

An Observant Eye



AUDITING NEWS OF JEWISH INTEREST AND ITS COVERAGE

Rabbi Avi Shafran

Slapstick in Syria

Iran Threatens to Stooge an Attack

With mounting evidence that the Syrian government has killed hundreds of its citizens with chemical weapons, and threats by President Obama about military action to convince Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad to desist from such murders, the lead paragraph of a *New York Times* report this past Wednesday was interesting. It read: “Iranian lawmakers and commanders issued stark

warnings to the United States and its allies on Tuesday, saying any military strike on Syria would lead to a retaliatory attack on Israel fanned by ‘the flames of outrage’.”

Readers of a certain age and background might recall when Moe hit Curly over the head with a bat and Curly, “fanned by the flames of outrage,” one might say, duly visited revenge in kind... upon Larry.

And so it goes in the Middle East.



Mein Wine

Stupid Is As Stupid Drinks

The (London) *Daily Mail* reported this week that a tourist from Philadelphia whose relatives died in Auschwitz was shocked to find wine bottles in an Italian supermarket featuring Adolf Hitler, *ym”sh*, on the labels.

One wine was called “Mein Kampf”; and another: “Ein volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer.”

An inquiry has been opened into the sale of the wine bottles, which have apparently been available for a number of years, and, according to the producer, sell very well.

Prosecutor Mario Giulio Schinaia told news agency ANSA that “the only crime that could be currently attributable to this is that of ‘apologizing for fascism’,” a legal offense in Italy.

“At this point, though,” he added, “it would be opportune to invent the crime of human stupidity.”



If Only...

Creative Ad-Crafters Mix Film and Philosophy

In other Hitler news, the Huffington Post reported this week about a fake ad, produced as a project by German film students for a competition sponsored in part by Mercedes-Benz. It featured a Mercedes C-Class automobile but in a striking way, raising a chilling historical “what if?”

Anachronistically, the vehicle winds through a 19th century Austrian town, and its collision-prevention feature helps it avoid hitting two girls playing in the road. But the car then speeds toward a little boy flying a kite and runs him down. The boy’s mother screams “Adolf!” and a split-second image of a scowling adult Hitler flashes across the screen.

And then the tagline appears, referring to the car’s technology: “Detects dangers before they come up.”

The final shot is of the boy’s lifeless body on the grass, twisted into a swastika.



Wall Wars MMXIII

Buoyant Bennett Bombs

The *Jerusalem Post* reported on Israeli Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Naftali Bennett's call to Reform and Conservative Jews to visit the Western Wall during the High Holy Days and pray at the newly upgraded site that has been prepared by the government for non-Orthodox services.

Earlier this week, Mr. Bennett cheerfully announced that the Robinson's Arch area, just south of the main Western Wall Plaza, had undergone a substantial upgrade. The new prayer platform there covers approximately 450 square meters and can accommodate approximately 450 worshippers. Torah scrolls, prayer books and prayer shawls will be made available at the site, which will be accessible seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

The Robinson's Arch site was designated a prayer area for non-Orthodox services in 1998, and a small prayer platform was constructed there in 2004.

Bennett said that, despite criticism by the feminist group Women of the Wall, the Robinson's Arch area is on equal historical and religious footing with the rest of the plaza.

Approximately 20 women, including the leaders of the Women of the Wall, participated in a 24-hour sit-in (and sleep-in) at the Western Wall to protest the government's unwillingness to change religious standards at the main Western Wall plaza, where Jews have prayed in a traditional fashion since 1967 (and, whenever they could, for centuries before).

Mr. Bennett's presentation of the new prayer area did not receive a warm welcome.

Asked for comment by *Haaretz*, an Agudath Israel spokesperson said: "The balkanization of the Kotel Maaravi is a step away from, not toward, Jewish unity. For more than three decades, the Kotel has been a place – perhaps the only one in the world – where Jews of all affiliations and persuasions have regularly prayed side by side."

“What has allowed for that minor miracle,” I added, “has been the maintenance of a standard at the holy site that all Jews – even those who might prefer other standards, or none at all – can abide.”

For her part, Woment of the Wall’s chairman, Anat Hoffman, unequivocally rejected the new site, calling it a “sunbathing deck.”

“There’s no G-d over here,” Ms. Hoffman complained, according to the *Jewish Press*. “G-d is around the corner, where the *charedim* are *davening*.”



White Russian

Madman On The Loose In Moscow

The *European Jewish Press* this week highlighted some interesting statements made by Moscow mayoral candidate

Alexei Navalny, the self-described “defender of Russian democracy.”

In a party celebrating the anniversary of the newspaper *The New Times*, the 37-year-old Russian blogger, who was

sentenced to five years in prison on embezzlement and fraud charges but is free pending a ruling on his appeal, suggested that those gathered “make the first toast for the Holocaust.” And on his blog, he referred to religious Jews as “dandies in fox hats and rags.”

Jews, however, “are not the only ethnic minority on the... candidate’s mind,” the report notes.

“In a video distributed in Moscow, he identifies dark-

skinned Caucasians as cockroaches and states that ‘though one can kill cockroaches with a shoe, when it comes to human beings, I recommend a gun’.”



Rabba II

According to Showbiz411, (we go to the ends of the earth for this newsletter), an apparently well-known television talk show personality by the name of Kathie Lee Gifford, a “born-again” Christian who has a Jewish father, announced on the Today show that she wants to become an Orthodox rabbi.

“I want,” she told viewers, “to go to Yeshiva University.”

“I want to understand what [Hebrew] words mean,” she explained further, “and what the context is. I’m fascinated by that stuff.”

Well, we suppose that’s a start.

Food Fight

*Love Conquers ...
Well, Some Things*

In an insufferable piece of navel-gazing, a young woman penned a lengthy essay for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency entitled “Can true love bridge the meat and dairy divide?”

Now that her boyfriend, “raised in a Conservative Jewish household in Los Angeles” and she, from “a Reform home in New York” are living together, they face the existential question of how kosher their kitchen should be.

“In our home,” she fondly recalls, “*tzimmes* was served alongside roast beef and Yorkshire pudding during our traditional Christmas Eve dinner with our longtime Jewish friends.”

But her partner politely balked at mixing meat and milk.

“Milk and meat lived so harmoniously in my kitchen – and my stomach,” she writes, “that the thought of separating the two rattled my belief system more than I would have anticipated. Could I embrace

kashrut for Dov? After all, he knew that I would never be one to keep Shabbat, so he’d altered his lifestyle from keeping the tradition. He also moved to New York City to be with me, despite his love for living in California. So maybe I could bend, too. There was a chance I might even enjoy it.”

“No such luck,” though, she informs us.

“I wasn’t moving in with my boyfriend to eat dinner alone.”

And so, our intrepid diarist concludes that all she and her partner can do is opt for compromise (on her terms), “not kashrut... to be less like the families we came from and more like the family we would create together.”

May their children come to value more important things than food.



Common Ground (Beef)

*Animals Bring
Jews And Muslims Together*

According to the JTA, the directors of the Jewish Community Center of Krakow and the Krakow Islamic Center have joined

forces to fight Poland's ban on Jewish and Muslim ritual slaughter.

Jonathan Ornstein, the JCC's executive director, and Dr. Hayssam Obeidat, director of the Islamic Center, issued a joint open letter Tuesday saying their "communities stand united and call on the Polish government... to ensure that we have the right to ritual slaughter and can practice our traditions..."

It is believed to be the first time the directors of Jewish and Muslim community organizations in Poland have issued such a joint appeal.

Miami It's Not

From Labor Camp To Racquetball

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reports on the opening of what is being called the largest Jewish community center in Siberia, Russia.

"Hundreds are expected" at the opening in Novosibirsk of the "Beit Machem Center." [One wonders if it may in fact be the "Beit Menachem Center.']

Icky Dick

Historian Rafael Medoff, writing for news service JNS.com, took note of the fact that newly released tapes of President Richard M. Nixon's private conversations reveal more of the sort of anti-Semitic remarks made by Mr. Nixon in tapes that were released earlier.

One remark, however, writes Mr. Medoff, in the latest tapes "stands out."

Discussing potential judicial nominees with an aide, Mr. Nixon insisted, "No Jews. Is that clear? We've got enough Jews."

But then he added: "Now if you find some Jew that I think is great, put him on there."

Well, at least he wasn't consistent.

"According to Rabbi Zalman Zaklas, the city's chief rabbi and emissary for the Chabad-Lubavitch movement," JTA reports, "the center cost approximately \$5 million to build. The money was raised in donations on three continents, he told JTA on Tuesday; the city of Novosibirsk donated the land.

"The center, which has 37,000 square feet of floor space, has a synagogue,

classrooms, a kosher restaurant and Jewish shops, as well as a computer corner, entertainment area and gym."

We just hope the pool's heated.

