

Dovetail

A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families



Holidays Across the Divide: Interfaith Families Light Candles Against the Dark

This issue of Dovetail was planned as a lighthearted set of reminiscences from adult children of interfaith families looking back on their childhood holidays. Then September 11 took the lightness from all our hearts. Still, as I write this on the eve of Yom Kippur, my heart yearns for the warmth and joy, however tempered with sadness, of the coming holidays, from the harvest home of Sukkot and Thanksgiving to the hope and light of Hanukkah and Christmas. I think it is not inappropriate to share some happy memories as we prepare ourselves to produce new ones for the years to come.



For Dovetail—not only the board but you, our members and supporters—there is also some reason for quiet pride and hope. We are playing some small part in furthering the cause of interfaith understanding and the love that crosses parochial boundaries. Some of the stories in this issue of the journal celebrate moments when those boundaries were crossed. Take joy in those moments, and please continue to stand behind and beside us; we need your help more than ever in working to bridge the gaps that divide the children of God. ❏

Mary Helen Rubin

Yet there is a somber side to our holiday histories, as well. Hanukkah celebrates a religious reform that involved sometimes brutal force on the part of the Maccabean reformers—people we'd certainly call extremist fanatics today—countered by the cruelest repression from Rome, then the world's greatest superpower.

On the Christian side, we would do well to recall why it is that Osama bin Laden uses the word "Crusader" as an epithet of contempt and hatred. God knows, Christianity has much to answer for historically when it comes to oppression and religious enmity.

As does Islam: the crescent moon emblem* is a traditional reminder of the thwarted political hopes of the old Muslim hegemony, often pursued with steel and fire. Perhaps the Muslim observance of repentance and reflection in Ramadan is most appropriate for all of us this season.

*see p. 8

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Authority, Power, and Leadership Related to Religious Identity: An Interfaith Conference

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This will be an experiential conference in the Group Relations tradition. **Participants will learn about** the formation of group identity and the unconscious emotional freight we attach to our sense of collective "belongingness" and membership.

Current events show all too clearly the urgent need for increasing our understanding of social identity and religious community.

Religious groups must learn to identify their own irrational processes, which may lead to abuses of authority and to ineffective mobiliza-

tion of resources, and which may prevent cooperation with groups that differ in religious culture.

Through learning about group processes such as splitting, projection, scapegoating, and the uses and abuses of power and authority, religious and mental health professionals can increase their understanding of the irrational forces that impede their efforts.

Rabbis, priests, and ministers must be aware of issues facing interfaith families, examine their own prejudices, and improve their "cultural competence." **Therapists** can improve their effectiveness through greater understanding of the pressures these families face both internally and in their communities. Both clergy and lay **community leaders** must better communicate with other religious groups to accomplish community goals with shrinking resources, to lobby effectively, to further their own visions for loving and peaceful

Dovetail's mission is to provide a channel of communication for interfaith couples, their parents, and their children. No matter what their specific choices regarding faith for their home and children, the more interfaith families can share their ideas, experiences, resources, and support, the more they can make peace in their homes and communities. Jewish and Christian perspectives can dovetail.

Believing that there are no definitive answers to the questions facing interfaith families, **Dovetail** strives to be open to all ideas and opinions. Editorial content attempts to balance and respect the perspectives of both Jewish and Christian partners in interfaith marriages, as well as the diverse perspectives of parents and children of interfaith couples. Inclusion in **Dovetail** does not imply endorsement. **Dovetail** accepts a thoughtful and constructive discussion of all related issues in the Letters to the Editor section, and reserves the right to reply.

*Prices include room and board; amounts may change slightly. To receive a detailed brochure, call 800-530-1596.

communities. This conference will provide tools that will help them lead contentious groups more effectively.

The conference focus will be on power, authority, group formation and intergroup functioning, in the context of Religious Identity. Staff will be drawn from AKRI members experienced in group relations work.

The **A. K. Rice Institute** was established in 1970 as a nonprofit educational institution. Organized through eight regional centers in the United States, its mission is to advance the understanding of covert processes affecting leadership and authority in groups and organizations. Using the Tavistock group relations tradition of open systems and psychodynamic theories, the A. K. Rice Institute offers group relations conferences, training programs, professional meetings, and publications in order to study and apply concepts of role, task, and boundaries to further understanding of authority, leadership, and organizational effectiveness.

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Rites and Rights

by Donna Schaper

The moments of most tension for interfaith families are the ritual moments. We try to do them “right” but can’t. Thus we double up, compromise, trade, borrow, and create from whole cloth what is tattered and ancient. We do rites instead of right. Baptisms, brits, marriages, confirmations or bar/bat mitzvahs (my friend irreverently calls ours “barmations” or “Mitzvir-mations”), burials: each of these normal moments in life becomes an occasion for tension among us.

As our hybrid seeds begin to grow, we learn more about what these kernels within fruits are. There are strong fears of separation from our roots, there are ridiculous competitions (like which gets the bigger gift budget, Christmas or Hanukkah), and there is simple ignorance of each other’s patterns. Interfaith families need to combine all their rites and rituals with a lot more conversation than others—and this conversation can be tedious. And it can be wonderful. We “political liturgists” know. Author/educator activist Parker Palmer says he became a contemplative by catastrophe. We understand.

The Rites

The little rituals tell more than the big ones like marriage and children’s rites of passage. We celebrate a very simple Sabbath on Friday nights, with two prayers, a few candles, and a blessing for the children. That moment when we exhale the week has often been one of exquisite difficulty for us—mostly because the dinner is often late, the children are often grumpy, and in my humble liturgical opinion, the service is too long. Our nightly prayer is one with hands, not with words at all, which is

a superb compromise, in my own view. The children’s good night prayers are more conversation than prayer.

People send our interfaith family a lot of sensitive “happy holidays” cards—but we’d prefer the Hanukkah lights on their day and the Christmas Christ on the 25th “straight up.” As an interfaith family, we believe in both blend and basic—not either but both—and our poor teenagers know it. We want stew, not melting pot. Others want something different—and that is their choice.

In our family, the menorah does get placed very close to the Christmas tree. We even have uncomfortable pictures of both together. The reason is less theological than practical. The one season blends into the other, and both symbols are pretty to us. Little children cavort in front of them and we snap photos. While it is important to reflect on why and how these December connections happen, it is more important to let them be gifts from God. “Lighten up” is an important message for those of us who think too much about getting rites right!

Sometimes we blend. And sometimes we don’t. The menorah and the tree may both be in our living room simultaneously, but that doesn’t mean we are combining them.

Hanukkah does not compare well to Christmas; one is a minor festival in its own faith and the other a major festival, and it is unfortunate that they get combined as equals (particularly since the meaning of the Hanukkah observance is to resist Hellenization, or “mixing”). For the Jew, Hanukkah is not a comparable season in size or import to Christ-

*Rev. Donna Schaper is an intermarried United Church of Christ minister in Coral Gables, Florida. Her most recent book is **Raising Interfaith Children: Spiritual Orphans or Spiritual Heirs?** (NY: Crossroad, 1999).*

Is religious truth so absolute that only one God and one faith dare be observed? I think not. Nor does God speak only in Jewish or Christian terms. God also speaks Muslim.

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mas. It is as though a minor Christian festival like All Saints' Day were paired with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The Rights

And then there's the really big question: How can one affirm both and affirm them at different times in different ways? Isn't religious truth so absolute that only one God and one faith dare be observed? I think not.

Nor does God speak only in Jewish or Christian terms. God also speaks Muslim. The sooner we move beyond simplistic "right" answer approaches to God into humbly accessing the God beyond God, the better. Thus, we have our way of being interfaith and others have their way, and so long as God is respected, we respect the ways people develop of respecting God. 

The Holiday Season Sparkles

by Sarah Ahmann Saviet

The holiday season sparkles.
The lights on the green branches
and the nine colorful candles
twinkle like stars in the sky.
Under the tree,
a multitude of rainbow colored
presents sit in waiting to be opened.
On a table, a heap of golden gelt lies
shimmering next to a wooden
dreidle.
Voices sing "Silent night, holy night."
A childish voice calls out "Gimel, I
won!"

The holiday season glistens with joy
and love!

Sarah Saviet wrote this poem as a holiday present for her dad several years ago. She is now a 12-year-old homeschooler. She considers herself half-Jewish/half-Christian. She went to church for many years and is now studying Torah. She celebrates Hanukkah and Christmas and many other holidays.



In Memoriam

Dovetail and the interfaith community have lost another old friend and a pioneer among rabbis who officiate at intermarriages, Rabbi Roy Rosenberg. Co-author of *Happily Intermarried: Authoritative Advice for a Joyous Jewish-Christian Marriage* (NY: MacMillan, 1988), Rabbi Rosenberg was on *Dovetail's* original editorial advisory board. Our condolences to his family and to the congregation he helped found, the Temple of Universal Judaism/Daat Elohim in New York (www.tuj.org).

Over the River and Across the Highway

by Meredith Morgenstern

It was tradition in my father's family that every first night of Hanukkah my grandparents would have a huge dinner at their house for the lighting of the menorah: kasha varnishkes (buckwheat groats with bowtie noodles), matzoh ball soup, brisket, and, of course, latkes (potato pancakes). My grandmother, may God rest her soul, made the crispiest, most mouth-watering latkes a kid could hope for, from scratch of course. After dinner came the dreidel game, which my brother, my cousins, and I elevated to new heights of competitiveness involving eye-bulging amounts of chocolate Hanukkah gelt.

My mother's family's Christmas traditions were similar: the menu included tsimmis (stewed carrots), baked ham, and more pirogies than you could shake a stick at, instead of the kosher meal at dad's family. Instead of playing dreidel we strung popcorn to hang on the gigantic Christmas tree, holding contests to see who could resist eating the popcorn the longest. Instead of Hanukkah gelt we gorged ourselves on candy canes. Either way, my brother and I were always well fed at the holidays.

Crossing the Highway

Growing up in a large suburb just south of Miami meant that my family and I had to take State Road 836 into the city proper. From there we'd either keep to the right and end up on the 874 to get to my mother's Catholic family, or keep to the left and end up on the 826 to get to my father's Jewish family. I always thought of the 836 as the Road That Divided My Family.

During the holidays in 1986, when I was 10 years old, the 836 proved to be more than just a dividing line between The Family Where No One Understood Yiddish and The Family Where We Couldn't Admit That We Ate Pork. My mother's sister Margaret, having just returned home from a business trip somewhere up north, had come down with a miserable flu bug three days before Christmas. Dinner that year was up in the air. Would it happen? Would Aunt Margaret be better by Christmas Eve? Should we just cancel the dinner and make ham sandwiches at home?

To be on the safe side, my grandmother postponed the big ham and tsimmis dinner until the 26th. She figured the traffic would be easier to handle the day after Christmas, anyway. The problem for my family was, though, that the first night of Hanukkah fell that year on—wait for it—Friday, December 26th. What to do? My parents had a solution, and even now I have asthma attacks just remembering it.

We drove up the 836 first, to light the Hanukkah candles then have brisket, kasha, and latkes. We left dinner early, my father explaining that he wanted to beat the Friday night traffic home. My brother and I were excited for our Christmas dinner at last, but we also hated missing the dreidel game. Two of our cousins had defeated us out of three sacks of gelt the year before, and we had been out for some serious revenge. Nevertheless, chucking the Hanukkah presents from aunts, uncles, and grandparents into the trunk of the car—more than once accompanied by the sound of breaking glass—we sped off to the 836. We nearly collided with about

Meredith Morgenstern, a member of the International Women's Writing Guild, was born and raised in Miami, Florida. She now makes her living as a free-lance article, short story, and sometime-screenplay writer in Brooklyn, New York. Her first Internet short story, "Rites of Death," was recently published on morbidoutlook.com, and her personal essay, "Car Seats," has been chosen to be included in an upcoming anthology of mother-daughter stories. Her mother, who went to Catholic school for twelve years, converted to Judaism in her late teens when she met Meredith's Jewish father. Although she and her brother were raised Jewish, their mother kept many of her Catholic traditions, such as Christmas trees and Easter egg hunts. Meredith can be reached at mmorgen0214@hotmail.com.

I always thought of the 836 as the Road That Divided My Family.

Why We Support Dovetail

Two years ago we had our first experience with Dovetail and it changed our lives. We registered for the Dovetail Conference in Louisville, KY hoping to have our many questions about the future of our interfaith family answered. After two very full days of information and ideas, we returned home feeling for the first time that a foundation could be laid for our future.

The most wonderful gift we received from the conference was being able to ask questions we had struggled with. "How can we teach our children about Judaism and Catholicism and not confuse them?" "How do we celebrate the Jewish and Catholic holidays together?" "How can we teach our extended families about our own interfaith family?" We finally had found caring and honest people to answer our many questions.

Having the support of others who are struggling with the same sorts of life issues has meant the world to us. Dovetail has allowed us to come to terms with the fact that living in an interfaith family is not always easy, but it is possible and can be extremely meaningful.

We hope you will consider what Dovetail means to you and your family and we ask you to join us in making a meaningful gift to Dovetail this year.

ten Mack trucks as we crossed five lanes of traffic in under a mile on a Friday night in Miami.

Cars honked, tires screeched, people yelled things I was too young to understand, and, at the time, I could have sworn that I saw my life flash before my eyes. Years later, my dad swears that it wasn't as bad as I remember it, but I've compared notes with my brother since then, and we're pretty sure that our dad violated at least a dozen different traffic laws that night. I think the skid marks from his car are still on the 836 to this very day.

To Grandmother's House

By the time we got to Mom's family, my poor little brother, who got motion sick just walking to the mailbox, was positively green and ready to throw up. I, meanwhile, was huddled in the corner of the backseat, trembling, my knees pulled up to my chest and my asthma about to kick in. But we made it. We scrambled out of the car and threw ourselves headlong into my other grandparents' house, just in time for ham and pirogies. Of course, not one of the four of us wanted to admit that we had just eaten, so we stuffed ourselves, again.

I don't think that to this day I've eaten so much food in so little time.

If we do not continue to financially support Dovetail, the support that has been so important to us will not be there for the many other families struggling with these issues.

Warmly,

Jen Kracower and Tom Cafferty

I was glad that I had already seen my cousins in their Nativity play, because the thought of forcing my poor bloated stomach to endure those unforgiving hard wooden church benches was just too much for me that night. God bless Pepto Bismol and ginger ale. And God bless the soft, pliant couches of my grandparents' living room.

I fully blame this incident for the time when, years later, I accidentally brought a ham and cheese sandwich to my job as a camp counselor at the Jewish Community Center.

Lucky for me and my poor digestive system, by the time another year rolled around when the first night of Hanukkah fell close to Christmas Eve, I was away at college. My brother called me up on Hanukkah to ask me how many dinners I had eaten that night. The minute he said it I felt queasy, but I smiled anyway. It could be worse, I told him. At least both our families don't celebrate the same Holidays—imagine if we had to go through that every year! Poor kid, he had to take a Dramamine when I said that.

And just for the record, my brother and I are still the #1 dreidel team in America. And we can string the most popcorn in our family without eating any of it. Most of the time. 

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Christmukkah

Anonymous,
From the Internet

Continuing the current trend of large-scale mergers and acquisitions, it was announced today at a press conference that Christmas and Hanukkah will merge.

An industry source said that the deal had been in the works for about 1300 years, ever since the rise of the Muslim Empire. While details were not available at press time, it is believed that the overhead cost of having twelve days of Christmas and eight days of Hanukkah was becoming prohibitive for both sides. By combining forces, we're told, the world will be able to enjoy consistently high-quality service during the Fifteen Days of Christmukkah, as the new holiday is being called.

Massive layoffs are expected, with lords a-leaping and maids a-milking being the hardest hit. As part of the conditions of the agreement, the letters on the dreidel, currently in Hebrew, will be replaced by Latin, thus becoming unintelligible to a wider audience. Also, instead of translating to "A great miracle happened there," the message on the dreidel will be the more generic "Miraculous stuff happens."

In exchange, it is believed that Jews will be allowed to use Santa Claus and his vast merchandising resources for buying and delivering their gifts. In fact, one of the sticking points holding up the agreement for at least three hundred years was the question of whether Jewish children could leave milk and cookies for Santa even after having eaten meat for dinner. A breakthrough came last year, when Oreos were finally declared to be Kosher. All sides appeared happy about this.

A spokesman for Christmas, Inc., declined to say whether a takeover of Kwanzaa might not be in the works as well. He merely pointed out that, were it not for the independent existence of Kwanzaa, the merger between Christmas and Hanukkah might indeed be seen as an unfair cornering of the holiday market.

Fortunately for all concerned, he said, Kwanzaa will help to maintain the competitive balance. He then closed the press conference by leading all present in a rousing rendition of "Oy, Come All Ye Faithful." ▀

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and
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Holiday Symbols An Internet Exchange

J: This may sound trivial, but how have people handled the Santa Claus issue?

R: Santa Claus is a fictional, secularized character. He originated, however, in the Eastern Christian church, deriving from the very real St Nicholas of Myra of what is now known as Turkey. My kids don't believe in Santa Claus, but then neither does my husband, who is from a Christian background. It's a non issue for us, too, therefore. :)

K: We wouldn't incorporate the popular version of Santa Claus, even if neither of us were Jewish. Fortunately, many of our daughter's peers' parents choose to ignore Santa Clause, too. If parents are able to create something positive with the Santa Claus construct, then that's great. The popular image just seems to us to be a kind of commercial perversion of the image of Saint Nicholas, who is known for his generosity to a poor family with many daughters. We do celebrate Saint Nicholas's Day (December 6th) by giving our daughter a special gift and including her in the act of giving a gift to a child who is in need.

L: Over the last few days I have seen several Christmas trees in people's

homes with the Star of David on top. Does anyone do this with their tree? Any opinions?

N: I haven't seen that, but I have heard of a Christmas tree decorated with laminated, sequinned bagels. I once gave my son and his Christian wife a Hanukkah menorah in the shape of a Christmas tree. It seemed appropriate.

M: This is an interesting question, and one that's aroused some rather intemperate responses (that I'm not posting). I think it is worthwhile for this group to explore, though, because it comes to the root of the challenge of intermarriage—which I take at least partly to be respecting boundaries while neither blurring them out of existence nor building them into dividing walls.

Why, for example, do so many of us feel repelled at the idea of combining two symbols, neither one of which is strictly religious. Both tree and star only came into widespread use as symbolic of the two creeds in the 19th century.

It's true that the six-pointed star was widely used in Byzantine churches long before it was anything more than a decorative trope in synagogue architecture—used, in one second or

third century BCE synagogue, alternating with pentagrams and swastikas.

Perhaps the last-named holds a clue: the uses to which a symbol has recently been put color our view of it: the success of the 19th century desire to find a simple, immediately identifiable symbol for Judaism similar to the cross for Christianity, and its use on the flag of Israel, combine with its use by the Nazis as a shameful identifier to change our feelings about the Magen David as surely as the Western ubiquity of the Christmas tree have shorn it of associations with paganism or "popery." Symbols are powerful; that's why we use them. Maybe just as we can no longer use the old English heraldic symbol called the fylfot in our church decorations, or view the shape with equanimity on a Navajo blanket, since it's been termed "swastika" and used to mean terror and oppression, we Christians can't co-opt the Magen David as our own divine shield, now that we've acquiesced in its use as a badge by the agents of oppression.

And in a culture dominated, at least nominally, by Christianity, we have to be particularly sensitive to misuse of others' symbols. 

We also need to be sure we have our symbols straight. Many of us were taught that the crescent moon of Islam symbolized the arc of the advance of Muslim armies from Gibraltar to Tours in the 8th century. It seems, however, that the crescent moon symbol was adapted from a Byzantine flag, combined with an omen seen in a dream by the founder of the Ottoman Empire. "The faith of Islam has historically had no symbol, and many refuse to accept what is essentially an ancient pagan icon. It is certainly not in uniform use among Muslims" (from <http://islam.about.com/library/weekly>).

Holiday Shopping

Please remember to do your on-line shopping at <http://www.iGive.com/> Dovetail. Not only can you support Dovetail—at no cost to you—by designating us as your favorite cause, you can also donate to relief efforts in Manhattan and Washington through this channel.

Join the Dovetail listserv discussion at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/interfaith>

The Buddhist, Jewish, Christmas Tree

by Lillian Pivar Heimowitz

It was three weeks before Christmas when my boss, O.B. Moan, called me into his office.

"Lil," he said, leaning back in his chair with his feet propped on the desk, "we have to do something about Christmas."

"What about Christmas?"

"I was thinking that we should have a Christmas tree. I'd like you to buy one and set it up in our department."

"O.B., I've never bought a Christmas tree. You know I'm Jewish. I'm more into celebrating Hanukkah."

"Take John."

"John is Chinese and believes in Buddha. Don't you think I should ask some Christian who would know more about buying a tree?"

"I don't see the problem. Just go to the nearest tree lot. It would be a good idea to buy decorations for it." Wallet in hand, he extracted a few twenties. "This should cover it. If not, I'll reimburse you."

John and I went to the lot, and with the advice of the salesman we bought a six-foot evergreen tree. Our next stop was a place that sold Christmas tree decorations. With the help of a clerk, we staggered out with a large carton overflowing with lights, ornaments, and boxes of silvery tinsel.

I thought our job was done, but not according to O.B. He enlisted the help of other department personnel to dress the tree. I must admit the twinkling lights and colorful decorations brought the corner of the room a certain aura of joy.

When O.B. saw the decorated tree, he said, "John and you did a great job." He paused for a moment. "I was

thinking. Rather than throw away the tree, we should give it to a poor family. We could deliver it to them on Christmas day."

I was getting into the spirit of giving. "O.B., I have another idea. Suppose I visit a church and ask the priest if he knows of a needy family. I'm sure the people in our department would donate money for something worthwhile. I'll find out what the family needs and buy them clothes and toys. Then we can bring them the tree and all the goodies."

"Lil," smiled O.B., "that's a terrific idea. Go to it."

It was the first time I'd been in a church, but after meeting Father Dolan, I did not feel like a stranger. He told me of a recently widowed mother and her four small children.

A few days later, with Father Dolan's information on the family's needs, I formed a committee to buy the clothes and toys. After work, we wrapped and placed them under the tree. Our mission had spread through the building; every morning when I came to work, another gaily wrapped gift had been placed under the tree by a generous donor.

On the day before Christmas, the trimmed tree, gifts, and an envelope of money were loaded into a truck owned by Joe, one of the men at work. Later, I asked Joe about the reaction of the family when he'd carried the tree into the house.

"The children's faces lit up when they saw the tree and the presents. I will never forget the mother's tears streaming down her face."

This was the beginning of an annual tradition. ❧

Lillian Pivar Heimowitz lives in Camarillo, Ca.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Jill Gupta, *The Great Bible Adventure, God's Message for Children*, no author listed; Margot R. Hodson, *A Feast of Seasons* (London and Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001).

Book Review by Ned Rosenbaum

Dr. Stanley Ned Rosenbaum is Professor Emeritus of Judaic Studies, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa. and adjunct professor at Louisville (Ky.) Presbyterian Seminary and the University of Kentucky (Lexington). A Dovetail Institute director, he is co-author of Celebrating Our Differences: Living Two Faiths in One Marriage (Ragged Edge: Shippensburg, Pa., 1994).

If religious education of children began at 13 instead of ending there, as it so often does, we might well awaken a serious lifetime interest in our young. This reviewer does not like children's books unless, like *Winnie-the-Pooh* or *Wind in the Willows*, they retain their power to speak to us even when we're adults. Religious books for children are almost precluded from doing this because their purpose is to teach children moral lessons derived from the faith. Hence, they are too often didactic and preachy, to say nothing of distortive of the Bible stories that the authors unquestioningly take as literal historic fact.

Nonetheless, Jill Gupta's book, *The Great Bible Adventure*, succeeds in holding the reader's interest while asking some of the provocative questions that come from Scripture. She does this by approaching the subject matter in a lighthearted but not frivolous way and by sprinkling the 8.5" x 11" volume with the clever cartoons and puns of Mychailo Kazybrid (Abraham and Sarah having an "intense" [in tents] relationship; sleepless Bethlehem sheep counting angels). After retelling each story in an upbeat manner, Gupta refers readers to the Scripture passage from which it comes. (She doesn't recommend which translation to use. For a mixed religious family, this last is of crucial importance, but that's an article for another time.)

God's Message for Children is a coat of another color: a monochrome. Even the illustrations are bland. While Gupta's book contains recognizably Semitic figures, *GMC's* are straight vanilla people dressed up as for a Sunday School pageant.

GMC is arranged as a series of daily half-page, illustrated "stories" with a moral printed at the end of each. All this is taken from the New International Version Bible, a very conservative Christian translation. In short, *GMC* is unsuitable for interfaith families. (I wouldn't recommend it to Christian families, either.)

A Feast of Seasons is not a children's book, though it was packaged with the other two and is cast in somewhat childish language. Its author "works full time for the Church Ministry among the Jewish People (CMJ)" and she acknowledges help from the Messianic community of North London (UK). Her book is presented as exploring "what these ancient celebrations can mean for Christians today." What she has produced is a revolting concoction of Christian triumphalism sprinkled with Jewish recipes but larded with encouragement to Christians to co-opt Jewish festivals as their own, for instance in "A Hagaddah for believers in Jesus" (59-65), and with suggestions to Jews to become "Messianic."

Ms. Hodson may be well intentioned, but Jesus himself had a few choice words to say on the subject of good intentions, and in these post-Holocaust days many Christians of good will have decided to forego proselytizing Jews, directly or indirectly. Let Ms. Hodson rather direct her efforts at making peace in Christian Ireland or between the Serbs and Croats of former Yugoslavia, after which her warm words might carry more weight. Meanwhile, those of us in the interfaith community should remain vigilant that what we give our children, or rely on ourselves, is accurate, balanced, and fair. 

Advertising Lesson

by Janett L. Grady

While baby-sitting a few days ago, I got a lesson in the power of advertising from my five-year-old grandson.

We were watching television when an ad for Muppet home videos came on.

"Gran-gran, can we sign up for those?" he asked.

"I don't think so, honey," I answered. "Your mom and dad don't have any extra money to be wasting on that."

"You don't need money," he said. "You can use a credit card."

"No, Michael," I said, "that just costs more money."

"But if we don't like it, we can cancel any time."

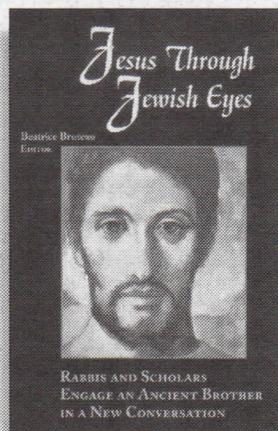
Here's a little boy who can remember every detail of a five-minute television commercial, but can't seem to remember from day to day that his boots go on *after* his snow pants.

The funniest part of it all is that Michael has never even seen the Muppet show. Knowing him as I do, I doubt his expectations would have

been satisfied... but it sure looked good on TV.

What's the lesson here?

Well, we're all advertising something, whether we know it or not. All of us—Christians and Jews, teachers and preachers, doctors and lawyers—represent our principles, our morals, values, ethics, beliefs, or whatever it is you want to call it all. However we live our lives, whatever we do, is advertising, and people will, like Michael, remember what they see. ■



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Beatrice Bruteau, editor

JESUS THROUGH JEWISH EYES

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Beatrice Bruteau, co-founder of an international network community for contemplatives of all traditions, asked prominent Jewish teachers: "If you could get to the historical Jesus himself, before Christianity, when he was simply a Jew among Jews, what would you see? How would you respond? What would you hope we could do about it today?" The beautiful and surprising insights that surfaced in this conversation will encourage both Christians and Jews to rejoice in common values and work together in the healing and blessing of their shared humanity.

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Composed on a Braided Base

by Janet Landman

*Janet K. Tracy Landman is associate professor of psychology at Babson College in Wellesley, Mass., and author of the nonfiction book, *Regret: The Persistence of the Possible (Oxford, 1993)*. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in an anthology and a number of literary journals, including *Black River Review*, *Blue Violin*, *The Dickinson Review*, *Icarus*, *Northeast Corridor*, *Potomac Review*, and *Princeton Arts Review*. Her poem "Anniversary at Middle Age" was awarded third prize in the 1999 National Writers' Union competition, judged by Alicia Ostriker.*

Once a year we purchase one bottle of wine
less for contents than container:
the kind of vessel called
in English *flask*,
in Italian *fiasco*,
round-bottomed vessel
that but for its plaited-reed base
could not stay upright.

November we buy two kinds of tapers:
Chanukah candles to fit the menorah,
and old-fashioned candles, each
of which melts into multiple hues—
to fit the flask.

We time the secular lightings
to coincide with Christmas,
unless Chanukah does;
then they come earlier.

First we plant a forest green,
and verdancy flows all around,
waxy spreading willow so
convincing it diverts
us all from the crash
of December outdoors,
where the wind boots so spitefully
over crystal ice slicks, one
can hardly stand without help.
Then gnarled clumps of blue
gather halfway down,
the overflow splash-
ing in cantilevered paths
to the stoneware beneath.

All flame and course, cumulatively,
until in time rivers of tallow commingle:
primary-colored freshets entangled
with rose, olive, raisin, and apple—
complex shades warming this life of mine
based on years of childhood Masses
layered with even more years of Chanukahs.

One season our child and I
settled ourselves at the table;
I peeled potatoes by the light
of our quiet volcano, and she sketched it
in crayon. Another year
we watched as wavy, variegated strands
of paraffin tresses grew—
not unlike hers
that post-bat-mitzvah season.

No, she tells her friends, No,
she doesn't miss a Christmas tree.
It's no disaster.
She hugs to herself
those eight waxing nights
along with our odd worldling rite.
She stands composed
on a braided base.

Bulletin Board Addition:

New York, Long Island/Suffolk County
New group: Eileen Horowitz, 516-345-0095.

The Midwife's Song (Review)

Bernard J. Bamberger, in *The Story of Judaism* (NY: Schocken, 1964), defines Midrash as “a searching by which unsuspected meanings could be derived from scripture,” and Brenda Ray, in *The Midwife's Song*, the first book in a projected trilogy, brings us such meanings. Reading between the lines with imagination and compassion, she expands scripture in order to expound scripture. Her novel makes scriptural revelation more contextually understandable by vivid characterization, intelligent plots, and believable sentiment.

In this 243-page book, the author—a former midwife herself—gives us a look at the Moses birth saga through the eyes of one of the two midwives mentioned in the Bible as charged by Pharaoh with exterminating newborn Jewish males. Through a passionate characterization of Puah we meet not only her but also her great love Hattush, her senior mentor Shiphrah, and Batya, an Egyptian princess with a mind of her own, as well as other credible characters.

At one point Batya, pregnant and realizing her baby is in trouble, sends the palace guard to summon Puah to help her. Their differences put aside, they develop a heartwarming relationship. In one of the book's most tender scenes, after the baby is lost, Hebrew Puah assures Egyptian Batya of her prayers. “It is good to

cry,” she says. “Allow yourself to feel the pain. You've suffered a great loss. I pray my God will comfort you....”

The princess, who has previously prayed to the Egyptian gods of childbirth, accepts Puah's concern, and they hold one another. It is a scene of interfaith harmony set amidst the conflict between Hebrews and Egyptians.

This story is biblical fiction, a genre I find helpful in understanding scripture. The outstanding contemporary example of this genre is *The Book of God* by Walter Wangerin Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), which opened me to God's Word in a new and renewing way. Brenda Ray's book is a credit to this particular literary method, and her approach of having ninety-eight-year-old Puah tell the baby Moses story to the children as they make their exodus through the wilderness is stimulating. Some tell stories to put someone to sleep, but Brenda Ray tells this one to wake us up, and wake us up to the truth and power of God's Word it does.

One of the children to whom Puah tells this definitive story is her great-great-granddaughter Hannah. The second book of Brenda Ray's trilogy, *The Midwife's Heart*, will bring us Hannah's adult years in the wilderness. The final story will be set in the Promised Land. Readers will enjoy the first book in this series and look forward to the next two. ▀

Brenda Ray, *The Midwife's Song* (Port St. Joe, Fl: Karmichael Press, 2000).

Book Review
by Philip H. Barnhart

Dr. Philip H. Barnhart is pastor at The Chapel on the Hill in Lake Geneva, Wis.

Small World Department

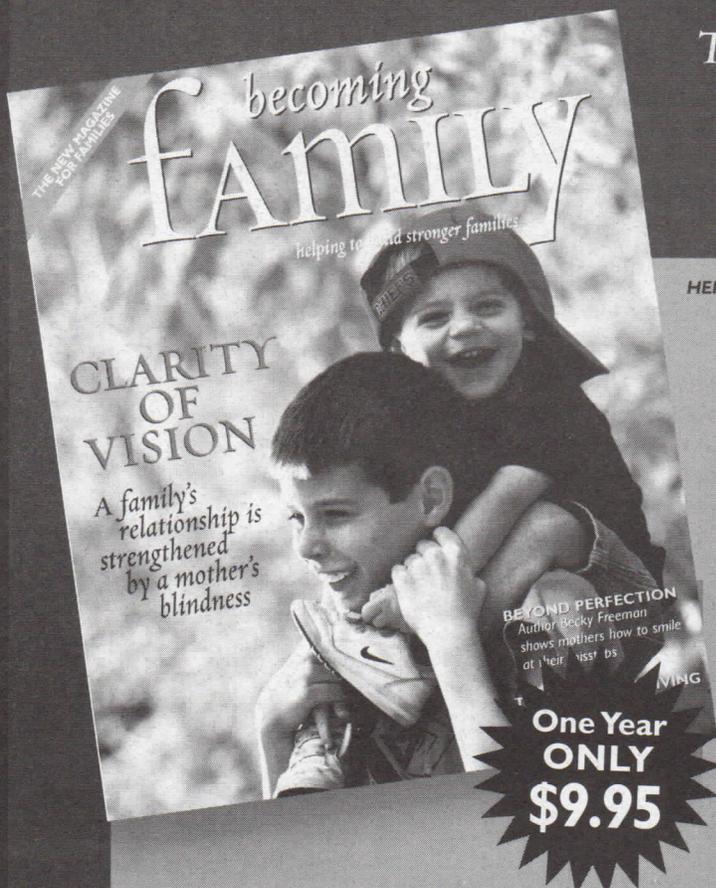
Thanks to the generous initiative of Dovetail members Sandy Stein (a student of mine at Dickinson in 19??) and Julie Kern, we have established a brokerage account with Bear, Stearns & Co. in Chicago and can now receive gifts of securities. (Hey, the market's got to go up sometime.) SNR

This issue of Dovetail was made possible by Dr. Florence M. Smith.

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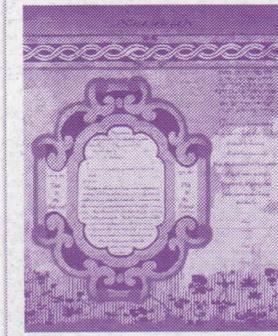
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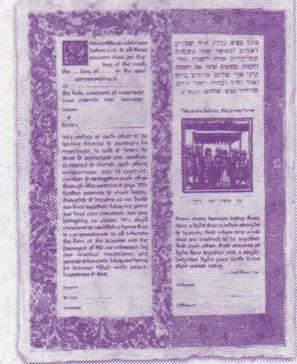
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