators or communal professionals. But each and every one of us.

I suppose that's, in part, why I love the annual *Tikkun Lail Shavuot* at Kane Street so much. It involves so many members of our community in the act of learning and teaching Torah to one another. The format - very short presentations, with plenty of time to prepare and with the rabbi as ready consultant - encourages even inexperienced or shy volunteers to participate. And the program itself is always engaging. It is interesting and inspiring to listen to such a wide variety of perspectives on Torah.

As any modern literary critic will tell you, the meaning of a work arises out of the interaction between the text and each individual reader. The rabbis were aware of this many centuries ago. They brought their own concerns, questions and life experiences to their study of holy texts.

And the Torah did not disappoint them. It yielded a multiplicity of meanings to them, which guided their actions and shaped their thinking. The rabbis' scholarly endeavors did not merely produce a body of legal and homiletical literature. Their activity also served as a model for future generations, including our own. When we study Torah, delve into its words and read ourselves and our lives into it, we are following their venerable example.

On the holiday of Shavuot, we celebrate the Revelation of the Torah. But receiving the Torah has never been a passive act. The moment we receive the Torah, we are bound to open it, to wrestle with it, and to transmit it to future generations. Learning Torah obliges us to teach it. As your rabbi over the past eight years, it has been my responsibility to teach Torah to this community. Happily, I have also been privileged to help many of you become teachers of Torah as well. I am grateful I could be both student and teacher here at Kane Street. May we all be blessed with the strength and ability to continue to learn and teach in the future. *Hazak, hazak v'nithazek!*

Happy Shavuot,
 Rabbi Debra Cantor

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT ON
 THE STATE OF THE
 CONGREGATION**

by Judith R. Greenwald

To better inform the Congregation of the state of the Synagogue, this re-

Tikkun Texts for June 1, 2006

Compiled by Rabbi Josh Guttoff

Part 1 - Profanation/Sanctification of the Divine Name

Tractate Yoma 86a

What constitutes profanation of the Name?

Rab said, "If I were to take meat from the butcher and did not pay him at once."

Abaye said, "That teaching applies only in a place where merchants don't go out to collect payment (i.e., where they don't normally extend credit), but where they do go out to collect payment (i.e., where credit is normally given), there is no harm in not paying at once."

Ravina said: "But Matta Mechasia is a place where credit is normally given. Even so, if Abaye bought meat from a butcher where there were two partners, each on a different end of the counter, he would give money to each, and afterwards bring them together and settle accounts with both."

R. Yohanan said, "If I were to walk four cubits without speaking Torah or wearing tefillin."

Isaac of the school of R. Yannai said, "If one's colleagues are ashamed of his reputation, that is a profanation of the Name."

R. Nachman b. Isaac explained, "If, for example, people say, 'May God forgive So-and-so.'"

Abaye explained, "As it says, 'You shall love the Lord your God' – which means, that God becomes beloved because of you."

Someone who studies Torah and Mishna, and is an apprentice to the Sages, and is pleasant in his dealings with people, what do people say of him?

"Happy his father who taught him Torah, and happy his master who taught him Torah. Woe to those who do not learn Torah, for look at So-and-so, who has learned – how fine are his ways, how righteous his deeds!"

Torah says of him, "And He said to me, 'You are My servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified.' (Is. 49:3).

But someone who studies Torah and Mishna, and is an apprentice to the Sages, and is dishonest in business and unpleasant in his dealings with people, what do people say of him?

"Woe to So-and-so who studied Torah, woe to his father who taught him Torah, woe to his master who taught him Torah. So-and-so, who has studied Torah – how ugly his deeds, how corrupt his ways."

Torah says of him, "These are the people of the Lord, yet they had to leave His land [for profaning His name.]" (Ez. 36:20)

Talmud Yerushalmi, Baba Kamma 4:3

The Roman government once sent two officers to learn Torah from Rabban Gamliel and they learned from him *mikra*, *mishneh*, *talmud*, *halachot* and *aggadot*. When they were finished, they said to him, "All of your Torah is pleasant and praiseworthy except for ... that which you maintain that it is prohibited to steal from a Jew but that it is permissible to steal from a non-Jew. At that very moment, R. Akiva decreed that stealing from a non-Jew would be prohibited because of *hillul ha-Shem*.

Part 2 - Mishna Yoma 8:8

The *chatat* and the *asham vadai* effect atonement;

Death, and the day of Yom Kippur itself, effect atonement along with repentance;

Repentance by itself effects atonement for lesser transgressions, both positive and negative;

For severe sins it suspends [judgment] until the day of Yom Kippur, which effects atonement.

Tractate Yoma 86a

R. Matthia b. Heresh asked R. Eleazar b. Azariah in Rome, "Have you heard about R. Ishmael's teaching about the four categories of atonement?" He answered, "There are really three categories; repentance is included with each:

If one broke a *positive* commandment and repented he is forgiven immediately, even before he can move from his place, as it says, 'Return, backsliding children, declares the Lord. Though I have rejected you, I will take you, one from a town and two from a clan, and bring you to Zion' (Jer. 3:14);

If one broke a *negative* commandment and repented, repentance suspends [judgment] until the day of Yom Kippur, which effects atonement, as it says, 'For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord.' (Lev. 16:30);

If one committed a sin punishable by *karet* (being cut off by God) or execution, and repented, then repentance and Yom Kippur suspend [judgment] and suffering effects atonement, as it says, 'I will punish their transgression with the rod, their iniquity with plagues.' (Ps. 89:33).

But if he has been guilty of the profanation of the Name, then repentance has no power to suspend punishment, nor the Yom Kippur to effect atonement, nor suffering to complete the process, but all of them together suspend the punishment and only death finishes it, as it is says, "This iniquity shall never be forgiven you until you die," said my Lord God of Hosts.' (Is. 22:14)

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 5:4

...In any of the transgressions concerning which it is said that one should die rather than sin, and a person sins rather than dies, this is a profanation of the Name, and if it was in the presence of ten Jews it is a "public" profanation of the name, and both an abandonment of the positive obligation to sanctify God's Name, and the breaking of the prohibition against profanation of the Name. Nevertheless, since it was under duress he is not beaten by the court – and certainly not killed, even if he committed murder under duress.

Part 3 - From *The Ghost Writer* by Phillip Roth

Note: Nathan Zuckerman, a promising young Jewish writer, had sent his father a draft of a short story he had written – a somewhat scandalous story, based on people and incidents from his childhood neighborhood. His father, shocked by the story, brings it to Judge Leopold Wapter, a family acquaintance and local Big Shot. And Judge Wapter, in turn, writes to Nathan:

...Great artists, as history reveals, have been harshly persecuted time and again by the frightened and ill-educated, who do not understand that the artist is a special individual with a unique contribution to make to mankind. Socrates was considered an enemy of the people and a corrupter of the young. The Norwegian playwright and Nobel Prize winner, Henrik Ibsen, was forced into exile because his countrymen failed to understand the profound truth of his great dramas. I explained to your father that I for one would never want to be allied with the intolerance shown by the Greeks towards Socrates, or by the Norwegians towards Ibsen. On the other hand, I do believe that, like all men, the artist has a responsibility to his fellow man, to the society in which he lives, and to the cause of truth and justice. With that responsibility and that alone as my criterion, I would attempt to give him an opinion of the suitability for publication in a national magazine of your latest fictional effort.

Attached you will find a questionnaire about your story, prepared jointly by my wife and myself. Because of Mrs. Wapter's interest in literature and the arts – and because I did not think it fair to rely solely upon my reading – I have taken the liberty of securing her opinion. There are serious and difficult questions to which Mrs. Wapter and I would like you to give just one hour of your time. We don't want you to answer them to our satisfaction – we want you to answer them to your own. You are a young man of great promise and, we all think, of potentially great talent. But with great talent come great responsibilities, and an obligation to those who have stood behind you in the early days so that your talent might come to fruition. I would like to think that if and when the day should dawn that you receive *your* invitation to Stockholm to accept a Nobel Prize, we will have had some small share in awakening your conscience to the responsibilities of your calling.

Sincerely yours, Leopold Wapter.

P.S. If you have not yet seen the Broadway production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, I strongly advise that you do so. Mrs. Wapter and I were in the audience on opening night; we wish that Nathan Zuckerman could have been with us to benefit from that unforgettable experience.

TEN QUESTIONS FOR NATHAN ZUCKERMAN

1. If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story?
2. Do you believe Shakespeare's Shylock and Dickens's Fagin have been of no use to anti-Semites?
3. Do you practice Judaism? If so, how? If not, what credentials qualify you for writing about Jewish life for national magazines?
4. Would you claim that the characters in your story represent a fair sample of the kinds of people that make up a typical contemporary community of Jews?
5. In a story with a Jewish background, what reason is there for a description of physical intimacy between a married Jewish man and an unmarried Christian woman? Why in a story with a Jewish background must there be (a) adultery; (b) incessant fighting within a family over money; (c) warped human behavior in general?
6. What set of aesthetic values makes you think that the cheap is more valid than the noble and the slimy is more truthful than the sublime?

7. What in your character makes you associate so much of life/s ugliness with Jewish people?
8. Can you explain why in your story, in which a rabbi appears, there is nowhere the grandeur of oratory with which Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver and Zvi Masliansky have stirred and touched their audiences?
9. Aside from the financial gain to yourself, what benefit do you think publishing this story in a national magazine will have for (a) your family; (b) your community; (c) the Jewish religion; (d) the well-being of the Jewish people?
10. Can you honestly say that there is anything in your short story that would not warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbels?

Part 4 - From Ezekiel 36: 22-36

The word of the Lord came to me: O mortal, when the House of Israel dwelt on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds...[and] I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the nations...But when they came to those nations they caused My holy name to be profaned, in that it was said of them, "These are the people of the Lord, yet they had to leave His land." Therefore I am concerned for My holy name, which the House of Israel have caused to be profaned among the nations to which they have come.

Say to the House of Israel: Thus said the Lord God: Not for your sake will I act, O House of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have caused to be profaned among the nations to which you have come. I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned among the nations – among whom you have caused it to be profaned. And the nations shall know that I am the Lord – declares the Lord God – when I manifest My holiness before their eyes through you. I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries, and I will bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes. And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh; and I will put My spirit into you. Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe My rules...

Not for your sake will I act – declares the Lord God – take good note! Be ashamed and humiliated because of your ways, O House of Israel!

Thus said the Lord God: When I have cleansed you of all your iniquities, I will people your settlements, and the ruined places shall be rebuilt; and the desolate land, after lying waste in the sight of every passerby, shall again be tilled. And men shall say, "That land, once desolate, has become like the garden of Eden; and the cities, once ruined, desolate, and ravaged, are now populated and fortified." And the nations that are left around you shall know that I the Lord have rebuilt the ravaged places and replanted the desolate land. I the Lord have spoken and will act.

Part 5 - Torah

Genesis 12:1-3

YHVH said to Avram:

Go you forth from your land,

From your kindred,

From your father's house,

To the land that I will let you see.

I will make a great nation of you

And will give you blessing

And will make your name great.

Be a blessing!

I will bless those who bless you,

He who curses you, I will damn.

All the nations of the earth will find blessing through you!

Leviticus 10:1-3

Now Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, took each-man his pan, and, placing fire in them, put smoking-incense on it,

And brought-near, before the presence of YHVH, alien fire,

Such as he had not commanded them.

And fire went out from the presence of YHVH

And consumed them, so that they died, before the presence of YHVH.

Moses said to Aaron:

It is what YHVH spoke about, saying:

Through those near to me, I will be made holy,

Before all the people, I will be honored.

Aaron was silent.

Leviticus 22:31 -33

You are to keep my commandments, and observe them, I am YHVH!
You are not to profane my holy name,
that I may be made holy amid the Children of Israel;
I am YHVH, the one who makes you holy,
Who is bringing you out of the land of Egypt, to be for you a God,
I am YHVH!

Numbers 14:11-16 *(after the incident of the spies)*

...YHVH said to Moses:
How long will this people scorn me?
How long will they not trust in me,
despite all the signs that I have done among them?
Let me strike it down with pestilence and dispossess it,
and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier in number than it?
But Moses said to YHVH:
When they hear about it, the Egyptians –
from whose midst you brought up this people with your power –
will tell it to the inhabitants of this land.
They have heard that you are YHVH in the midst of this people,
that eye to eye you were seen, O YHVH,
your cloud standing over them,
in a column of cloud going before them by day,
and in a column of fire by night –
should you put this people to death as one man,
then will say the nations that have heard of your fame:
“It was from want of YHVH’s ability
to bring this people into the land about which he swore to them,
and so he slew them in the wilderness!”