

SHORESH

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**Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News**

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Fast Time

Woven Love

A Terrifying Prayer

Unetaneh Tokef: A Terrifying, Troubling Prayer

by Rabbi Klief Rose

A key focus of the High Holy Days is to look deeply inside ourselves and honestly evaluate our imperfections. We are also meant to consider strategies which can lead us to transformation. We refer to this as *teshuvah*: the process of return or renewal or repentance; 'looking inward.'

A central prayer on Rosh Hashanah which speaks to renewal is the "Unetaneh Tokef." It is a prayer I find to be incredibly profound but absolutely terrifying. A pivotal verse in the middle asserts that we have the capacity, to some degree, to control our own fate, the capacity to renew our lives: "*teshuvah* (repentance), *tefillah* (prayer), and *tzedakah* (acts of charity, generosity, and love) have the power to annul the severity of the decree." The severe decree—the penalty of death—can be averted through prayer, charity, and repentance. We are not powerless; we have the powerful tools of *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, *tzedakah* to influence blessing over destruction. These tools give us strength to go forward, to rebuild our lives as we move toward wholeness and renewal.

As powerful as repentance, prayer and *tzedakah* are, they don't always have the power to cancel out G-d's decree. For reasons we cannot understand, living a righteous life, full of repentance, prayer, and good deeds, is no guarantee of a long life, free from sorrow. However, they do have the power to change the way we look at and understand any decree, to annul its severity, and to help us endure, despite loss and pain.

If *Unetaneh Tokef* is troubling to us, then it has worked; it is meant to be terrifying. The motif of death isn't coincidental; only through fear of confrontation with death do we gain strength for *teshuvah*—take a weathered look at who we are and motivate ourselves toward sincere transformation. But should death be the catalyst for this renewal into more wholesome beings?

A major theme of the High Holy Days is the notion that the heavenly gates are open to our prayers. These gates can open outwardly to new possibilities. Or they can close inwardly, blocking what is within. So too, *teshuvah* can cleanse us spiritually or make us feel guilty. It's an answer to the difficult questions about ourselves and our lives that we have been avoiding.



Rabbi Alan Lew, Z"L, taught:

The closer we are to being in the present moment, the more mindful we are, the closer we are to G-d. G-d is here; if we are elsewhere, we are estranged from G-d... When we are really immersed in the act of prayer, we are not so much asking for things... we are really engaging in an act of self-judgment.

We reconcile with G-d, now, Rabbi Lew continues, because we realize we need G-d:

We realize we can't do all these really difficult things without a sense of a transcendent consciousness beyond our own.

Rosh Hashanah is the day when the gates to heaven open, and it's a very rich symbol, suggesting both access to the presence of G-d during this time, extraordinary access, suggesting a time of transformation—that if we read the book of our life, we can see ourselves and we can stop jumping into fires that we are wont to do and stop doing unconscious hurt to others.

Yom Kippur, the very end of this process, is a time when we literally rehearse our own death, and we intone this endless liturgy of who will live and who will die, and we abstain from all activities that living people engage in, like eating and sexual activity.

We can evoke the power of our death to show us our lives. The most intense times are those last several hours of Neillah when the gates are closing. I can literally hear and feel those gates clanging shut. And then the shofar blows and there is a tremendous feeling of lightness. We spend the rest of the year in a greater state of awareness.*

As we prepare to stand in prayer this High Holy Days season to thank G-d for the many blessings we have received this past year, let us pray for personal, familial, and communal renewal, and work towards peace, health, communal prosperity, and welfare of the world for the coming year. ■

*Lew, Rabbi A. *This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared: The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2018.

Woven With Love

By weaving creativity and spirituality together, two women from the Etz Chayim community each produced a unique and meaningful spinoff that is infused with love. Elaine Schaffer and Dawn Rittberg recently took a 10-week *tallit*-weaving class hosted at Congregation Etz Chayim. By the end, each had created a beautiful, one-of-a-kind prayer shawl illuminated with significance and sentiment.

Elaine was inspired to learn to weave by her niece, Cheryl Lazar, Z"L, who wove a *tallit* for each of her three sons while battling breast cancer. "It is very important to me that my grandchildren have this special keepsake from me, one that would have meaning and that they will cherish for many years," says Elaine, who has seven grandchildren. She intends to weave a *tallit* for each one and has already delivered on two: Ben Goldenberg, Elaine's eldest grandchild, received his handwoven *tallit* at his February 2020 Bar Mitzvah (see photo page 4). His brother, Jonah, would have received his *tallit* for his May 2022 Bar Mitzvah, but Covid got in the way of the weaving class. Elaine hopes to weave his *tallit* this winter and has already bought the yarn. Henry Schaffer, Elaine's third grandson, received his *tallit* this past May at his Bar Mitzvah (see photo above).

Dawn was motivated to take the class once she began noticing other people wearing handwoven *tallitot* (plural of *tallit*) at synagogue. "I was impressed with their beauty and artistry," she says. "I am a sewer, a knitter, a crocheter, and have done other crafts but never learned how to weave. The class was an opportunity to learn the craft as well as make a beautiful *tallit*."

Dawn says each student in the class created their own design for the *tallit* they would weave and purchased their own accent yarns. "Dorothy (de Bruijn, the weaving instructor) provided ideas and direction, especially about placement of striping along the total length of the *tallit*, but otherwise each *tallit* made in our class is unique," she says. Students wove *tallit* bags first, enabling them to "see how our pattern looked in the fibre project," says Dawn, who took the class with her daughter, Rebekah. "From there we could



L-R: Bert, Henry, and Elaine Schaffer

make adjustments if wanted. I did modify my pattern slightly after doing the bag before starting the *tallit*."

Elaine consulted with each grandson when planning the pattern for his *tallit*. "The boys and I chose the colours; I made a pattern on graph paper with the striping and width of each colour and then reviewed it again with the boys. I added silver accents which they liked," she says.

The classes focused on weaving, not on adding *tzitzit*, Elaine continues. "With the first *tallit* I wanted to involve others in this gift and called on Lil Hirt to teach the Bar Mitzvah boy's mother and other *baba* how to wind the *tzitzit* and the knot sequences," she says. For the second *tallit*, Elaine watched a YouTube video which explained the winding, knot sequencing, and symbolism. Then, she called on Lil again and they made the *tzitzit* together.

The *atarah* (crown) is the collar or neckpiece on a *tallit*, closest to the head. It is often decorated with embroidery, frequently with the blessing one recites before putting on the *tallit*. Sharon Greenberg embroiders the *atarah* of each student's *tallit*. "She has a number of options she uses but is open to requests," Dawn says.

Elaine was grateful for Sharon's help and abilities, particularly her finishing skills. "She is great with helping choose the colour of the embroidery, and I added a *Magen David* (star of David) to each end of the *bracha* (blessing). She also sews the *kippot* (which students also weave) and *tallit* bags and personalizes the latter with the boy's name or, as I chose, just the word *Tallit*."

"Sharon is also amazing at hiding our mistakes as she sews in missed ends and irons the finished product," says Elaine.

Dawn appreciated the opportunity to learn how to weave, though she discovered she's not as quick at these types of tasks as she once was. "The eyes don't work as well and the back gives out much more quickly," she says.

Elaine reveals she was a bit worried she wouldn't finish the *tallit* on time. "I spent several afternoons at the Etz Chayim craft room bent over my loom. At the end, I had a real feeling of accomplishment when the finished product was unwound from the loom. It was especially emotional when the boys received their *tallitot* at *shul* the morning of each one's Bar Mitzvah. Amazing! I think they were pleased with the outcome," she says. ■



Dawn Rittberg

Tallit and Tzitzit Teachings and Traditions

Long before setting reminder alarms on phones and attaching sticky notes to fridges, Jews were given a unique set of visual spiritual reminders that prompt us to follow G-d's command. These cues are the *tzitzit* on your *tallit*.

The *tallit* is a four-cornered prayer shawl with *tzitzit* (fringes) that hang from each corner and are knotted and wound in a specific way. Our tradition of wearing the *tallit* with *tzitzit* comes from a verse in the Torah (Numbers 15:39-41): G-d directs Moses to guide the Israelites to add fringes to their clothing as reminders of G-d's commandments:

Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages... Thus, you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your G-d.

There are two types of *tallit*: *tallit gadol* (big) and *tallit katan* (small). The former is a large, rectangular piece of cloth woven from wool, cotton, or silk, that we wear over clothing, draped over our shoulders when we pray. The *tallit gadol* is usually white; while black or blue stripes are traditional, these are not essential.

The Tekhelet Thread

The Torah tells us that one of the four threads at each corner of the *tallit* should be "of *tekhelet*," an indigo dye made from the blood of a *chilazon*, a snail found, at one time, in the Mediterranean Sea on the northern coast of Israel. But the method for creating *tekhelet* was lost during the Middle Ages, so the tradition fell out of practice, and today, the identity of the particular snail is unknown. Some Jews believe that the black or blue stripes on the *tallit gadol* originated as a reminder of the strand of *tekhelet*.

The *tallit katan*, sometimes called *arba kanfot* (four corners) is smaller and simpler, a white, rectangular, poncho-like garment with a hole in the middle for the wearer's head. It is worn all day by observant Jews, often under regular clothing. It is not worn at night.

All *tallitot* (plural of *tallit*), both *gadol* and *katan*, have *tzitzit* tied to the four corners. At each corner, four strings are threaded through a hole (*begeg*) in the fabric and then looped over so that eight threads hang down. One string, the *shamash*, or caretaker (like the candle you use to light the other candles on your *Chanukiah*), is longer than the others and used to wind and knot around the other seven threads in a specific sequence of double knots and coils, joining the first few inches of the *tzitzit*. The series of winding groups are called *hulyot* (singular *hulya*), and double knots separate each *hulya* from the next. Following the knots of the last *hulya*, the remainder of the eight threads hang loosely.

Differing Tzitzit Tying Traditions

There are many different traditions and opinions about how *tzitzit* should be tied. The most common ways of tying *tzitzit* are Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Chabad, and Yemenite, and they vary by number of windings in each *hulya* and the types of knots used. Some also have additional spirals going down each *hulya*.

Ashkenazic *tzitzit* are tied with five sets of double knots and four *hulyot* between each knot-pair. Each *hulya* has a different number of windings—after the first double knot there are 7 windings, then 8, 11, and 13.

The *tzitzit* on a Sephardic *tallit* are tied in a similar way, with five double knots and four *hulyot*, but another twist around each coil creates a grooved coil on every *hulya*. Like the Ashkenazic *tzitzit*, the sequence of *hulyot* for *tzitzit* on the Sephardic *tallit gadol* is also 7 windings, then 8, 11, and 13 but with the extra grooved coil. The sequence of *hulyot* for the *tallit katan* is different: 10 windings,



then 5, 6, 5, also with the extra grooved coil.

Tzitzit on a Chabad *tallit* are tied similarly to *tzitzit* on a Sephardic *tallit*, but there are a few differences: The *begeg* usually has two holes through which the *tzitzit* are threaded, to prevent them from moving at the corner. Also, while the *tzitzit* are tied with five knots and four *hulyot* in the 7, 8, 11, 13 sequence, the windings within each *hulya* are then arranged into smaller groupings. In the first *hulya* (7), windings are arranged in groups of 3, 3, 1. In the second (8) they are arranged in groups of 2, 3, 3. In the third *hulya* (11) windings are arranged in groups of 3, 3, 3, 2. And in the fourth (13) windings are arranged in groups of 1, 3, 3, 3, 3.

The Yemenite *tzitzit* are the most distinct. *Tzitzit* on a Yemenite *tallit* are tied with only one knot at the top, followed by either 7 (traditionally) or 13 (contemporarily) separated *hulyot*, with 3 coils in each *hulya* and no other knots.

Mitzvah Minding Reminder

To understand how *tzitzit* remind us to follow G-d's commandments, we turn to Gematria, a system of assigning numerical values to the Hebrew letters of the alphabet using a base-10 approach: so aleph, the first letter, is 1, *beit* is 2, *tzaddi* (the 18th letter) is 90, and so on (see table below). Gematria was developed by scholars of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) and has been used to decipher Torah writings. Looking through a gematria lens reveals how *tzitzit* are cues to follow G-d's word, delineated as 613 mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah.

The letter-value sum for the word *tzitzit* (*tzaddi, yod, tzaddi, yod, tav*) is equal to 600 (90 + 10 + 90 + 10 + 400). Add to that the 8 threads of the *tzitzit* plus the 5 double knots and the total is 613—representing the 613 commandments.

Additionally, the sum of the corresponding numerals for the name of G-d that we do not say aloud (the Tetragrammaton) is 26: *yod* (10) + *he* (5) + *vav* (6) + *he* (5) = 26; this sum is equivalent, in Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Chabad tradition, to the first three *hulyot* on the *tzitzit*: 7 + 8 + 11. And the windings in the last *hulya*—13? This is the value of the word *Ekhad*, or one: *aleph* (1) + *chet* (8) + *dalet* (4). So, these four *hulyot* together symbolize the phrase G-d is One, the familiar line from the *Shema*, a central Jewish prayer. Some Jews also interpret the 13 as symbolizing the 13 attributes of G-d (compassionate, gracious, forgiving, and so on). Similarly, in the Sephardic tradition, those same assigned numerals for the Tetragrammaton (10, 5, 6, 5) correspond to the number of



Ben Goldenberg at his 2020 Bar Mitzvah, wearing the *tallit* woven by his *bubbe* Elaine Schaffer.

windings after the first knot in the *tallit katan*.

There are still more teachings about the gematria of *tzitzit*. The sum of the knots on the two sets of *tzitzit* at the front of the *tallit katan* (5 + 5 = 10) is symbolic of the Ten *Sefirot*, or Emanations—the *Kabbalistic* understanding of the ten attributes through which G-d is both revealed and interrelates with the physical and the spiritual world. Another explanation connects the 8 threads of *tzitzit* to the eight days between the Israelites' departure from Egypt and their singing of the Song of

Tallit Traditions

- Some Jewish couples use a *tallit* stretched over four poles as their *chuppah* or wedding canopy.
- Jews are buried wearing a *tallit*. One corner of the *tallit* is removed, making it unusable for prayer, and the corner is placed on the deceased.
- An unusable or castoff *tallit* is used to wrap Jewish liturgical materials, like *sifrei Torah* and *siddurim* that are also no longer needed or fit for use. These materials will then be buried in the *tallit* (see "How to Retire a Sefer Torah," page 14).
- There is a Yemenite tradition to wear a black *tallit* during a time of mourning.
- Some Jews wear an all-white *tallit* on Yom Kippur, to symbolize renewal.
- Some synagogues use a *tallit gadol* for *Kol HaNe'arim* (all the children), a special *Aliyah* on *Simchat Torah*. The *tallit* is held over the children's heads during the *Aliyah*.

Deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 15); and the five knots are symbolic of the five books of Moses. Still another interpretation points out that the sum of the last two windings (for all but the Yemenite *tzitzit*), 11 and 13, is 24, equaling the number of books in the *Tanakh*. Yet one more interpretation suggests that the 7 windings symbolize the physical world, which G-d created in seven days, while 8 is the number of transcendence, rising above the boundaries of the physical world.

There are evidently many differences in interpretation of the symbolism of *tzitzit* as well as variations in how they are tied. Despite the differences, Jews are unified in the spiritual practice of wearing the *tallit*. And we are unified in the understanding that G-d is One and that we are guided, as Jews, by G-d's 613 commandments. Wearing the *tallit* with *tzitzit* helps us to remain mindful of these understandings. ■

Gematria: The 22 Hebrew Letters and Numerical Values

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20
Alef	Bet	Gimel	Dalet	He	Vav	Zayin	Chet	Tet	Yod	Kaph
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200	300	400
Lamed	Mem	Nun	Samekh	Ayin	Pe	Tsade	Qoph	Resh	Shin	Tav

Shanah Tovah—Happy

Dina Frankel, Gail, Ron, and Marlee Cantor

Wishing a happy and healthy New Year to family and friends

Fayanne, Avrom and Carli Charach

Wishing family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Wendy, Alan, Laurie and Jillian Daien

Wishing family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Darlene and Jerry Davis

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Ethel and Zvi Dil

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Ann, Max, and Elie Feierstein

Wishing your families a year of gezunt, health, and wellbeing

Freedman family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Bruce Granove, Morissa Granove, and Laurie McCreery

May the coming year bring good health, strong connections, true peace, and safety to everyone.

Kim Hirt, Jerry Rubin, Bina, Rachel and Alex

A sweet and happy New Year to family and friends

Lil Hirt

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Margaret Kasner and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Howard Kideckel

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Matthew and Nola, Ezra and Sonia, Caleb, Zev, Yona and Eliran, Galya, and Gilon Lazar

Shana Tova U'Metukah

Estrid Mandel and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Fay Reich

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Jane and Ronald Reider, Tiffany Reider and Lucas Baird

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year



New Year!

Lorraine Reiner

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Sid and Joyce Rosenhek and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Colette Rubin

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Marvin and Esther Samphir and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Shayna and Merrill Shulman and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Cynthia Hiebert Simkin and Simon Simkin

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Mimi and Earl Singer and family

Wishing family, friends, and congregation a healthy and happy New Year

Tony Sorto and family

Wishing friends a healthy and happy New Year

Avery and Nata Spigelman, children Adam, David, Jenny, and Deborah, and grandchildren Joshua, Connor and Logan.

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Women's League of Congregation Etz Chayim

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy New Year

ETZ CHAYIM PEOPLE

Member News and Life-Cycle Events

SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

JULY

Sharna Berman, Jonathan Goldenberg, Sharon Labinsky, Bert Schaffer, Andrea Slusky, Harold Stone, Lynn Wolfe

AUGUST

Wendy Daien, Ethel Dil, Susan Greenberg, Claudia Gitin Griner, Kelly Robinson

SEPTEMBER

Carey Boroditsky, Harriet Boroditsky, Gina Chodirker, Susan Cohen, Jerry Davis, Katia Dos Anjos, Debby Hirsch, Margaret Kasner, Steven Raber, Emily Shane, Ilana Simon

OCTOBER

Reeva Abrams, Richard Boroditsky, Maxine Chamish, Alan Daien, Sima Feuer, Karen Gall, Murray Hyman, Beverley Jesierski, Henriette Ivanans-McIntyre, Cindy Pasternak, Susan Permut, Clarice Rayter, Colette Rubin, Elana Schultz, Norman Secter, Nikki Spigelman, Stacy Wyatt

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

JULY

Ilana Abrams and Steven Hyman (20)

Maylene and Israel Ludwig (50)

Carol and Mark Tolchinsky (50)

AUGUST

Rebecca Cramer and Mark Binder (30)

Terri Lee and John Farber (55)

Andrea Leibl-Hochman and Sid Hochman (45)

Leigh and Steven Raber (15)

Naama Ukashi Samphir and Joel Samphir (20)

Shayna and Merrill Shulman (55)

Nata and Avery Spigelman (45)

SEPTEMBER

Sandy and Murray Hyman (55)

OCTOBER

Candace Buchalter and Jonathan Hyman (20)

Elana and Myron Schultz (30)

Amy Swirsky and Michael Schacter (15)

Brenda and Phillip Yakir (45)

IN MEMORIAM

Gerry Baker, Randee Goldman, Norman Freedman, Sammy Hochman, Leslie Litman, Sally Singer, Fay Swartz

MAZEL TOVS

Adam Levene for being awarded the Max and Mollie Shore Memorial Award

Jakee Werbuk for being awarded a Shem Tov award for her work with Camp Massad

Rita Margolis for being awarded a Shem Tov award for her work with Gwen Secter Creative Living Centre

Jessica Cogan for being awarded a Shem Tov award for her work with Jewish Federation of Winnipeg

Roxana and Ariel Drimer on their daughter Tzofi's Bat Mitzvah, July 1

Lyla and Shane Solomon on their son Koen Zachary's Bar Mitzvah, August 28

Kera Borodkin and Sean Shapiro on their daughter Mia's Bat Mitzvah, October 14

Sandy and Hart Shapiro on their granddaughter Mia's Bat Mitzvah, October 14

Amy Swirsky and Michael Schacter on their son Seth's Bar Mitzvah, October 21

Elaine and Neil Swirsky on their grandson Seth's Bar Mitzvah, October 21

Rebbe and Alan Schacter on their grandson Seth's Bar Mitzvah, October 21

From Family to Football (and Everything Between)

There's a lot more to know about Lillian Zentner than football. We're starting with football, though, because this 80-something baba likely knows more about the NFL (National Football League) than... well, than most people. Except for Lillian's grandson, Jonah.

"He's an NFL fan to the Nth degree," she says. "He probably knows every player on every team."

When Jonah was approaching his 16th birthday (some ten-plus years ago), Lillian asked him what he wanted as a present to mark the milestone.

Jonah's response: Tickets to an NFL game. So, Lillian and Jonah flew off to Minneapolis, where they saw the Vikings play the Green Bay Packers, taking a few extra days to tour Minnesota's largest city. "He was in heaven, and we had a ball," says Lillian, adding a foreshadowing "that was our first NFL trip."

As Jonah's 17th birthday drew near, Lillian asked her grandson what he wanted for his birthday. "Another game?" was Jonah's reply.

"Are you serious?" Lillian asked. He was.

Football can be an expensive pastime, particularly because Lillian wasn't buying any bargain-basement birthday gifts. "I'm not sitting up in the bleachers," she states, her eyes sparkling. "I want a good seat. And I'm not going to sit outside in a stadium in the winter. It's got to be a dome stadium or a hot climate." So, the second year they went to Tampa Bay, where they saw the Buccaneers play Jonah's favourite team, the Philadelphia Eagles. "He was so excited," says Lillian, a retired schoolteacher.

After two NFL adventures together, they were hooked; it had become an annual gift. "I'll leave him less in my will," Lillian jokes, adding, "everybody thinks I was crazy as a loon." But it was money well spent, she clarifies.

The third year was Seattle to see the Seahawks play the Denver Broncos. Year four they went to Atlanta followed by New York City in year five. The sixth year, the game was in New Orleans and for the



Lillian Zentner

seventh, the duo went to Philadelphia to see the Eagles (still Jonah's favourite team) play a home game. "We saw the Eagles three times, but this was the only time in Philadelphia, and he remembers everything about it," Lillian says. At that point Jonah offered to pay for his own ticket.

Following an NFL hiatus during Covid, the twosome shared one last trip for an

NFL game in Las Vegas, in November 2021, to see the Las Vegas Raiders play the Kansas City Chiefs at the newly opened Allegiant Stadium. "What an amazing building!" Lillian says. "We had a great time."

Family Ties

Lillian and Jonah, now 27, have always been close, and the NFL trips enhanced their connection. "We bonded unbelievably because we were with each other 24-7," she says.

Lillian says she is more like a parent than a baba to Jonah, who is BBYO Regional Coordinator for the Red River region. Her eldest daughter and Jonah's mom, Pam, Z"L, had been sick for much of Jonah's life, and with no second caregiver available, Lillian stepped in to fill the gap, together with husband Hersch, Z"L, until he became sick. "I'd see Jonah almost every day, I was there for him whenever he needed. He'd come over, sleep over..."

"Now, we live five minutes apart; I bring him lunch every morning to take to work," Lillian continues. "We're really close."



Ali and Lillian

Lillian's family has always been small. Together with Hersch, also a teacher, she had two daughters, Pam and Ali. After many years of happy memories, both Hersch and Pam have now died, and Lillian holds tightly but joyfully to the remaining members of her family: Jonah, Ali, and Ali's husband, Jason. She feels a strong sense of responsibility for their spiritual connection, which she holds close to her heart.

"I'm kind of like a matriarch of the family," she says. "I think I'm holding Judaism into their lives because Judaism is very fragile. That's something important that I want for my family."

"I want them to be proud of being Jewish," she continues. "I want them to be tolerant and accepting of other religions and all people. But inside they have to know they are Jews and keep Judaism alive in some way. That's really important to me."

A Teaching Life

Lillian's teaching career spanned 35 years. In the early years she taught elementary grades within the Seven Oaks school division. "When I was teaching elementary, I loved their innocence. I loved their enthusiasm for school. I loved that they loved their teacher. I loved the shy ones and the quiet ones," she says. And she loved the bright students—not only because they were bright. "I asked the kids who are bright and compassionate and willing to help, to help the other kids." There were no teaching assistants in those days, she explains, and having students assist other students was a tremendous support to their teacher. "It was good for the kids who were bright because they could use their knowledge and teaching skills. And it was compassionate because they were helping somebody," she says.

Lillian set up "stations" in her classroom long before stations were a 'thing.' Students who had finished their work before the end of the period, or students who preferred to take their schoolwork home as homework and visit the station during class time could do so. At the stations, Lillian set up self-guided activities that were challenging for students, often beyond curriculum expectations—"puzzles and things like that, particularly in math," she says. She included an "answers" book, from which

students could correct their own work or have another student correct it (Lillian often encouraged her students to work in partners).

"My class was always noisy, it was never quiet," she says. The noise was the low-hum of engaged minds, of children doing constructive work that was fun and challenging. "I think that's why the kids liked my classes. And as a result, I had very few discipline problems," she says.

While Lillian was teaching at the foregone Red River School, she was asked to organize a musical with the grades 4, 5, and 6 students by the Seven Oaks division's director of music and musical theatre. "I played the piano, and I sang, and I was teaching music," she says, justifying the unexpected request. "So, we put on a musical, I was director, and we did it outside in June as a fundraiser for the school. That was so much fun."

Jewish School System

Lillian spent the majority of her teaching career (22 of the 35 years) within the Jewish school system teaching high school—mostly math and some English—at Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate (JWC). She says the stations worked at the junior high level too, though "junior high is a whole different ballgame," Lillian laughs. "Junior high is hormones, especially the boys in grades 7 and 8." She organized an English project station in her classroom and "they were never bored in my class. They never had to act up because they always had something to do."

Lillian describes a program she developed at the junior high level where students could complete three grades of math (7, 8, 9) in two years. Once these students reached grade 9, they were doing grade 10 math, and by grade 12 they could take university level math. She says she created the program because there were many gifted students "and the regular curriculum was boring for them; they needed something a little bit more, so they could move faster through the program, and they were happy to do that."

She says she adored teaching high school students. "I absolutely loved those grades because there's literally no discipline problems. Kids don't act up in grade 10. They're serious and by grade 12, they're adults. They come to school to



Lillian and Jonah

learn, and they are focused," says Lillian, who also helped with most of the JWC musicals during her tenure.

She says what she loved most about being a teacher was "that I could maybe influence a kid. They made me feel like I was doing something important in their lives." And while she was there to teach her students math (or English), she says "how I related to them as a human being was important to me. Teaching math was important, but also the relationships I had with kids was important."

Community Contributions

Volunteering time and energy to people in need has also been an important part of Lillian's life work, though she prefers to keep a low profile about it. "I help people because I want to. I don't want anything in return, and I don't need my name up in lights, and I don't want people to think I'm doing it to brag. I do it because I want to do it and I feel good about helping."

Lillian was, at one time, volunteer funeral coordinator for Congregation Etz Chayim alongside Shelley Sklover, filling in on weekends as needed. She has also sat on the board of the Gwen Selter Creative Learning Centre and on various committees for the Shaarey Zedek synagogue, where she is also a member.

“Volunteer work for the Jewish community, I think that’s really important,” she says, though she hasn’t limited her volunteer work to this community. One organization Lillian volunteered for is Dress for Success: through clothing donations, this charity helps outfit immigrant, refugee, and other women of lower-income who are looking for work and need appropriate clothing for that pursuit. “I absolutely loved this volunteer job,” says Lillian, who is chairperson of the social committee for the building in which she lives and plans social gatherings for residents. She also enjoys driving friends who can no longer drive themselves to their appointments. Lillian served on the executive of the Winnipeg Jewish Schools Teachers Association for many years and was also involved with the Manitoba Association of Math Teachers.

Jewish Education

Lillian compiled her own Jewish education throughout her lifetime. As a child, that learning was more cultural than spiritual, she says, and she didn’t go to Hebrew school, “although I spoke Yiddish before I spoke English. My parents often spoke Yiddish at home, so my brother and I learned Yiddish, but I never learned how to read and write, and I never learned Hebrew,” she says.

Lillian’s parents were Polish immigrants who had met in Canada, eventually settling in Esterhazy, a small Saskatchewan town with only three Jewish families, back then. Her father’s family had come to Canada in the 1920s; her mother, having come to Canada in 1930, was one of only four remaining members of her family of 48, most of whom were murdered during the Holocaust, Lillian explains. “So, they (Lillian’s parents) were determined that we were going to be Jewish, in spite of

the fact that we were surrounded by non-Jewish people,” she says. The family got together with other Jewish families in town or in surrounding communities for the High Holidays, sometimes for other celebrations, and they travelled to Melville to attend synagogue for the High Holidays.

A couple decades later, the death of Lillian’s father presented an opportunity for more education around Jewish ritual. She was now married to Hersch, and they were living in Winnipeg and working as teachers. “I was really devastated, I was very close to my father,” Lillian says. “I wanted to say *Kaddish* (the mourner’s prayer) for him, so I would go to synagogue once in a while on Saturday. And I really liked it,” she says.

Spiritual Wellness

Once Lillian was teaching within the Winnipeg Jewish schools system, another door opened for Jewish education. Now a member of the Winnipeg Jewish Schools Teachers Association, Lillian had regular professional development opportunities, which were often focused on wellness, she says. One speaker had particularly resonated for Lillian; this presenter, an Orthodox Jew, had described wellness as looking after one’s body physically, emotionally, and spiritually; “how important it is to have spirituality in your life as a teacher,” says Lillian, adding, “she didn’t mean spirituality in Judaism but in whatever religion you belonged to.”

This struck a chord, for Lillian. “It sort-of clicked. I thought, I can do this, I can go to synagogue every Saturday, and I can learn the prayers, even if I don’t read Hebrew, because I can memorize them. And I’m going to try. This was 1989, and I have gone every Saturday since,” she says, except if she’s sick or away.

Lillian says a benefit to teaching in a Hebrew school for as long as she did was that “I became more Jewish. I really loved that.” And because of where she worked, she and Hersch decided to send their daughters to Jewish day school, although neither had been themselves. “That would probably never have happened had I not taught at a Hebrew day school because I loved Judaism, but I didn’t really relate it to going to Jewish day school. When I was teaching there, it became very important,” she says.

A Special Mitzvah

Last January, a few months shy of Lillian’s 83rd birthday, Ali surprised her mother by saying, “How about having a Bat Mitzvah, mom. You never had one as a teen, so Jason and I would like to arrange one for you.” They were proposing April, Lillian’s birth month—three months away.

“I said, ‘don’t be ridiculous. I can’t read Hebrew, I’m not going to start, forget it,’” Lillian states. But Ali wasn’t backing down, promising her mom, “I’ll do the *maftir* and the *haftarah* in your honour, you do the other stuff.” So, it was settled.

“I was able to do most of the *shacharit* service, a *d’var* Torah, and a speech,” Lillian says with a smile. Ali had arranged everything else, including an out-of-towners dinner on the Saturday evening and a Sunday morning brunch. “It was a whole weekend, and it was amazing!” she says. The milestone had been another opportunity for Jewish education—“a good learning-Judaism experience,” she says, understanding that no age is too old to learn. In that same spirit, perhaps you’ll spot Lillian at an NFL game this coming fall. ■

Shabbat in the South

On June 9, Congregation Etz Chayim hosted a Kabbalat Shabbat service at Gray Academy, led by Rabbi Klief and Cantor Tracy. After the service, refreshments were served in the JFM Garden. ■



Fast Time

Beginning before sundown on the ninth day of *Tishrei* and lasting until nightfall the following day, no food nor drink passes an observant Jew's lips. We fast on Yom Kippur as we devote the day to contemplative prayer, asking G-d to forgive us for sins committed during the year past. What is the basis for this abstinence?

Yom Kippur means Day of Atonement and is considered the holiest day of the Hebrew year. Tradition teaches that at the end of Yom Kippur, G-d seals our fates in the Book of Life for another year. The Torah instructs Jews to "afflict" our souls on this day; we understand this to mean we should abstain from food and drink (fast), as well as from washing or bathing, using lotions or oils on our bodies, wearing leather shoes, and engaging in sexual relations.

Surveying Our Souls

Although Yom Kippur is a day of judgement, we do not fast as retribution for our sins, a consequence of our misdeeds. Rather, we disregard our bodily needs so we can focus on our souls instead. Fasting helps us turn our focus inward, become self-reflective. "The purpose is not to punish ourselves but to gain control over our bodies," says Lesli Koppelman Ross in "Fasting and Ascetism." "While not engaging in our normal daily concerns and pleasures, we become more conscious of how our physical urges so often lead us into trouble." (MyJewishLearning.com).

Yom Kippur is a day to survey our souls and engage in heartfelt connection with G-d. We evaluate, internally, our year past, identify transgressions, lapses, and offenses committed, and ask G-d for forgiveness, promising to avoid the same wrongdoings in the coming year. Withholding our corporeal needs on this day can help us reach a calmer, more spiritual state within, allowing us to direct each moment toward repentance and inner awakening, returning to G-d: *teshuvah*.

"On the Day of Atonement, fasting can transport us to other worlds," says the Jewish Journal editorial "The meaning, and the possibilities, of the Yom Kippur fast."

"It's a reboot of the body and soul. Time slows, and if we choose to review our lives and deeds of the past year, clarity and perspective can emerge."

While our practice of fasting on Yom Kippur originates in the Torah, some Jews connect personal meaning and interpretation to the ritual. "I realize our rabbis and sages tell us we are to afflict our souls," says Susn Palmer. "This wording, coloured by modern nuances, does not easily resonate. I describe the Yom Kippur rituals as opening into our innermost core."

Going without food or drink makes our bodies vulnerable, Susn continues, referring to fasting as part of a "package" of abstinence together with avoidance of everyday clothing and bodily treatments. "We spend 25 hours intentionally relying only on the Creator. We are protected, or not, as *Elohim* (G-d) decides. Just as we say the words claiming it



Oil painting by Maurycy Gottlieb (1856-1879) of Jews praying in synagogue on Yom Kippur

is G-d who plans how our names will be written in the Book of Life, we 'do' ourselves vulnerable. During Yom Kippur we increasingly 'understand' that we are truly, always vulnerable and must rely on the Holy One."

Strength in Numbers

While the practice of scrutinizing our innermost selves and appealing to G-d through prayer is a deeply personal experience, Susn recognizes how community bolsters us for the fast. "On my own I do not do well at fasting," she says. When she joins her community at *shul*, "I don't really notice the fasting until later on. It is community that helps me notice I am tired and waning. Then, we support each other to continue our earnest *davening* (praying). Due to fasting, we are becoming vulnerable—physically, emotionally, spiritually. In community, we are able to immerse into *Elohim*."

Kathy Cobor also appreciates the value of community at Yom Kippur. "There was always a meaningful communal spirit in the undertaking of fasting in the Roses' Alternative High Holiday service held for many years in the lower level of the synagogue," she says. "Rabbi Neal Rose (father of Rabbi Kliel) always impressed upon attendees to check with our medical caregivers on the advisability of the individual decision to fast," she continues. "He reminded that 'we are meant to live by the commandments, not die by them!' Sage advice that has stayed with me (also taking on more meaning as the years go by)!"

As with many other Jewish traditions, families come together for the fast, particularly its conclusion. "Fasting brings our family together and I feel more connected to Judaism, especially as I am denied food and drink. It feels good after the fast and I feel cleansed," says Howard Kideckel. Reeva Abrams hosts a break-fast every year, at the end of Yom Kippur. She says her daughter, Ilana (Abrams) usually helps her set up for the break-fast in the late afternoon—"a nice mother-daughter bonding time."

Unique Traditions

Some Jews incorporate personal or familial customs and traditions to the spiritual ritual of fasting, or to the break-fast at the end of Yom Kippur.

Other Jewish Fast Days

Yom Kippur isn't the only Jewish holiday that Jews fast:

Tisha B'Av is observed on the ninth day of the Hebrew month Av. Like Yom Kippur, this is a full-fast day, meaning observant Jews refrain from washing and bathing, using lotions or oils, wearing leather shoes, and engaging in sexual relations in addition to abstaining from food and drink. The fast commemorates various tragedies from Jewish history including the destruction of both Temples. More recently, this Jewish day of mourning has become associated with more modern catastrophes, too, like the Holocaust.

The **Fast of Gedalia** is a minor Jewish fast day—only food and drink are restricted, from sunrise until sundown, on the day after Rosh Hashanah, the third of Tishrei. We fast to mourn the killing of Gedaliah, leader of the Jews who remained in Jerusalem after the fall of the first Temple.

The **Tenth of Tevet (Asarah BeTevet)** is another minor fast day, observed from sunrise to sunset on the tenth of Tevet. We fast to mourn the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian Empire, the end of the Kingdom of Judah, and the destruction of Solomon's Temple.

We observe the **Fast of Esther, Ta'anit Esther**, from dawn until nightfall the day before Purim, the 13th of Adar. This fast memorializes the three-day fast undertaken by Esther and the Jews of Shushan as they prayed for deliverance from persecution by the evil, Jew-hating Haman.

The **Seventeenth of Tammuz** is a minor fast day to commemorate the invasion of Jerusalem and destruction of the Second Temple. This fast, from sunup to sundown on the 17th of Tammuz, also commemorates Moses's smashing of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, and other historic Jewish tragedies that happened on the same date.

A few other minor fast days are not observed by all Jews:

The **Fast of Behav** is an Ashkenazic tradition to fast on the Monday, Thursday, and subsequent Monday following both Sukkot and Pesach.

Yom Kippur Katan (Little Yom Kippur) is a fast day preceding every Rosh Chodesh (new month).

The **Fast of the Firstborn** occurs the day before Passover, on the 14th of Nisan. Observed to celebrate the passing over of firstborn Jewish sons during the Plague of the Firstborn in Egypt, this fast is undertaken only by first-born sons.

"For many years, my young daughter would bring a fresh lemon studded with dried cloves and sprinkled with cinnamon to the afternoon Yom Kippur service to help revive those who were waning," describes Kathy. "I vividly recall the scent as most rejuvenating and refreshing as it was passed along the rows; I continued the custom until Covid interrupted our lives." Kathy is describing the ritual of passing *besamim* (spices), often in a special box or container and commonly shared amongst participants of a *Havdalah* service to recognize the end of Shabbat and, in some communities, near the end of Yom Kippur.

Kathy used to organize a vegetarian potluck break-fast at the Rosh Pina Housing Co-op when her mother, Rose Cobor, Z"L, lived there. "That eventually morphed into a wonderful evening held for many years at Affinity Vegetarian Garden restaurant with the most accommodating owners," Kathy states.

For the break-fast at Reeva's home, she hosts "anywhere from 20 to 40 hungry souls, who congregate at my place from three different *shuls*." Because guests arrive at different times, "I fill a bowl with miniature cinnamon buns and a tray with glasses of orange juice so people can break their fast upon arrival. We then have a meal after everyone is here."

Although Howard says he doesn't have many fasting traditions, he likes to break the fast with "a piece of honey cake and rye. A great way to end the fast," he says.

Susn plans to light a glow stick at the end of her Yom Kippur fast, this year. "The light from this to help me carry the Yom Kippur experience until I fully return to the choices and actions of ordinary days. This light is tangible as moving from the fast (relying solely on G-d) to eating (acting to nourish ourselves)."

Some Jews say the *mitzvah* of fasting on Yom Kippur unites us with people who live with scarcity or suffering daily. And while Jews hail from all walks of life and parts of the world, this day of abstinence connects us.

"Fasting, for me, is a touchstone, 25 hours of intense experience, helping me immerse in a G-d-filled, G-d-focused community," says Susn. ■



Howard Kideckel



Reeva Abrams



Susn Palmer



Kathy Cobor

Programs in the Pipeline

Congregation Etz Chayim has an abundance of exciting programming brewing for you this fall! Don't miss out, register soon!

Journeying into Judaism - This introduction to Judaism course returns in November (Thursdays) to offer participants a foundation in Judaism, including learning about Jewish history, theology, holidays, and prayer.

The Judith Putter Z"l Etz Chayim Book Club - Readers rejoice: reincarnation of the synagogue book club will begin in November. Meetings will now be held at Etz Chayim (at our new location)!

Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Kliel - Participants in this renewed monthly program (October through June) will engage in informal learning sessions and discussions with Rabbi Kliel downtown—over their lunch breaks!

Mitzvah Minds - Revival of this educational program for children,

designed and directed by Cantor Tracy, will include exploration of Torah, t'fillah (prayer), Hebrew language, songs, and *mitzvot*. Beginning in October, there will be five independent age-based classes: 15 months to 2 years; junior kindergarten and kindergarten; grades 1 and 2; grades 3 and 4; and B'nai Mitzvah (grades 5 to 7).

Sundays at Simkin - This new, intergenerational program scheduled for Sundays (beginning October) at The Saul and Claribel Simkin Centre will feature casual connections for residents with Rabbi Kliel and Etz Chayim congregant volunteers. Interested residents will also receive help putting on tefillin.

Torah on Tap - We return to this casual learning opportunity for young adults (18 to 25) in October. Participants will join Rabbi Kliel (at the Trans Canada Brewery Co.) Wednesday evenings



Torah on Tap, Brazen Hall.

for a drink and light discussion on current topics with a Jewish perspective.

Gesher USY - Revival of the United Synagogue Youth group targeting grades 5 through 7 gets into full swing this fall. Beginning in October, *chag* (holiday) and other Jewish programming will happen on the second Sunday of every month (until May). Synagogue youth can also help to repair the world: through the *Tikkun Olam* project, participants have opportunity to volunteer at Harvest Manitoba the last Wednesday of every month (evenings, October through May). ■

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To Bury or Not to Bury

Whether or not a retired Jewish artifact should be buried or not depends on whether the item is *shaimos*, meaning it has intrinsic holiness.

Genizah Items That Must Be Buried (*Shaimos*)

Sefer Torah

Aron Kodesh (Torah ark or Holy ark)

Torah crown, mantle, pointer
(any items that have been in direct contact with a Torah scroll)

Gidim (thread made from veins of a kosher animal, used for sewing a Torah scroll)

Papers, pictures, stamps, or ads containing G-d's name (in any language even if not read aloud)

Sefarim (holy books, in any language) and *Siddurim* (prayer book, plural, in any language)

A pasuk (verse or portion) of *Tanach*

Mezuzah coverings

Tefillin boxes, straps, bags

Genizah Items That Are Suggested *Shaimos*

Tzitzit (fringes only from a *tallit*)

Lulav

Schach (roof branches) and walls of *sukkah*

Shofar

Items That Are Not *Shaimos*

Eitrog boxes

Shofar bags

Lulav covers

Mezuzah nails

Tallit

Tallit bag

Kippah

How to Retire a *Sefer Torah*

Uncovering the Tradition of *Genizah*

As Jews, we treat our religious Jewish artifacts with a great deal of respect and reverence. But what happens to a *sefer Torah*, a *siddur*, a *mezuzah*, *tefillin*, and other Jewish liturgical artifacts when they fall out of use due to damage or wear, replacement, or surplus? They are still sacred objects which often contain G-d's name, and while we may no longer be using them, our Jewish *minhag* (custom) does not condone putting them into the garbage or destroying these items; we must continue to treat them with the same respect given them during their lifetimes.

Many synagogues have a reservoir for storing retired sacred objects referred to as a *genizah*, which literally means “reserved” or “hidden.” Often in the basement or attic of the *shul* (but it can also be a closet, an unused room, a simple box, sometimes even within the walls, or another out-of-the-way place) the *genizah* stores retired artifacts until they can be properly, respectfully, abandoned.

Am Ha-Sefer

Eventually, the contents of a *genizah* are ideally buried, with as much respect as we bury our dead. Liturgical items are frequently wrapped in a *tallit*, for burial, just as we wrap a deceased person in a *tallit* before laying them in the ground. The *genizah* burial often takes place in a cemetery, but a household *genizah* can be buried in the backyard of a home, as long as it is done in a respectful way. There isn't any required liturgy for a *genizah* burial, but congregations often create their own ceremonies. Last June, *Chesed Shel Emes*, Winnipeg's non-profit burial society, hosted a Jewish book burial at the B'nai Abraham Cemetery, over which Rabbi Kliel presided.

Rena Boroditsky, executive director for *Chesed Shel Emes*, says this was the *Chesed's* sixth or seventh book burial. “We have sometimes had clergy and guests, and sometimes we have just driven the boxes to the cemetery and put them in the hole, the gravedigger and I,” she says. This time, Rabbi Kliel was available to lead the short cemetery service, which was combined with a field trip for Gray Academy students.

Rena says Rabbi Kliel began the book burial service by discussing the significance of books in Jews' lives, and our connection to them.

“We have been called *am ha-sefer*, the people of the book,” he said. “It is a title we have worn with pride. We learn that books are almost living beings and should be treated as we would honour a friend or teacher. And when a book is old, worn, and no longer of any practical use, we still treat it with respect by burying it as we would a deceased friend who has taught us ways of wisdom and truth. This is our expression of love and honour.”

Picking Up the Shovel

To prepare for the burial, a large grave had been dug at the cemetery, approximately ten feet by four feet, Rena says. Once the boxes and papers and old books had been put into the grave, “the rabbi encouraged the Gray Academy students to come up and shovel dirt onto the books, as if it were a burial of a person,” says Rena. “I think that added a whole other element for them to have that visceral experience, a physical experience to drop the earth. Rabbi Kliel also explained why Jews hold the shovel upside down to shovel the dirt (as an expression of reluctance to be carrying out this *mitzvah* for a loved one) and why we don't pass the shovel from one person to another.

“Some people say there's a superstition of passing bad luck from one to the other, Rena says. “Others say it's a way of allowing each person to fulfill the *mitzvah* completely by picking up the shovel. It's voluntary, it's not just handed to them, but also to allow each person to enter into that sacred space for themselves,” she continues.

Rena says she was particularly impressed by Rabbi Kliel's acknowledgement of unwillingness or reluctance with the passing of the inverted shovel.

“Like any other burial, we're grateful for the wisdom and the gifts that this book or this person gave us,” she says, paraphrasing Rabbi Kliel's words. “And we're also



kind of disappointed and kind of angry at G-d that life has to end, and that it's okay to be a little bit angry at G-d and it's ok to have that conversation with G-d."

"I just thought, 'what an amazing thing to say out loud,'" she states.

Once the books and boxes had been covered with dirt, the *El Maleh Rachamim* was recited, Rena says, the prayer for the soul of the departed, followed by the Mourners *Kaddish*, and then the song "Etz Chayim Hi" (*It is a tree of life*).

Beautiful Melancholy

Rena says the Gray Academy students were respectful and engaged and she hopes they came away from the experience with something positive. "A lot of them had been at a funeral before. But for those who have never shoveled before, I think it's a very nonthreatening sort of introduction to that," she says. "Then, if they're at a funeral and there is an opportunity for them to shovel the earth, they have a little bit of confidence, I've done this before. I know how to do it. It will serve them well in the future, and I thought that was a really smart thing to do."

Rena says overall the book burial was a beautiful event, yet tinged with melancholy. "The cemetery is so peaceful, and you're standing there and then the birds fly by and the geese are honking at you. To be out in space and quiet... it just makes you think for a minute."

The melancholy comes from the need to let go of the books—indeed, we are *am ha-sefer*. "There's sadness because a lot of the books, there's nothing wrong with them, they don't need to be buried, but you cannot give them away (that is, no one wants them). I love books and it feels very sad to bury them in the ground, but I try to focus on the upside, on the respectful side," she says. ■



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