



Congregation Tiferet Yehudah v'Yisrael

The Kerhonkson Synagogue Newsletter

March 2010

Rabbi Suri Krieger

Nissan 5770

☆ Schedule of Events ☆

Shabbat Service

Saturday, April 10 at 10:00 AM

Shabbat service & Brunch*

Shabbat Service

Saturday, May 8 at 10:00 AM

Shabbat service & Brunch*

Service

Sunday, June 13 at 10:00 AM

Jordan's Bar Mitzvah service

**For our summer schedule
& events
please go to our web site
www.kerhonksonsynagogue.org**

*Bring a dish, dairy or parve only.



Rabbi Suri Kreiger

Earthquake: Port-o-Prince, Haiti

Earthquake: Maule, Chile

Tsunami: Southern India

Hurricane Katrina: New Orleans, Louisiana

The list of natural catastrophic phenomenon within the last decade is astounding. And the devastation caused by them is hard to grasp. It is not hard to imagine however, that had these events wreaked such havoc a few millennia ago, they might well be viewed as acts of God, much like the Ten Plagues that we find in the book of Exodus. In effect, they were the weapons of mass destruction in the ancient world, thought to be perpetrated as a form of Divine Retribution.

Even in this modern era, there are those who explain the current cataclysmic events as punishment for wrongdoings. Consider Pat Robertson's insinuation that the devastation in Haiti was punishment for a pact with the devil made by Haitian ancestors while seeking liberation from the French. Bishop Gerhard Wagner of Austria was convinced that the death and destruction caused by Katrina was "divine retribution" for New Orleans' permissive sexual attitudes and tolerance of homosexuality. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the former Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, claimed that God sent the hurricane because of President Bush's support for the recent Israeli withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and because the people of New Orleans "have no God."

I imagine that most of us would be appalled by such fundamentalist explanations. But at the other end of the spectrum, there are those who would love to find scientific explanations for the major cataclysmic events found in the Bible, events we otherwise call Divine miracles. Not long ago I watched a documentary film by an Israeli-Canadian producer, Simcha Jacobovici which attempts to prove scientifically the authenticity of the Ten Plagues. The film was fascinating. Each plague was linked in some way to a cataclysmic earthquake which took place in Santorini, a Greek island on the Northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, approx 3500 years ago. In the aftermath of this massive earth-

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Business meetings are generally held the first Monday of the month at 7:30 PM.

From the Rabbi

Continued from page 1

quake, presumed to be one of the strongest ever in recorded history, there was a massive Tsunami which reached the Southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, that being Egypt. Volcanic ash from the Santorini quake was verifiably found on Egyptian soil. According to Jacobovici and the team of scientists he enlists in this documentary aired on The History Channel, the eruption and its aftermath created a series of natural imbalances that could conceivably have produced a domino series of side effects such as red tinged discoloration to the water, frogs jumping out of such water, swarms of locusts flying overhead, darkness, people and animals plagued with skin disorders, and so forth. Jacobovici's approach is an attempt to utilize contemporary scientific and archaeological data in interpreting the ancient text. It is an admirable and captivating enterprise. But there are as many scholarly critiques of his conclusions as there are enthusiastic supporters.

If we cannot be comfortable with Divine Miracles, nor can we be convinced of the scientific approach, how are we to understand the phenomenon of the Ten Plagues? There is a mythological approach. That is, perhaps the plagues are a cultural collaborative collection of ancient remembrances, perhaps memories stemming originally from ancient cataclysmic events like earthquakes and tsunamis. These events, inexplicable in their day as anything other than Divine intervention, may have occurred in a number of Middle Eastern countries and over a substantial period of time. Over a long course of oral history, they became fused into one potent story that eventually became the drama of the Exodus. Again, scholars and rabbis alike argue on both sides of the spectrum.

The plagues are at the heart of this story that we read every year in the Haggadah. Whether the plagues actually occurred or not, they are colorful and powerful in the telling. But do they hold meaning for us, beyond the drama? Be they Divine miracles, scientifically verifiable events, or collective myth, do the plagues have a message to teach us today?

Rabbi Arthur Waskow suggests that we identify plagues we currently experience in our challenged world... the plague of social injustice, of pollution, toxic waste, etc, and work towards antidotes for the same. This is certainly a valuable exercise at our seder tables. But particularly this year, when the devastation of recent earthquakes still resonate, I believe that instead of asking Why plagues or Why earthquakes perhaps the more useful approach might be asking What next?

What becomes important for us today, is to consider what our responsibility is in the aftermath of such devastation.

Tikun Olam, Repairing of the World, is not a mitzvah that applies only to Jewish crises. As conscientious Jews, it is incumbent upon us to be conscientious global citizens. It is our moral and social duty to acknowledge the Plagues of the World, and heed the call to help, not just in the immediate hours after the cataclysmic event, but in the long and challenging rebuilding that must take place with our help. As this season of Pesach approaches, let us not Pass Over the opportunity to be personally involved in Tikun Olam.

Rabbi Suri Krieger

Some Words from Our President

When I think of Pesach, I think of freedom. We tell the story of our freedom from slavery, the beginning of our journey of receiving the Torah and becoming the "Jewish" people rather than twelve tribes descended from Abraham, and freedom from oppression and fear. This year I urge you during your seder to think of those today that still live in fear and oppression; from Sudan to Tibet to Haiti. The Passover story is as relevant today as ever.

However, freedom is not just freedom "from", but also freedom "to". Freedom "from" is easy to passively reflect on. Freedom "to" is harder. I encourage you to take the step to use this freedom to create a Kerhonkson synagogue that is alive and vibrant. We look forward to a year of increase in numbers, increase in programs and increase in participation. I hope to see everyone at services to join in our discussions and absorb the knowledge and creative force we have in Rabbi Suri.

a zisn Pesach

Mark

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Israel To Set Up School For 1,000 Kids in Haiti

Thursday, March 4, 2010

Amid the rubble in Haiti, Israel is planning a 1,000-student school and community center in the heart of Port-au-Prince.

Several weeks after the Israeli field hospital in Haiti was dismantled, and amid growing concern over the country's long-term needs, officials hope to build a permanent compound or Israeli-style village that will include an elementary school, community center and playground. Staffed by local teachers, the compound will also house a medical clinic and rehabilitation center.

Ambassador Haim Divon, head of MASHAV "The Israel Center for International Cooperation, hopes the school will be up and running this month. Initially, he envisions being able to accept 1,000 students." jpost.com

Senior News

This winter has been very difficult for us seniors. We had to cancel numerous Tuesday luncheons due to the weather. The amount of rainy and snowy days since this last newsletter report has made it challenging for us to gather together and enjoy each others company. Our incredible phone tree keeps us up to date and the handful of times we did meet were joyous with much sharing of information. We are looking forward to Spring when our Tuesday 12 p.m. luncheons will be more regular and many of our Florida snowbirds in attendance.

Lynda

This is a friendly reminder.
Have you paid your dues?

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China Gets Kosher Milk, We All Laugh - At First.

China is known for a lot of things: Pandas. Mao. Jackie Chan. That totally-awesome-slash-mildly-frightening drumming display at the Beijing Olympics.

What China is not known for is Jews. Actually, that's not entirely true - during the Holocaust, many Jews fled Europe for China (the term "Shanghaianders" may ring a bell), and for centuries Kaifeng (the ancient capital of China) was the home to a small but thriving Jewish community. But the Kaifeng Jews eventually assimilated and forgot their heritage, and most Shanghaianders ended up immigrating elsewhere (like the Bay Area) after the war.

Today there are around 10,000 Jews in the People's Republic. So let's be honest. In a country of 1.3 billion people, 10,000 of anything is, well, nothing. In fact, the percentage of China's population that is Jewish is so infinitesimal that I don't even have a calculator that will tell me what it is.

Which is why I was so surprised when I saw a story on JTA about kosher milk coming to the PRC. A dairy in Beijing is now distributing the milk, which is both cholov Yisroel (the strict kosher standard for dairy products) and organic.

At first glance, this story seems pretty ridiculous. In a country of 1.29999 billion people who aren't Jewish and 10,000 who are, establishing a kosher dairy industry seems

a little bit, um, stupid? I mean, of those 10,000 Jews, how many probably keep kosher? Sure, there are 10 Chabad Houses in China whose inhabitants need certified milk, but that still doesn't seem like enough to necessitate a full-on kosher dairy industry.

But then I remembered: melamine. In 2008, batches of melamine-tainted baby formula sickened more than 300,000 Chinese babies, and some even died. JTA reports that in the wake of that incident, "public distrust of the dairy industry remains strong."

Studies of who is buying kosher food in the U.S. has revealed that in fact, a very significant number - up to 80 percent, according to some reports - of people who buy kosher products aren't doing it for religious reasons. They're doing it because they feel that kosher food is healthier, thanks to the strict supervision process. This has been a boon to companies like Manischewitz and Streit's, which might otherwise have tanked thanks to the dwindling number of Jews keeping kosher.

So there's actually a very good likelihood that kosher milk will really take off in China, not just with Jews.

Perhaps this move, while seemingly a bit odd on the outside, is actually genius. Even if only 5 percent of China's population could be convinced that kosher is better, that's still 65 million people - think the entire population of France.

So to the person who thought this up, I raise my glass (of milk) to you.

**Kerhonkson Synagogue
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