

The woman came to her teacher with a heart full of pain. She allowed herself to feel and express her pain in his presence. The teacher sat with her, listening deeply, patiently and lovingly. He did not avert his gaze from her.

The woman learned that there is no shame in feeling pain, longing, sadness, loneliness or grief. The woman learned that expressing emotional pain in the presence of a loving and attentive person can itself bring comfort. The woman felt the gift of a loving witness to her experience. She discovered that, in the words of James Hillman, "being perceived bestows blessing."

There are many gateways to God: contemplation, silence, music, study, and deeds of lovingkindness are among them. Feeling deeply is another gateway to the Divine. Love, grief, fear, desire, anger, pleasure, awe and sadness can all mysteriously bring us into an awareness of God's presence. When we allow ourselves to feel the truth of our experience, we open to the flow of life. In this way, our tears can be holy.

Rabbi Nancy Flam, co-founded the Jewish Healing Center, is currently the Director of the Spirituality Institute, a retreat-based learning program sponsored by Metivta: A Center for Jewish Wisdom.

My brother turns 45 next week. From shortly after he was born, his bizarre autism and profound retardation have brought my mother many tears.

"A woman came to a teacher for comfort. She poured out her grief as he listened patiently. Then he said to her: My dear, I cannot wipe away your tears. I can only show you how to make them holy."

An anonymous meditation from
On the Doorposts of Your House (CCAR Press, NY 1994).

"She poured out her grief"

Our capacity to express our grief is in itself a comfort. Revealing our anguished souls to someone who will listen can help us begin to heal.

"As he listened patiently"

The simple act of listening is a sacred gift that we can give to anyone in need of comfort. That is what *Sh'ma* means after all. Listen. Hear. Understand. We don't have to have all the answers. We don't need to say anything brilliant. All we need to do, is to simply offer our ears and our hearts.

"How to make them holy"

Unfortunately, we cannot prevent tragedies from occurring. But we do possess the power to choose our responses to those tragedies. We can give in to despair or we can search for the capacity to hope once more. We can become cynical or we can struggle to retain our openness. We can give up on ourselves and on God or we can reach out to God in our darkest hour and receive the strength to revive our spirits in the face of whatever may come.

Most of the time we expend a lot of energy trying to erase or hide our scars. But the truth is that there is holiness in our brokenness. It is from our brokenness that we learn empathy. It is from our brokenness that we learn how to appreciate each blessed day of our lives. It is from our brokenness that we learn that we are far, far stronger than we ever had imagined. And it is through our brokenness that we can find God.

Rabbi Naomi Levy is the author of *To Begin Again; The Journey Toward Comfort Faith and Strength in Difficult Times*.

When he was small, she told me that mothers from other religious traditions called their children's afflictions gifts, holy trials from God. "To hell with that," she said. And so do I.

One must recite a blessing for bad things, commands the Mishna, just as one gives thanks for the good. The blessing for bad tidings is *dayan ha-emet*, affirming the true judge, and His judgment.

Maimonides enjoins us, out of love for God, to joyfully praise Him even at times of suffering. I don't know what that means. I'm not sure I want to.

But joyful acceptance, however hard to achieve, does not mean hallowing tears. Judaism sanctifies the mundane; it does not sentimentalize the tragic. Whether we weep for the Temple or for ourselves, our tears may be rued, pitied, transcended, not exalted.

Rather than laud the teacher's compassion, I would censure his impertinence. Who handed him the Divine blueprint?

Avi Rockoff, a dermatologist, is a member of Sharei Tefillah in Newton, Massachusetts.

A number of writers in recent years have maintained that women tend to listen and empathize, while men try to analyze and solve the problem. My own view is that people of both genders engage in both kinds of activity, but men do need to fight off their natural tendencies to jump in and solve a problem and to instead, simply to listen and empathize. In that way this parable is directed most especially at men and is valuable as such. It needs to be balanced, though, by a parallel parable directed at all of us, but perhaps most especially at women, about the need to do what one can to sanctify our tears through repairing the world. That, too, is a way of finding God.

Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff is Rector and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.



Alice Shalvi

Sh'ma should address itself to as broad as possible a range of contemporary issues — all those topics that do or should exercise the mind and conscience of committed citizens and concerned Jews. No area of our lives should be closed to the intellectual and spiritual search from within a Jewish perspective.

Similarly, the articles should be drawn from a wide base of contributors. In short, I envision an intellectually challenging, stimulating and enlightening publication that would be of interest to Jewish (and perhaps even non-Jewish) readers worldwide. At their best, the contents should provide a stimulus for *tikkun olam* and for the promotion of social equality and justice.

Alice Shalvi, founding Director of the Israel Women's Network, is Rector of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.

Sam Apple

As the editor of a magazine for Jewish students, I am interested in what it takes to keep young Jews thinking. Rather than focusing on what it takes to keep young Jews physically involved (attending services, going to Israel, etc.), I'd like to see *Sh'ma* concentrate on what it takes to keep young Jews intellectually involved. By reaching Jews across the country, *Sh'ma* has the opportunity to address the hard questions surrounding continuity that the Jewish community seems to avoid.

Jewish continuity is too often treated as an end in and of itself. I don't just want a new generation of Jews who feel a vague Jewish charge because of trips they took to Poland or Israel and so feel compelled to marry only another Jew. I

want a new generation of critically thinking Jews; Jews who will be at once knowledgeable of their history and capable of working for change within that historical context. In addressing this theme in an accessible manner, *Sh'ma* will not only be highlighting a serious dilemma of the Jewish people, it will itself become part of the solution.

This may be a lot to ask these days. With assimilation on the rise, any sort of continuity is tempting. But there is no greater need for idealism than in a time of panic and no better place for a debate about the future of Judaism than in the pages of *Sh'ma*.

Sam Apple is the Director of the Jewish Student Press Service and the Editor of New Voices.

A Few Comments from the Editor

Thank you for your patience

The first two issues of *Sh'ma* arrived a little late, and for many came in a typeface that was too small to read. We appreciate your encouraging letters and suggestions. As you can see, we have listened to your comments, changed the font size and style, and returned to black ink. And we are trying to get back on schedule, to have *Sh'ma* in your mailbox by the middle of each month.

We would like to build a *Sh'ma* archive

If you have copies of *Sh'ma* from the first 28 years to donate to our growing archive, please contact the editorial office.

Your feedback, online

Sh'ma has had a discussion listserve for several years. We'd like to hear whether you'd prefer that the listserve continue or that we post discussions on our website, shma.com. We could send out an email letter to you once a month alerting you to the discussion and soliciting your commentary.

Please send your comments to: Susan Berrin, 1001 Watertown Street Suite 3B West Newton, MA 02465 or email: jflsusan@aol.com.

***Sh'ma* has moved!**

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Shalom,

Those of your writers who favor school vouchers (which seems to be all but one of them) in one form or another seem to miss some important points. Some of these are mentioned by Jacqueline Kates. The problem is much more basic and much more serious than the current crisis in public education in this country.

First there is an increasing level of pure selfishness at the center of our national social philosophy. Jews are not exempt. We moved to the suburbs depriving the cities of an important part of their tax base. Suburban homeowners tend to vote against increases in the school budget because these come from increases in the property tax. This is even more true once our children have graduated from the school system. Because of this even the suburban systems are suffering. In the 90's we are retreating even further from the rest of the world by moving into gated communities. In cities like New York public school is strictly for those who cannot afford private school. As the growing gap between rich and poor continues to increase this will become true not only in big cities but virtually everywhere.

The second problem is that the prevailing conservative philosophy in Washington and elsewhere is that the only legitimate functions of government are defense and the judicial/penal system. Paying for wars past, present and future is, by far the largest part of the discretionary part of the Federal budget.

Fewer than half of eligible citizens bother to vote even in national elections.

They not only feel disenfranchised and alienated but they have less and less understanding of the issues and less and less of a feeling of power in dealing with problems. People who are educated in schools sponsored by religious groups or in schools that exist to serve a particular economic class are not likely to feel much of a sense of connection with the rest of the country, let alone the world.

Public education is an important part of what makes the United States what it is. Turning to parochial education and, at the same time, weakening or destroying public education may well destroy much that we treasure about America. Many of the people who are most strongly promoting the movement toward government sponsorship of private education by vouchers or other means oppose America as a pluralistic society. They are hoping to circumvent First Amendment rights and educational requirements that allow students to think about certain controversial issues. I include in this some of the Jewish proponents of vouchers.

When a serious social scientist like Daniel J. Elazar opts for supporting day schools at the expense of public education for the sake of Jewish continuity I think we have arrived at a very dangerous juncture in American Jewish history. The advent of one school system for the affluent and another for the poor and of separate schooling for people of different faiths and ethnicities cannot possibly be good for us.

L'shalom, Rabbi Philip J. Bentley

Sh'ma will be including a few ads each month for Jewish organizations and institutions seeking Jewish professionals in the areas of rabbinics, education, academia and communal service. To post a listing (\$50.00), please contact the Sh'ma editorial office. Advertisements may be faxed to: (617) 558-9316 or sent by email to: jfilsusan@aol.com.

Headmaster

The Solomon Schechter Day School of Providence, RI is looking for a Headmaster (position available July, 1999). We are seeking a leader with a background in Jewish education, but also a leader who will take the school through a major physical expansion and help fashion the vision that will lead us into the next century. Contact: Dr. Penny Stein (401) 751-2470 85 Taft Avenue Providence, RI 02906.

Jewish History Teacher

Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, in Rockville MD (suburban DC), is looking for a full-time teaching position in Jewish History. For more information contact: Lauren Granite at: (301) 881-1404 x331 or email: lgranite@aol.com.

Lower School Director

The Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston in Newton, MA is looking for a Lower School Director. The Director of the Lower School campus (Grades K-3) is in charge of the supervision of faculty and the entire educational program, with particular attention to shaping and supporting the culture of a Conservative Jewish day school. Requirements include: master's or doctoral degree in education, minimum five years experience; advanced degree in Judaica desirable. Send resume to: Rabbi Dov Bard, SSDS 60 Stein Circle Newton, MA 02459.