

This year, in celebration of 350 years of Jewish life in America, *Sh'ma* will feature a monthly column by Israeli Ruth Calderon. Launched in October, Calderon shares her perceptions of Jewish life in America — from A to Z, America to Zionism. The full reflection will be posted on www.shma.com.

Celebrate 350
Jewish Life in America
1654 ~ 2004

CAMP — In the American summer camp — with leaves in 15 shades of green, a calm lake surrounded by geese, and good-natured counselors — spoiled children, used to television and junk food, live without telephones, computers, or television, eat three nutritious meals a day, and enjoy every minute of it. They write letters to their parents and get over their homesickness. After two weeks, they no longer want to go home and would prefer to stay for two months (if their parents could afford it). The amazing thing is that our children enjoy their time without all the electronic gadgets that almost seem to be growing out of their bodies — these are the same children who can barely survive Yom Kippur without electronic gadgets — proving that when camp is taken seriously, it can be one of the most significant learning experiences of childhood. At the same time, parents at home experience a temporary “empty nest”; the summer can be eye-opening.

An Israeli summer is entirely different, since the children do not go away but rather rule at home without limitations: they consume whatever food is in the house, sleep most of the day and spend most of the night out. As the end of the summer and the beginning of the school year approach, the prayers of parents — especially mothers who work at home — fill the skies of the holy land with gratitude.

DECK — The wooden deck adjoining the kitchen, which leads from the house to the backyard, is one of the great blessings of America. The dream of every middle-class couple is a private house. But realistically, aside from short-lived adventures in planting vegetable gardens, based on the illusion that home-grown basil and fresh tomatoes will make us into Provencal people and fill our lives with simple romanticism, and aside from children who want to ride the see-saw (since there is no neighborhood playground, every house has its own), or dogs who need to poop, most of us are suburban city-dwellers and do not need to relax on the lawn. The ideal compromise is life on the deck.

But this is no small matter: a cup of coffee on the deck is much more than a cup of coffee in the kitchen. It offers contemplative times to watch the leaves falling around the house in the early morning or during the long night and bless their inventor. It is the pier into nature of the *homo urbanicus*.

Next month:
Expressions, Flag, and Garbage.



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The opinions expressed in *Sh'ma* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors. Donations to *Sh'ma* are tax deductible. *Sh'ma* is available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI, and in audio format from the Jewish Braille Institute.

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Sh'ma is published by Jewish Family & Life! monthly except July and August. Application to mail at periodical-class postage rates pending at Newton, MA 02464. Subscriptions: \$49 for two years in U.S.; \$29 for one year; \$39 for one year overseas; \$59 for two years; \$21.97 for one year senior/student. Bulk subscriptions are available at reduced prices. Please notify the subscription office in writing if you prefer that your name not be given out on rented lists.

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ISSN: 0049-0385 November 2004

A discussion guide for each issue of *Sh'ma* can be downloaded from www.shma.com



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November 2004
Heshvan 5765
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