

Top Jewish Events of 2008

(Rabbi Havivi usually reviews the “top ten” on the last Friday night of the year, and publishes the list in a subsequent bulletin. Here is his list!)

- **ISRAEL@60** – this year, Israel celebrated its sixtieth anniversary. Whether we celebrate from the UN declaration of November 29, 1947,, announcing the partition plan, or the Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948, Many of us who witnessed the birth of Israel, or remember before there was a Jewish State, and then saw its 10th and 20th and 30th..... Who would have dreamed that such a developed cultured, strong, thriving first-world country would exist today? The industrial and High tech and scientific research accomplishments of Israel, its ongoing ingathering and absorption of Jews from all corners of the earth, the greening of the land, the development of Jewish and Israeli and world culture b in so many fields – amazing! Israel has many challenges – poverty, Arabs and Jews, peace with neighbors, ecology, and we look forward to assisting Israel with these in the years ahead. We have much to be proud of. In the meantime – Let’s visit!

-**AGRIPROCESSORS** – The largest kosher meat packing plant in the US, Agriprocessors had long been under a cloud of dubious employment and industrial practices. A US immigration raid in may arrested many undocumented workers, some underage, as well, ultimately bankrupted and closed the plant, putting hundreds out of work, and leaving a stain on the Kosher, and by extension, Jewish community. The question of whether Kashrut is merely ritual law, or are there ethical considerations in Kashrut as well, has given rise to a Conservative Movement organization called Hechsher Tzedek – the certification of Justice, which will begin to appear as a copyrighted symbol on kosher food who se manufacturers treat their employees fairly, and engage in environmentally sound industrial practices.

-**IRAN** – the threat of a nuclear Iran continues to be a threat to world stability and an existential threat to Israel in particular. President Ahmedinajad has made public speeches denying the holocaust, and stating that Israel should be wiped off the map. Irons support of terrorism including Hamas and Hezbollah, and its nuclear goals threaten to destabilize the region, and the world. As I heard recently in an AIPAC briefing – “Israel has three main threats facing it at this time: Iran, Iran, and Iran”

- **SAMIR KUNTAR** – In 1979 Samir Kuntar came with several other terrorists by rubber dingy to the seaside town of Nahariya, landed on the beach, invaded the apartment of the Haran family, and shot the father, Danny Haran, then proceeded to smash four year old Anat’s head to pieces with the butt of his rifle. The mother Smadar, hid in a crawl space with two-year old Yael, and in an effort to stifle her cries, accidentally smothered her baby. Although there have been many bloodier terrorist incidents in Israel, perhaps because of the Nazi-like associations of this horrific crime, Kuntar became a symbol of particularly depraved and bloody terror. This year, Samir Kuntar was returned to Lebanon, exchanged for the bodies of two kidnapped Israeli soldiers, EldadRegev and Ehud Goldwasser. Two Israeli soldiers kidnapped in Lebanon in the war of 2006. Because of Kantar’s notoriety in Israel, the deal to set him free was hotly debated in Israel – to add insult to injury, Kuntar was given a heroes’ welcome in Beirut.

-**ELLIOT SPITZER** - governor of New York, known as a fighter of corruption, was found in March to be a patron of a high priced Escort Service, and resigned in shame. His Jewish connections well known, his foible was a chilul HaShem, reflecting poorly on the Jewish People.

-OLMEWRT-LIVNI- In other ethical lapses, Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert was indicted for receiving illegal campaign contributions, having already been roundly criticized for his handling of the 200 Lebanon war. Tzipi Livni, his deputy, assumed the caretaker post as the head of the ruling Kadima party, but was unable to cobble together sufficient votes for a government coalition, bringing Israel to projected elections in February '09.

-OBAMA- Barack Obama defeated Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Party nomination for President, and then went on to defeat Republican John McCain, becoming the first African American President of the United States. Hailed by many as a watershed event in America's Civil Rights struggle, and by many in the world as a new beginning for America, we strengthen his hands and wish him well.

-ECONOMY- Beginning with a mortgage lending crisis, and progressing to the bankruptcy of major banking and stock firms, this year saw a stock market plunge, and the beginning of a major economic recession. Individual and Organizations were hurt, or worse.

-MADOFF- On the heels of the economic crisis, Bernard Madoff was found to have run a huge Ponzi Scheme, leading to the loss of fifty Billion dollars for individuals and organizations and Foundations, many of them Jewish. Hadassah lost ninety million dollars, Yeshiva University one hundred million, Maimonides School in Boston, Ramaz, and many others. In a year where there were, unfortunately, many instances of Individual Jews acting poorly, this was yet another case, on which received much media attention, and hurt many people.

-MUMBAI- Pakistani Terrorists came ashore in Mumbai, India, and attacked Hotels, and restaurants, killing 173 innocent people. It became a specifically Jewish story with the attack on the Habad house in Mumbai, killing Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka, and others.

-GAZA- Since Israel evacuated Jewish settlements and citizens from Gaza in 2005, 6300 rockets have fallen on Southern Israel. Despite a six-month ceasefire with Gaza's ruling Hamas party, smuggling of armaments continues into Gaza from Egypt, and Israel chose to no longer absorb the rocket fire without reaction. At the end of December, the Israeli Air Force began a one week assault on Hamas positions and institutions in Gaza, and then infantry entered Gaza for a two week period. Many Gazan civilians were killed, and at the end of January 2009, it was still unclear what the political results of the war would be.

-PAUL NEWMAN/CHARLTON HESTON - Two non-Jews who depicted proud, strong Jews, on the silver screen, projecting that image onto Jews themselves and to many others in the world, died this year. Paul Newman played Ari ben Canaan in Exodus, and Charlton Heston, well, *was* Moses.

All in all, we say of 2008 – *Tichleh Shanah v'kill'oteha, tachel Shana u'virchotehah* -May the old year with its curse end, and may the new one with its blessing begin.

Eliezer Havivi