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### Atlanta Jewish Times op-eds

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# Atlanta Jewish Times op-eds

IS AMERICA FACING ITS OWN TISHA'B'AV? (8-22-03)

Jews throughout the world recently fasted and prayed on Tisha'b'Av (the 9th Day of Av). On that day, the First and Second Temples were destroyed and Jews later suffered a wide variety of other misfortunes.

Centuries after the destruction of the Temples, traditional commentators asserted that Jews loss of the Temples was divine punishment for various sins. But a geopolitical explanation also exists: The loss of both Temples arose from our ancestors attempts to stand up to a powerful foreign empire.

In the 6th century B.C.E., the Jewish king Zedekiah, a vassal of the Babylonian Empire, rebelled against what he probably perceived as oppression. And Babylon responded by wiping out the Jewish kingdom, destroying the First Temple and sending almost all the Jews into exile in Babylon.

Six and a half centuries later, first-century Jews in Israel were sick and tired of corrupt, brutal Roman governors. So they rose up against the Roman Empire - and like Zedekiah, they were crushed. The Romans destroyed the Second Temple and killed or enslaved millions of Jews.

After another anti-Roman rebellion yielded similarly tragic results, Jews moved towards a more pacifist posture for many centuries, tolerating gentile repression rather than taking up arms.

Both supporters and opponents of Americas adventures in Iraq can invoke these TishabAv wars as precedent. My hawkish friends argue: Just as ancient Jews got crushed for resisting the Babylonian and Roman Empires, the Taliban and Sadaam Hussein have been crushed for resisting the United States.

Hence, Arabs and radical Muslims in other countries will learn to make nice with America just as Jews learned to make nice with Rome.

So far, of course, this strategy has been of limited value: the destruction of Iraq's government has not prevented well-armed civilians (from Iraq and from other nations) from attacking Americans.

And as long as America, unlike Rome, seeks to minimize civilian casualties, our empire will never exterminate most of its enemies.

Indeed, a sophisticated dove could argue that just as ancient Jews provoked the Babylonian and Roman Empires, America's Iraq adventure has foolishly provoked the "empire" of Islamic terrorism.

We already know that the Iraq war has increased Muslim hostility to the United States. For example, a recent Pew Center poll reported that 77 percent of Moroccans held a favorable opinion of America in 1999 - but only 27 percent do today.

A worst-case scenario is as follows: Some of the most [newly] hostile Muslims become full-time terrorists. And the more people who start new terrorist groups or join existing ones, the more likely it is that some of those terrorists will succeed in attacking Americans or obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

Eventually, a group of these terrorists gets the smallpox virus or a few nuclear weapons -- and America suffers its own TishabAv.

So which scenario is correct? Will the Iraq war force Arab radicals to live in peace with America? Or is Americas assault upon Sadaam & Co. going to risk Americas own destruction by provoking terrorism?

Ten years elapsed between Osama bin Laden's initial radicalization (caused, so he claims, by Americas decision to post troops in Saudi Arabia in 1991) and his attack on the World

Trade Center. So it may take 10 years or more to learn the long-term results of Americas recent wars.

#### MUSLIMS, POLLS AND MYTHS (7-4-03)

A few weeks ago, the Pew Global Attitudes Project ([www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org)), part of Washingtons Pew Center think tank, issued the results of a poll taken in dozens of countries, including several Arab and Muslim countries. The results conflict with myths cherished by hawk and dove alike.

For example, one common dovish myth is that most Muslims just want to get along with us infidels, and that only a few crazy people support al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. But the Pew Center poll suggests otherwise. When asked how much confidence they had in a variety of world leaders, 71 percent of Palestinians stated that they have a lot or some confidence in Osama bin Laden, as did 58 percent of Indonesians and 55 percent of Jordanians.

In Pakistan, where the local dictator supports (or at least pretends to support) American anti-terror efforts, 45 percent of respondents supported bin Laden, and only half of the other 55 percent did not. The rest refused to answer, no doubt because they feared government retaliation.

In no Islamic country did over 30 percent of respondents favor U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism.

Muslim attitudes towards Israel are even more Neanderthal. When they were asked whether Arab needs can be taken care of as long as the state of Israel exists, 80 percent of Palestinians, 85 percent of Jordanians and 90 percent of Moroccans answered in the negative, essentially endorsing the extermination of Israel.

The moderate Muslim states were not much better. Supporters of wiping out Israel outnumbered supporters of a two-state solution by 57 percent to 23 percent in Pakistan, 58 percent to 28 percent in Indonesia, and 49 percent to 33 percent in Turkey.

By contrast, 74 percent of French respondents said that a way can be found for the State of Israel to exist so that the rights and needs of the Palestinian people can be [addressed]." In America and Israel, 67 percent agreed.

The Pew Center poll also explodes the hawkish myth that Muslim public opinion is so fixed that it cannot be affected by U.S. policy. In fact, public opinion of America has changed dramatically for the worse in Muslim nations over the past few years.

For example, 77 percent of Moroccans held a favorable opinion of America in 1999 - but only 27 percent do today. In Indonesia, U.S. supporters plunged from 75 percent in 1999 to 61 percent in 2002 to 15 percent today. In Turkey, the percentage of pro-U.S. respondents skidded from 52 percent in 1999 to 30 percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2003.

Even the most anti-American areas have hardened their views. In 1999, 14 percent of the Palestinian Authoritys residents held a favorable opinion of America; today only 1 percent do. When Americans make war upon Muslim countries, yesterday's friends become today's

foes.

This poll also contradicts the pro-war argument that America's takeover of Iraq will cause the Arabs to love us because Sadaam Hussein was so awful. In fact, only 4 percent of Palestinians, 17 percent of Indonesians and Pakistanis, 19 percent of Jordanians, and 24 percent of Morrocans believe that Iraqis are better off now.

If you're an optimistic, you can argue those numbers show that Muslim opinion of America can only improve. If you're a realist, you know we have to find a way to do better.  
[NOTE: this last paragraph of the above article differs pretty significantly from what I wrote].

#### AMERICA'S TAXING SITUATION (6-20-03)

About 1,800 years ago, our sages wrote in the Mishnah: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for without fear of it, people would swallow each other alive."

Today, our government is less wasteful and repressive than the Roman Empire under which the Mishnah's authors lived. Nevertheless, many Americans would rather eviscerate government than pray for its welfare. At the federal level, Congress just voted to cut taxes even though the government is already mired in debt.

And at the state and local level, many governments are broke, partially because of the economic slowdown and partially because Congress continues to enact unfunded mandates - laws that require, say, better education for disabled children or increased homeland security without giving the states money to fund such projects.

The federal government won't help, and many voters would rather see state and local governments chopped to ribbons than forego tax cuts.

Why? Because many voters believe that starving the government will lead us to paradise; we will all painlessly finance tax cuts by eliminating government waste, fraud and abuse.

But this argument is based on a fallacy. Taxophobes believe that if government is adequately financed, politicians are not wise enough to spend the money intelligently. But they also believe that if government is underfinanced, those same politicians are wise enough to cut wasteful spending instead of essential government functions. Obviously, both propositions cannot be true.

The authors of the Mishnah, by contrast, didn't think that weak government led to a low-tax utopia. Instead, they wrote that weak government leads to anarchy- and that's exactly what is happening in parts of America.

Local governments starved for revenue are balancing their budget by cutting back on police, prosecutors, and prisons. For example:

\*In Kentucky, a budget crisis forced the early release of 900 prisoners, some of whom were promptly rearrested on rape, robbery and other charges.

\* In Minneapolis, the police department has shaved 200 officers from a 900-person force,

partially because the state cut funding, partially because the federal government reduced subsidies for local police, and partially because the federal government has forced local police to busy themselves guarding waterworks against terrorism instead of addressing more common crimes.

\*And in Portland, Oregon, the county prosecutors office shrank by more than 20 percent and the police budget was cut by more than 10 percent in the last three years. At the same time, the federal government is requiring the police department to spend millions of dollars to guard bridges.

The results of Portland's "pro-crime" policies are predictable: in the first four months of 2003 alone, car thefts have risen 19 percent and home burglaries have jumped by 21 percent

Atlantans have been spared the worst of taxophobia, primarily because Governor Perdue chose an increase in tobacco taxes over cuts in public safety.

But should the states fiscal problems continue next year, Georgians may face a tougher set of fiscal choices, so how can we avoid Portland's fate?

First, tell Gov. Perdue and Mayor Franklin to keep up the good work, and urge our legislators to focus on preserving the most important public services as well as on keeping taxes down.

Second, tell Congress to support state and local governments instead of obstructing their work with unfunded mandates.

#### THE POLITICS OF RUTH (5-30-03)

On Shavuot, Jews around the world read the Book of Ruth, which begins when a Jewish couple (Naomi and Elimelech) leave Bethlehem and move to pagan Moab because of a famine. They marry their sons off to Moabite women, but Elimelech and the sons die.

When Naomi returns to Israel, one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, comes with her, converts to Judaism, and marries a Jew. (She later bears King David's grandfather). But the Book of Ruth is not just a G-related soap opera; it's a story laden with messages for today.

When Naomi's husband and sons die in Moab, she has no visible means of support -- no one to provide for her and no form of social welfare or communal charity in Moab.

Moab is the perfect libertarian society: Each person is responsible for herself and the local idol-worshippers are unburdened by a welfare state or taxes [to support one]. There is no place for the likes of Naomi in Moab.

Fortunately, Naomi hears that the regional famine is over in Israel. After she and Ruth go there, Ruth "came and gleaned in a field behind the reapers (2:3). In plain English, Ruth went on someone else's farm and gathered grain to eat.

Nevertheless, Ruth is not a thief. She is merely taking her due under Torah law, which states:

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your

field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest, you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger." [Leviticus 23:22].

In other words, the Torah mandates an agricultural version of the modern welfare state. Instead of adopting the libertarian position that every person is responsible for herself, the Torah says everyone is entitled to some minimal amount of material support, and that every non-poor farmer must provide that support by leaving gleanings of your harvest . . . for the poor and the stranger.

Today's conservative conventional wisdom is that the hard-working taxpayer owes nobody anything because "it's your money" and that no one can tell you what to do with your land.

But the Torah operates on the assumption that the hard-working farmer owes the poor something because the land ultimately belongs not to the farmer but to our divine creator. The recipient of such social welfare has obligations too. She can't just sit at her mailbox and watch the welfare checks roll in; she has to go out and pick up her grain.

In effect, the Torah creates not a welfare state of subsidized idleness, but a workfare state where those who are willing to work for their food are entitled to support from Hebrew farmers.

Like any great literature, the Book of Ruth raises as many questions as answers. We know from Ruth that we have an obligation to support the poor and the stranger. But how does this obligation function in a society where Jews are a minority? Are Jews merely obligated to provide charity among themselves and ignore the rest of society?

Or are we obligated to urge other Americans to provide charity collectively through our government?

And if we are, exactly what must our government do for the poor and the stranger?

Is it enough to give the poor some food and give their children a minimal education? Or must we provide health insurance and other services that you or I might deem necessary for a normal life? The Torah may not provide a clear answer but it encourages us to ask the questions.

#### CYNTHIA TUCKER AND ISRAEL (5-9-03)

Recent issues of the Jewish Times have hosted an exchange of letters about Cynthia Tucker, editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution's editorial page. One letter praised Tucker for her "keen insight into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" while others blamed her for what they perceive to be the paper's anti-Israel bias.

I decided to go on the Internet to find out what Tucker really thinks of Israel.

Much to my surprise, I found only one or two Israel-related columns by Tucker herself over the past several years (as opposed to columns by other writers or by the Journal-Constitution's editorial board, which represents the perspectives of a collective of journalists).

Tucker's most relevant column, dated April 7, 2002, focused on death threats heaped upon the family of Adam Shapiro, a self-styled peace activist from Brooklyn who decided to visit Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat while his compound in Ramallah was under siege by the Israeli army.

Tucker understandably denounced the threats to Shapiro's family, but didn't take the further step of endorsing Shapiro's breakfasts with Arafat as a step towards peace. Instead, she noted that Israel's supporters have long denounced Arafat and the terrorism that he has, at the very least, tolerated.

She further wrote that pro-Israel threat-mongers were behaving like Palestinian extremists who are well known for their intolerance of anyone labeled a `collaborator.

She explained: Palestinians believed to be cooperating with Israeli authorities are often treated to mob justice brutal beatings, summary executions, anonymous graves. Is that not what the Shapiros critics are also threatening?

In other words, Tucker does not assert that Arafat is just a nationalist leader and that suicide bombers are merely "frustrated" and "misunderstood"; instead, she apparently thinks Arafat is a thug and that his followers are worse.

Tucker has also condemned American supporters of Arab extremism.

In a June 30, 2002 article about Cynthia McKinney's fight for re-election, she described her [McKinney] as a fringe lunatic, well outside the congressional mainstream and incapable of aiding any cause, whether an independent Palestine or her own congressional district. (McKinney ultimately lost in a campaign exacerbated by anti-Semitic remarks made by her father, Billy McKinney).

But Tucker is not a firm supporter of the Israeli government. She wrote that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's heavy-handed tactics have started to corrode the decency, humanity and moral authority of the nation he seeks to defend.

Tucker explained: While the targets of Israeli tanks and commandoes are often well-armed extremists of Hamas and Hezbollah, the targets are also, too often, young boys armed only with rocks and bottles - rhetoric that may have made sense a decade ago, but is out of date when many Arab boys prefer blowing people up to bottle throwing.

So, we conclude from all of this that Tucker is not a rabid McKinneyite foe of Israel, but a more moderate liberal: She doesn't like Israel's enemies, but she doesn't want Israel to be too tough either.

That makes her the sort of liberal who swoons over former Prime Minister Shimon Peres rather than the sort of liberal who thinks both Peres and Sharon are both war criminals.

SECULARISM: GOOD FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE? (4-25-03)

As Jews argue about whether they should be aligned with social liberals or Christian conservatives, they tell each other two very different stories.

The liberal, secularist story is based primarily on one simple fact: For more than 1500 years, Jews lived in a Christian-dominated Europe, one where most countries had established state churches.

And for many of those years, European Christians served our ancestors with heaping helpings of anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust.

Social liberals reason that to avoid such unappetizing dishes, Jews should fight for liberal social mores generally and strict separation of church and state in particular.

For example, Michael Staub, a professor at Bowling Green State University writes: "Given the deeply racist, and often anti-Semitic cast of Christian culture and history it strikes me as odd . . . to ascribe our success in the U.S. to Christianity."

The conservatives' story is based on Jews' experiences today -- not just with Christian conservatives and their support for Israel, but more broadly on the differences between America and Europe.

America is far more religious than other affluent democracies. For example, a 1998 survey by the University of Michigan showed that 44 percent of Americans attended church once a week, as opposed to only 27 percent of British, 21 percent of French, and 4 percent of Swedes.

Americans attitudes are also more religious: An early 1990s survey by the University of Chicago shows that one-third of Americans view the Bible as the actual word of God as opposed to 7 percent of British, 12 percent of West Germans, and 12 percent of Austrians.

If Christian fundamentalism was bad for Judaism, America would be more anti-Semitic (and perhaps more anti-Israel) than Europe. But this is clearly not the case. By most measures, America is friendlier to Jews than Europe: Anti-Semitism is less common, and Americans are far more pro-Israel than most Europeans.

So the conservative argument runs as follows: Religious Christians are more pro-Jewish and pro-Israel than everyone else, and religious America is more pro-Jewish and pro-Israel than secular Europe. Thus, Christian conservatism is good for the Jews.

As the right-wing rabbi Daniel Lapin argues, "America's Bible belt is the Jewish safety belt and Jews who disregard this fact are driv[ing] with their eyes on the rear view mirror instead of the windshield."

But this has not always been the case. For example, the America of the 1930s was a more religious, conservative country than the America of 2003 -- prayer in public schools was common and abortion and homosexuality were [often] illegal. So if publicly endorsed fundamentalism was good for the Jews, 1930s America should have been paradise. Yet in fact, the religiously conservative America of 60 years ago was more anti-Semitic than today's America in many ways.

A 1937 Gallup poll revealed that 51 percent of Americans would never vote for a Jew for president, and a 1938 poll showed that 58 percent of Americans believed that European persecution of Jews was at least partially their [Jews'] own fault.



And when German Jews sought to flee Hitler, conservative Christian America kept them out.

In 1939, Senator Robert Wagner (D-N.Y.) and Representative Edith Rogers (D-Mass.) introduced a bill to admit 10,000 refugee children into America. But the bill was crushed -- not by liberal secular humanists but by isolationists and right-leaning veterans groups.

Opponents of the bill included the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Daughters of the Confederacy. The bills congressional supporters were disproportionately from the urban, socially liberal Northeast, while most of its opponents were conservatives.

Today, America's religious conservatism seems to lead to good interfaith relationships. But 70 years ago, this was not the case. The most logical conclusion from these facts is that Jews have no permanent allies or permanent enemies, but only permanent interests.

#### MORDECAI Q. PUBLIC'S PURIM (4-4-03)

For most of my life, I thought that Purim was about wearing funny costumes, making noise while the Book of Esther is being read, and eating triangular pastries. But in recent years, I have learned that other Purim customs include:

- \*Drinking on Purim night to the extent that one no can longer fully differentiate between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai.

- \*Giving gifts of food to as many friends and acquaintances as possible.

- \*Giving gifts to the poor.

In the small, mixed-income Jewish towns and neighborhoods of the 19th and early 20th centuries, these customs were easy to follow. Mordecai Q. Public could get have a few drinks on Purim night and stagger home, get up in the morning, give some money or food to a couple of poor neighbors and spend the rest of the day distributing sweets to friends.

But in America's suburban metropolis[es], most of these customs have withered away. Imagine, if you will, a 21st-century Mordecai Q. Public who lives and works in a Atlanta suburb.

Mordecai begins the holiday by resolving to have a few drinks on Purim night at the neighborhood synagogue. But right away our would-be celebrant runs into trouble he probably can't reach the synagogue without driving, which means he can't drink on Purim without endangering numerous lives.

And why can't Mordecai walk to shul? Because in much of metropolitan Atlanta, zoning laws allow only a house or two on each acre of land (or 650-1,300 houses per square mile). This means that only 150 or 300 houses will be within a quarter-mile walk of a synagogue.

If the area near the synagogue has as few Jews as the rest of metro Atlanta (about 2-3 percent of the population), some synagogues may have as few as five or 10 Jewish neighbors.

In other words, Atlanta's suburbs are typically so thinly populated that hardly anyone lives within walking distance of a synagogue.

And even if Mordecai lived within walking distance of a synagogue, he could not do so in safety and comfort because many of the residential streets lack sidewalks.

But suppose our adventurous friend, with or without alcohol, wakes up the next morning and resolves to fulfill the Purim custom of giving to poor people. If he works downtown, near panhandler-heavy Woodruff Park, this good deed is easily performed.

Otherwise, Mordecai is out of luck; Atlantans have so effectively segregated wealth and poverty that the average suburban office park has no denizens who will admit to needing charity.

The custom of giving food to friends is also not easily satisfied in suburbia. Here too the culprit is low density: if all your Jewish friends live a 45-minute drive from each other, there simply is not enough time to speed to Five Points to help the poor, drive an hour into suburbia to drop goodies off for friend A, then drive half an hour more to drop goodies off for friend B and still squeeze in a workday.

So if Atlanta's sprawl prevents grownups from drinking, charity, and exchanging gifts on Purim, what's left of the holiday? Noisemakers and costumes- in other words, a holiday that's fun for kids but not particularly interesting for adults. And that's how Purim becomes infantilized].

## THE CASE AGAINST THE SLIPPERY SLOPE (2-28-03)

In recent years, the Christian right has been one of Israel's most loyal supporters. For example, former Christian Coalition leader Ralph Reed has joined a rabbi in Stand for Israel, a group formed to mobilize 100,000 evangelical churches to raise money and support for Israel.

Yet many Jews are hostile to the religious right at least partially because of concerns over church-state separation.

For example, one American Jewish Congress (AJC) fundraising letter states: "If you and I are not vigilant, the religious right may be able to achieve . . . a government where those who do not share their religious views are, in effect, second-class citizens."

While mainstream Jewish groups constantly seek to improve relations with African-Americans and other traditionally liberal groups, the same groups are rigidly opposed to any breach in the alleged wall between church and state, oblivious to the danger that repeated slights could endanger Christian conservatives' support for Israel.

Jewish support for church-state separation is not completely irrational. Clearly, some varieties of public support for religion, such as openly Christian prayers at government

functions, do trample on Jewish sensitivities.

And other church-state issues raise practical concerns. For example, one common argument against vouchers for parochial school students is that such aid might drain funds from public schools.

But Jewish concerns often rest on a broader and less rational phobia --the slippery slope idea exemplified by an Anti-Defamation League press release: "Supreme Court Decision on Public Aid to Parochial Schools Could Lead to a Slippery Slope On Church-State Separation."

This press release was hardly an aberration: I ran a Internet search and found 374 references incorporating the phrases "church-state" and "slippery slope".

The concern here is that any accommodation of religion in any public facility or institution will inevitably lead America on a slippery slope towards a Christian theocracy. The flaw in the "slippery slope" argument is this: Religious activity has never been completely separated from government facilities.

For example, if you watch Congressional proceedings on C-SPAN you might notice that Congress begins with an invocation by a clergyman.

And if you buy breakfast or a snack on the way to work you might notice that the government-issued cash you spend includes the phrase "In God We Trust".

And if you have college-age children, they can use federal Pell Grants or student loans to attend religious as well as secular institutions.

And if your children go to public high school, they may be able to join a Torah study group meeting at the school (if the school extends similar privileges to secular student groups). And on Shabbos, you might pray at a synagogue which is tax-exempt.

In fact, many of the same Jewish groups that seek to guard church-state separation also endorse some forms of aid to religious institutions. The AJCs Statement on Church-State Relations endorses publicly funded benefits, such as lunches and medical and dental services [for] all school children and loans to parochial schools to assist them in complying with federal health and safety standards.

In sum, American government is already intertwined with religion so if any breach in the wall of church-state separation led to theocracy, America would have long ago reached the bottom of that particular slippery slope.

Does this mean we should give the Christian right a blank check to mix church and state? Of course not. But when confronted with a controversy over government support for religion, Jews and Jewish groups should ask themselves two questions:

\*Is the particular [scheme at] issue offensive to our sensibilities as Jews and as Americans?  
\*Will this issue endanger our relationships with Christian conservatives, and if so, is it important enough to justify creating such friction?

## 2050: THREE SCENARIOS FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE (2-7-03)

Not long ago, I was chatting with a friend about the state of American Jewry. My friend spouted the conventional wisdom that American Jews are becoming less numerous and more devout because liberal and secular Jews are assimilating or producing smaller families, while more religious Jews (the Orthodox [Jews] in particular) are marrying and creating large families.

Similarly, if current immigration patterns continue, Jews outside America will continue to migrate to Israel as their communities in Europe and Latin America decline.

That would mean a Jewish world dominated by a huge community in Israel and a smaller -- possibly more devout -- community in the United States.

But current patterns of Jewish life might not continue at all for one reason: terrorism. Al-Qaida wants to wipe Jews from the earth, while Hamas and its ilk seek the more modest goal of turning the land of Israel into Muslim turf.

It's conceivable that terrorist groups could, in our lifetime, obtain enough firepower to make attacks like the September 11 disaster as regular as suicide bombings in Israel are today. So what would happen to the Jews of America and Israel if terrorism becomes so widespread that life in one of those countries becomes intolerable? Three scenarios come to mind:

\*Israel OK, America not so OK.

Imagine that over the next few decades, Israel becomes a less dangerous place after the Palestinians decide that blowing themselves up will never work. And suppose that America continues to be Public Enemy No. 1 in the Arab and Muslim-dominated world.

In that case, radical Muslims might leave Israel alone and attack America again and again with increasingly lethal weapons, causing Jews to abandon America for Eretz Yisrael.

If this scenario comes to pass, the long-predicted ingathering of the exiles will become reality and the Jewish world of 2100 will look a lot like the Jewish world of 3,000 years ago.

\*America OK, Israel not so OK.

The situation in Israel continues to deteriorate, while America somehow makes peace with the Muslim world. If the Jewish state survives, it becomes less attractive to all but the most determined Jews, and millions of Israelis move to America, the new center of world Jewry. And because the most secular Jews will likely be the first to abandon Israel, the American Jewish community of 2050 could be larger -- yet less devout -- than the American Jewish community of 2000.

\*Israel not OK, America not OK.

The American-Israeli alliance, along with American wars against radical Islam and Islamic rogue states, inflames a billion Muslims and both countries become war zones.

In such a situation, many Jews might abandon both America and Israel. But where could they go?

Certainly not to Western Europe, which has becoming increasingly Muslim (and thus dangerous for Jews) in recent years due to immigration and declining birthrates among non-Muslim Europeans. And not to Latin America, which has more Muslims than Jews, and is suffering from severe economic problems.

If my nightmare scenario comes to pass, Jews would want to move to countries that either have almost no Muslims or are run by regimes so oppressive and so stable that Islamic radicalism is crushed.

The largest country that meets both criteria is China, where the Muslim population is small and the government is unlikely to tolerate dissent.

And the first criterion is met by Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine, which have no significant Muslim population. [NOTE: Initial draft referred to Eastern Europe generally, though I'm not sure this edit makes a difference].

Although those countries (once the center of world Jewry) have a vibrant tradition of anti-Semitism, Jews may decide that the risk of harassment by Christian anti-Semites is better [less dangerous] than [the risk of] being blown up by jihadniks.

If so, the world of 2050 might look a lot like the world of 1850, one where the Western Hemisphere is no longer a center of Jewish life, but where Eastern Europe once again contains a wall of yiddishkeit from sea to shining sea.

## MAKING A CASE FOR VOUCHERS (1-24-03)

(NOTE: This headline was not my idea).

Opponents of vouchers and similar programs in the Jewish community and elsewhere often claim that public schools are uniquely valuable

They argue that public schools force children of all races and classes to mix, exposing them to the real world.

Thus, only public schools deserve public support, and children whose parents cannot afford private school tuition must attend such schools.

For example, the website of the Religious Action Center (Reform Judaism's social action lobby) describes government-run schools as the heart of American identity, calling them a unifying factor among the large range of ethnic and religious communities in our society.

Such reverence for public schools obviously discourages families from sending their children to Jewish day schools. More important[ly], the claim that public schools expose children to diversity is often factually incorrect. In segregated metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, public schools have failed to expose rich to poor or whites to blacks. Instead, most public schools are dominated by one racial or demographic group.

Only 7 percent of students in Atlanta public schools are white, while 89 percent are black.

By contrast, many suburban public schools are mostly white, while others are majority black but have a more affluent student body than city schools.

The status quo is quite recent: As late as 1958, only 33 percent of Atlanta's public school students were black. But in the 1960s and 1970s, the federal courts tried to desegregate public schools.

As a result, many white parents decided that racially integrated schools were bad and moved en masse to majority-white suburbs. [Editors deleted sentence explaining why this was so- partially irrational, partially fears of violence, partially fears of classes being dumbed down].

But when blacks move to a suburb, it [that suburb] often becomes unpopular with whites.

For example, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, was once a white suburb. But when middle-class blacks began moving in, the public schools got a bad reputation.

Today, Cleveland Heights is nearly half-black and resembles Atlanta's intown neighborhoods: It retains singles and Orthodox families who send their children to religious schools, but is unpopular with other whites because of the allegedly inferior public schools. Similarly, public schools in Atlanta's more integrated suburbs tend to have few white students.

The public school system enforces -- rather than reduces -- segregation. Here's why:

If there were no public schools, many white and black middle-class families might find

[intown] middle-class areas like Virginia-Highlands as attractive as the suburbs because [perceived] school quality would not factor in their housing decisions.

But as matters now stand, to stay intown parents must send their children to public schools with socially diverse student bodies and the bad reputations that often accompany such diversity. That's a price few parents will pay.

The public school system also rewards people for becoming segregation-seeking suburbanites. A well-off suburban family can send its children to public schools and often pay lower property taxes.

That's why vouchers might reduce housing segregation. If middle-class families could afford to send their children to private schools, many would stay intown. Therefore, more private schools would be formed, creating a virtuous cycle of urban rebirth creating new schools creating more urban rebirth.

#### SEEKING THE CENTER IN 2004 (12-27-02)

In 2000, President Bush got only 19 percent of the Jewish vote. Nevertheless, Jewish Republicans have been predicting in recent years that Jews would join the GOP en masse. For example, Republican pollster Frank Luntz predicts that in 2004, George Bush will get more votes in the Jewish community since any other Republican presidential candidate since they started to measure religious voting.

Because no nationwide exit polls were taken in 2002, there is no way to tell with certainty how Jews voted in the November elections, but state polls in 2002 revealed a mixed picture. On the one hand, Republican Gov. George Pataki of New York won a flat majority of the Jewish vote in a three-way race. But in two other states, Republican candidates were unable to improve upon the GOP's traditional share of the Jewish vote.

In California, Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill Simon got 22 percent of the Jewish vote (as opposed to 69 percent for Democrat Gray Davis and 9 percent for a leftist third party candidate).

And in New Jersey, Democratic former Sen. Frank Lautenberg pulverized Republican businessman Doug Forrester by an 80 percent- 20 percent margin among Jews.

Why was New York different from New Jersey and California? In New York, Republican George Pataki ran as [a] moderate on both economic and social issues. In addition to supporting abortion and gay rights, Pataki supported social spending [to a sufficient degree] to be endorsed by health care workers and [other government employee] unions.

By contrast, Simon ran as an anti-tax, anti-abortion, pro-gun conservative. Forrester supported legal abortion, but he also championed Bush tax cuts, opposed new gun control laws, endorsed oil drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Reserve, and attacked federal fuel economy standards.

The lesson seems to be that a moderate Republican can win a majority of the Jewish vote, but a solid conservative will get the same 20 percent or so that got in 2000 -- and not a vote more.

Bush has focused on the concerns of his party's conservative base large tax cuts and Social Security privatization. Because conservative Republicans did as poorly among Jews in 2002 as they did in earlier elections, Bush may not exceed the GOP's traditional 20 percent share of the Jewish vote if he stays right and if the 2004 election focuses on domestic issues. But Bush can do well with Jews if he moves to the center on domestic issues.

And if foreign policy dominates the 2004 election, President Bush may gain Jewish votes for another reason. Even a conservative Republican can get a few extra Jewish votes if he is sufficiently pro-Israel or his Democratic rival is perceived as overly dovish or wishy-washy in

his commitment to Israel.

In 1980, President Reagan got 39 percent of the Jewish vote against Jimmy Carter. Against the more solidly pro-Israel Walter Mondale, Reagan got 31 percent - not a stellar showing, but better than any post-Reagan Republican to date.

If Bush continues to be perceived as pro-Israel, he may get 30 percent of the Jewish vote and maybe more if the Democratic nominee is seen as too dovish by more conservative Jewish voters.

But nothing suggests that Bush can get a majority of the Jewish vote without moving to the center on domestic issues.

## WHAT WOULD HAMAN DRIVE? (12-13-02)

Not long ago, a group of Christians started a What Would Jesus Drive campaign ([www.whatwouldjesusdrive.org](http://www.whatwouldjesusdrive.org)). They believe Christians should stop driving gas-guzzling vehicles because Jesus wants us to travel in ways that reduce pollution and consumption of gasoline.

I couldn't help wondering if there was a Jewish angle to this story. But rather than risking sacrilege by speculating on the likely views of long-dead Jewish prophets and scholars, I decided to imagine visiting one of Atlanta's Persian restaurants for a lunchtime interview with Haman (who, as we recall every Purim, unsuccessfully sought to wipe out the Persian Empires Jews about 2,500 years ago).

I began with the key question: Haman, what would you drive if you were alive today?

Haman: Of course, I'd drive a huge, gas-guzzling SUV or pickup truck.

Me: Why are these different from other cars?

Haman: They are gas guzzlers. Some of those cars get as little as 12 miles per gallon in city driving (as you can learn by going to [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov)). And the more gasoline a car uses, the more money its drivers have to spend on oil from Arab countries. Some of that money gets sent to the enemies of the Jews in that part of the world.

Me: So gas guzzlers finance war against Israel?

Haman: Precisely - well, at least I hope so.

Me: But aren't big, gas-guzzling SUVs safer than other cars precisely because they are so big?

Haman: Not so. According to a recent study [in the transportation journal published] by the University of California, the risk to drivers of average midsize and large cars is about the same [as the risk to drivers] for the [average] SUV because SUVs are so likely to roll over. Pickup trucks have even worse safety records.

And when the SUV collides with another car, the driver of the other car may get crushed. The California study also says the combined death rate (to SUV drivers and drivers of the cars they collide with) is 129 per million vehicles, as opposed to 105 for the average midsize car and even less for most minivans.

Me: Isn't the higher death rate something you're worried about?

Haman: Of course not. Just by the law of averages, some of the people hurt have to be Jews, which of course is my main goal in life - well, it would be if I was still living. Me: Do SUVs have any other benefits?

Haman: Absolutely. You ever sat behind one of those things in traffic? You can't see a thing. By blocking visibility, huge cars annoy the daylighters out of other motorists - some of whom happen to be, you guessed it, Jews.

Me: But doesn't that apply to every driver?

Haman: Yes, but there are ways the careful SUV driver can target Jews. For example, I

would really enjoy driving around Toco Hills on Friday in some huge car so the Jews can't get home before sundown.

Or I'd go to Quality Kosher with a car so big that it would take up two or three parking spaces.

Me: So what does your perfect car look like?

Haman: Low gas mileage and dangerous design are important, but my ideal vehicle would also have an annoyingly high center of gravity and be wide enough to take up several parking spaces. After all, the driver you're annoying may be a Jew - so happy motoring.

## ONE TORAH, ONE ATLANTA (11-29-02)

In a recent election for Fulton County Commission, relations between the city of Atlanta and the rest of Fulton County became a campaign issue.

According to the Northside Neighbor, one candidate said: "If you want the city of Atlanta represented, you want [one candidate] . . . If you want the people of unincorporated Fulton represented, you want [another candidate]."

The brouhaha over these alleged remarks made me wonder what the Torah says about city-suburb relations.

One passage is arguably relevant: the requirement that Jews "shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not . . . favor the person of the mighty". (Leviticus 19:15).

Rashi, a medieval Torah commentator, says that this verse prohibits judges from favoring the rich. [It logically follows that] By implication, [all types of] government must provide comparable services to everyone [,rather than favoring the rich].

Yet local government falls far short of this goal. Atlantas poor are concentrated in the city and less affluent southern suburbs, while our upper middle class is concentrated in the northern suburbs. According to the 2000 Census, nearly one-quarter of Atlantas inhabitants as opposed to less than 8 percent of suburbanites lived in poverty, and Atlantas median family income is less than two-thirds that of the Atlanta region as a whole.

Because Atlanta is poorer than its suburbs, its tax base is smaller, which means that the city must choose between higher taxes and worse municipal services. Moreover, a city full of poor people must spend more money than its suburbs for the same quality of services [because poor neighborhoods require more police protection and more social spending].

And a city full of poor people typically has a smaller, less educated talent pool of politicians from which to draw, thus ensuring that less talented politicians have to do more with less.

How can we make local government more equitable? An obvious (but radical) solution is to consolidate Atlanta and its major suburbs, so that rich and poor are governed by the same mayor and council. If Atlantas four largest counties (Cobb, Gwinnett, Fulton and DeKalb) were combined, the new city would have about 2.5 million people, and be the fourth largest in the United States, making Atlanta a "major league city."

A common argument against consolidation is that [if city and suburb are consolidated] the suburbs get stuck with the city's problems. But when city and suburb combine, both prosper.

For example, in 1962 Nashville combined with Davidson County, and in one step a city of 73 square miles became a city of 473 square miles. Nashville now compares favorably with Atlanta: its population has grown by one-third since 1970 (while Atlantas has stagnated), its murder rate is one-third that of Atlanta (10 per 100,000 people as opposed to 30 per 100,000), its traffic congestion is less [overwhelming] (35 person-hours of congestion per 1,000 people, as opposed to 53 here).

As former Nashville Mayor Beverly Briley said: "I believe there is a direct relation between



[consolidation] and the revitalization that downtown Nashville is experiencing."

Another argument against consolidation is that it redistributes wealth to the poor. But if this [redistribution] means higher taxes, consolidation is not redistributionist [because it does not increase the overall size of government].

Instead, narrowing the group between city and suburb requires only equal treatment a system in which the rich, poor and middle class are served and taxed by the same government, and thus get the equal service that the Torah mandates.

#### AN AL CHET FOR ALL OUR POLITICIANS (11-1-02)

It is appropriate that the political campaign season begins around Yom Kippur and ends with Election Day since politicians have a lot for which to repent.

After watching a particularly reprehensible TV ad, I created a prayer to remind politicians of their campaign-season errors. Its modeled on the Al Chet prayer we say on Yom Kippur.

The politicians Al Chet would begin with the traditional opening for that prayer, which includes: Hide not Thyself from our supplication, for we are neither so arrogant nor so hardened as to say before thee, O Lord our God and God of our predecessors, `we are righteous and have not sinned; verily, we have sinned.

Then the politicians prayer would focus on sins commonly associated with liberals and those commonly associated with conservatives.

For the sin we committed by buying votes with taxpayers money, and for the sin we committed by putting future generations in debt to cut taxes today;

For the sin we committed by idolizing government, and for the sin we committed by making government the enemy;

For the sin we committed by comforting the comfortable and afflicting the afflicted;

And for the sin we committed by afflicting the middle class to make ourselves feel better;

For the sin we committed by pandering to the middle classes desire to cut its commutes by a few minutes while ignoring the working poors interest in health insurance and decent bus service;

and for the sin we committed by pretending that government could help the poor by forcing everyone to pay each other higher wages;

For the sin we committed by pretending schools could be saved by throwing money at them,

and for the sin we committed by ignoring differences between rich and poor schools;

For the sin we committed by unchastity, and for the sin we committed by focusing on our opponents personal lives;

For the sin we committed by veiled appeals to racism and [for the sin we committed by] frivolous accusations of racism;

For the sin we committed by letting government support illegitimate childbirth and the sin we committed by pretending all government spending goes to unpopular programs like welfare and foreign aid;

For the sin we committed by refusing to acknowledge that an embryo in a test tube is different than an already born human, and for the sin we committed by refusing to acknowledge that a fetus with arms, legs and a heart is different from an embryo in a test tube;

For the sins we committed by ignoring the environment;

For the sin we committed by war-mongering and by using patriotism to justify every war,

For the sin we committed by spurning the insights of religion, and for the sin we committed by using religious issues to distract voters from issues that their daily lives;

For the sin we committed by accepting bribes disguised as campaign contributions,  
For the sin we committed by reckless partisanship and slandering our opponents,  
For the sins we committed by pandering to labor unions; and for the sins we committed by  
pandering to business;  
For the sins we committed in the name of liberty, and for the sins we committed in the name  
of equality;  
For all these, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

And to all candidates, I say what I say to myself as the gates of prayer close: Please try to  
do better next year.

## IS THE TORAH LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE? BOTH (10-4-02)

As Election Day approaches, liberals and conservatives alike will clog the pages of Jewish  
weeklies across the nation, arguing that if we Jews properly understood our heritage, we  
would give our votes to the right (or left) candidate.

Liberals will emphasize Jewish traditions benevolence towards societys underdogs, while  
conservatives will emphasize the Torahs endorsement of a stern moral code.

So is the Torah liberal or conservative? It's both.

On cultural issues, the Torah (for the purposes of this column I mean the Five Books of  
Moses, not the entire Hebrew Bible or the "Oral Torah" of rabbinic interpretation) generally  
supports positions commonly considered conservative in 21st-century America.

For example, the Torah states: "One that strikes a man, so that he dies, shall surely be put  
to death." (Exodus 21:12) [Artscroll translation]. Indeed, the Torah endorses capital  
punishment for offenses other than murder, such as kidnapping (Exodus 21:16).

I note, however, that the severity of the Torahs rules has been diluted in a variety of ways  
by rabbinic interpretation.

Nor is the Torahs law-and-order tendency mitigated by a desire to protect defendants from  
disadvantaged backgrounds. Instead, the Torah states: "you shall not favor the poor and  
you shall not honor the great." (Leviticus 19:15).

Although church-state separation has become an obsession among modern Jewish liberals,  
the Torahs frequent endorsement of criminal penalties suggests that the Torah originally  
contemplated a theocratic state, one in which Jewish law could be enforced through  
criminal punishment.

The Torahs sexual mores also fall on the right side of todays political spectrum: in addition  
to condemning incest and bestiality, it appears to condemn male homosexuality, stating:  
"You shall not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination." (Leviticus  
18:22).

Traditional rabbinic commentators later forbade lesbianism as well, although no Biblical  
provision directly addresses the issue.

On foreign policy, the Torah appears hawkish, mandating uncompromising warfare against  
some pagan tribes. For example, Numbers 33:5 states "you shall drive out all the  
inhabitants of the Land before you." And in these wars, the Torah is not always persnickety  
about civilian casualties: Moses states of one pagan tribe: "we destroyed every populated  
city . . . we did not leave a survivor." (Deuteronomy 2:34).

Thus, the modern notion that we should allow terrorists to live because there might be  
civilians in their midst is hard to square with some parts of the Torah.

On economic issues, however, the Torah is undoubtedly liberal by the standards of 21st-

century America. Some modern right-wingers believe that "redistribution" (as in "redistribution of wealth") is a dirty word But the Torah seeks to limit inequality by redistributing wealth in a variety of ways.

For example, the Torah mandates a primitive form of welfare: "You shall not pick the undeveloped twigs of your vineyard and the fallen fruit of your vineyard you shall not gather; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them." (Leviticus 19:10). Leviticus also sought to limit inequality by mandating redistribution of land every 50 (25:28).

Having said that, the Torah is more liberal than radical, because it does contemplate significant material inequality: if an all-powerful government was capable of eliminating poverty, there would be no poor to pick up the "fallen fruit" referred to in Leviticus 19:10. In other words, the Torah contemplates a pre-industrial version of the modern welfare state, which limits, but does not eliminate, inequality.

In sum, the author of the Torah (whether singular or plural, whether human or divine) would probably not fit well into either the modern left or the modern right.

Of course, all of this discussion may beg one huge question: so what?

Should we vote the way we think the Torah's author(s) would? The appropriate answer requires us to think about the proper relationship between faith and politics. The Torah's rules, whether divinely written or not, were written for Jews. To what extent should these rules govern a religiously diverse society?

Jewish law cannot govern a secular society but our politics must be informed by our values, and those values should be at least somewhat affected by Torah and tradition. I don't give the past a veto over my political views - but I do give it a voice.

#### JERUSALEM THE WALKABLE (9-6-02)

Most Americans think of Jerusalem as a spiritual center or as Israel's capital. But this city of about 650,000 people is also a city where apolitical people work and play, and where transportation and urban form matter as much as in Atlanta or Memphis or Baltimore.

After a little exploring on a trip last month, I noticed that most of Jerusalem does not resemble any neighborhood in Atlanta.

Atlanta is dominated by two types of areas: sterile skyscraper districts (in downtown, parts of Midtown, and parts of Buckhead) and low-density, auto-oriented areas dominated by single family houses; intown areas differ from suburbs primarily in house and lot size.

But most of Jerusalem falls into neither category. Jerusalem has more than 13,000 people per square mile, some four times as many as Atlanta and more than seven times as many as Alpharetta, Yet I saw almost no high-rises.

How does Jerusalem do it? Most of Jerusalem is dominated by row after row of apartment buildings of two to four stories, making it compact enough for Jerusalemites to walk to shops and synagogues, yet low-slung enough to avoid the claustrophobia some feel in downtown Atlanta or midtown Manhattan.

In other words, a walk through Jerusalem shows that "density" doesn't have to be a dirty word even for skyscraper-phobes.

But density alone is not enough for walkability. Even in dense parts of Atlanta ([like parts of] Midtown and Buckhead), city streets are often so wide that pedestrians cannot comfortably cross them. By contrast, Jerusalem's streets are narrow enough to be comfortably crossed in a few seconds: I never saw a city street with more than four (usually narrow) lanes.

In other words, Jerusalem teaches us that skinny streets are walkable streets. And some Jerusalem neighborhoods do almost nothing to accommodate the automobile.

For example, the Jewish Quarter within the Old City is essentially a giant pedestrian mall. In many of its residential streets, there is no need for sidewalks not because everyone drives

everywhere, but because the streets are too narrow, and the pedestrians too numerous, to accommodate any significant number of vehicles.

So rather than going into the heart of the Old City, taxis and buses stop at its outskirts. The Quarter is centered around a square, and numerous streets shoot off the square in every direction.

Each of these streets, in turn, is flanked by courtyards surrounded by apartments; some Jewish Quarter residents live in walkups, while others have apartments with private entrances directly accessible from the street.

More modern neighborhoods, of course, do more to accommodate cars. In parts of Southwest Jerusalem built in the 1920s and 1930s, there are plenty of cars, but off-street parking lots are invisible or nonexistent. Instead, cars are parked on the street enhancing safety by creating a buffer between pedestrians and speeding cars, and making streets less deserted by bringing drivers to the street instead of segregating them in the huge, ugly parking lots that infest most of Atlanta.

Southwest Jerusalem residents get shade from street trees plenty of trees in some blocks, too few in others. Because the trees tend to be new and small, much of Jerusalem is far less lush than Atlantas greener neighborhoods.

Of course, Jerusalem is not Utopia, even leaving aside terrorism, and dehydrating summer heat. Nearly every building I saw in Jerusalem was brown and made of stone, apparently because of a municipal ordinance enacted to give "a certain romantic quality to the buildings" according to an Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs web page.

Personally, I found the pervasive "brown-ness" of Jerusalem to be monotonous and even disorienting, making it hard to distinguish one part of Jerusalem from another especially since I had spent the previous week in the historic areas of Buffalo, N.Y., where the citys Victorian neighborhoods are a riot of blues and purples and greens.

Then again, everyone has their own tastes in such matters.

Israels transportation policies, unlike Jerusalems architecture and street design, should be familiar to any Atlantan. During the past several decades, metro Atlantas city and county governments have followed a self-contradictory transportation policy: On one hand, our politicians built MARTA and other public transit systems to facilitate access to the city center and increase mobility. But they also emasculated MARTA by building highways such as I-285 and Georgia 400, dispensing people and jobs to places without MARTA service, forcing them drive more and to choke the roads with cars and pollutants.

Similarly, Jerusalem is building a light rail system, one likely to be far more succesful than Atlantas, because the citys high density means many more people can walk to stations than in Atlanta). But the national government is busy sabotaging the rail system by building the Trans-Israel Highway, a billion-dollar road that may well disperse development to now-unsettled areas.

On balance, Atlantans can learn a lot about street design from Jerusalem but I only wish Israelis would learn from Atlantas mistakes.

#### WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE BLACK-JEWISH "ALLIANCE" (8-9-02)

On Aug. 20, one election may be of special interest to local Jews: the Democratic primary in Georgias 4th District between incumbent Cynthia McKinney and challenger Denise Majette. Most Jews will probably support Majette, because of McKinneys pro-Palestinian stands and because her support for Israel has been less than enthusiastic. (For example, earlier this year McKinney refused to vote for a pro-Israel resolution that passed the House 352-21). Although both McKinney and Majette are black, their contest has placed Jews on the opposite side of the fence from much of the black political Establishment

In such situations, the press typically teems with reports about the "broken black-Jewish alliance". Yet when Jimmy Carter wrote an op-ed in the New York Times that many people considered anti-Israel, there was little discussion of the "broken Southern Baptist-Jewish alliance" .

In fact, the black-Jewish alliance is about as real as the Southern Baptist-Jewish Alliance -- which is to say, not very real at all.

Fifty or 60 years ago, our grandparents could talk about a black-Jewish alliance with a straight face, because Jews and blacks lived in the same urban neighborhoods and were discriminated against by the same people -- white Christians who didn't want either group in their schools or neighborhoods.

But these common interests have evaporated during the last several decades. While blacks still suffer disproportionately from racism and poverty, Jews generally get along well in America maybe even too well given the skyrocketing intermarriage rates of the past several decades.

Nor are Jews and blacks united by geography anymore, because our desire to move to overwhelmingly white neighborhoods is just as strong as that of non-Jews.

For example, Atlanta's south side long majority black contains few Jews. And the only synagogue south of I-20 will soon be built in overwhelmingly white Fayette County, many miles to the south of most of Atlanta's black neighborhoods.

Still, Atlanta is more integrated than some other large urban regions. For example, Cleveland's most heavily Jewish suburb, Beachwood, is less than 10% black, and more integrated suburbs like Cleveland Heights have been losing Jews in recent decades.

To sum up, all that blacks and Jews have in common is that -- before I was born both groups were oppressed by white Christians, a slender peg on which to hang an alliance.

Given that Jews and blacks have no special reason to be allies, how should we interact with each other? What do we owe each other?

I begin with the simple, widely held moral assumption that color blindness is ordinarily a good thing, so it logically follows that Jews should treat black Christians the same way we treat white Christians.

That means that we cannot expect blacks to fight for Jews' special interests any more than we expect other whites to be our natural allies and that we should be no more disappointed by blacks' failure to follow our lead than by whites' failure to do so.

And because we cannot reasonably expect blacks to behave differently from white non-Jews, we should resist the temptation to blame blacks for the anti-Semitism of a Louis Farrakhan or to assume that his remarks represent the views of most blacks.

Just as Jews owe blacks the same treatment they owe other non-Jews, blacks owe Jews the same treatment they owe other non-blacks.

Blacks cannot expect us to be consistently supportive of policies they support any more than they should expect white Presbyterians or Baptists to endorse that agenda.

On the other hand, blacks have a right to expect just as much civility and decency from Jews as they should expect from white Presbyterians or Baptists.

In sum, in matters of politics Jews should see blacks simply as non-Jews and blacks should see Jews simply as whites.

Once both groups adjust their expectations accordingly, black-Jewish relations may well improve.

(Editing note: I personally would have used the term "non-Jewish blacks" instead of "blacks", since there are a few Jewish blacks out there. But this sort of judgment call is what editors are for).

## TORAH LESSONS FOR ATLANTA'S SUBURBS (7-19-02)

In order to limit suburban sprawl and preserve natural resources, Oregon requires municipal governments to establish "urban growth boundaries" around cities and inner suburbs.

Outside the boundary, subdivisions are prohibited -- and agriculture and forests are promoted.

In other words, Portland and other Oregon cities cannot sprawl indiscriminately into the countryside as Atlanta suburbs have; instead, Portland is surrounded by a green belt of rural land.

Some results of Portland's growth boundaries are miraculous; in the past two decades, the city of Portland's population has increased by 40 percent -- as fast as [that of] its suburbs. By contrast, the city of Atlanta's population increased at a sluggish 5 percent pace during the 1990s, while its suburbs exploded.

Nevertheless, Oregon's policies are not likely to be adopted by Georgia (or other states) - partially because of concerns about Portland's ever-increasing home prices, but also because of a widely held view that any environmental regulation of real estate violates developers' "property rights" to unlimited profits.

For example, John Charles of the libertarian Cascade Policy Institute says Oregon's growth boundary "strips thousands of property owners of a reasonable use of their property" by prohibiting subdivisions and office buildings in agricultural zones.

The Supreme Court has ruled that regulation is subject to a balancing test -- [a] landowner's loss is balanced against [the] public interest favoring regulation. So protecting natural resources is subject to judicial whim.

By contrast, the Torah takes a clear pro-regulation position - one with lessons for the unbridled growth in Atlanta.

For example, Numbers 35:2-5 states that upon entering Israel, the Hebrew people had to assign "towns for the Levites to dwell in [and] . . . pasture around their towns." That town pasture "shall extend a thousand cubits around the town wall all around. You shall measure off 2,000 cubits outside the town . . . with the town in the center."

The medieval Torah commentator Rashi explained that the inner 1,000 cubits (about 500 yards) surrounding cities were to be undeveloped, and the outer 1,000 were for agriculture.

In other words, the Torah created the first urban growth boundary. The Levite tribe -- to a greater extent than modern-day Oregonians -- was limited to the urban core, while the suburbs were reserved for flora and fauna and could only spread out over 2,000 cubits.

The Torah also orders farmers to let the earth lie unplowed every seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-6) and provides that agricultural land must be returned to [its] original owners every 50 years to limit inequalities of wealth (Leviticus 25:10).

Post-Biblical Jewish law extended the goals of land use regulation by enacting early forms of environmental regulation.

For example, Bab Batra (a book of the Mishnah, a code of Jewish law written around 200) creates a zoning code limiting the location of cisterns, ditches, caves, seeds, dovecotes, bakeries, graves, tanneries and other potentially noxious sites.

Tanneries [for example] create foul odors, so the rabbis were creating an early form of environmental regulation. Dovecotes had to be 50 cubits away from villages because doves might eat crops.

The position of Jewish law is clear: A property owner's right to develop must sometimes yield to the broader good, including keeping rural land rural and limiting pollution.

Think of that the next time you drive up I-85.

## WHEN "PREDICT AND PROVIDE" DOESN'T WORK by Michael Lewyn (6-7-02)

A few weeks ago, an article ran in the Jewish Times about the growth of suburban synagogues. One interviewee said: "You don't keep building in places where the Jews used to live. You try to figure out where they're going to live." In other words, predict where people are going to live, and provide services for them.

During the past few decades, this "predict and provide" model has been used to justify disinvestment in older Atlanta neighborhoods, and to justify shifting Jewish facilities to outer suburbs far from the region's historic core. (I hasten to add that the interviewee in question may not have meant to endorse such disinvestment).

For example, a Jewish retirement home moved to Alpharetta because, according to its executive director, Alpharetta is "up-and-coming" even though in fact (according to a related Jewish Times story) "only a few of the home's residents have relatives in Alpharetta."

So what's wrong with predicting and providing? First of all, the "predict and provide" model is, to some extent, a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you build something (say, a Jewish day school, or a Jewish community center, or a synagogue) in place X, committed Jews are likely, other factors being equal, to move to place X.

For example, as Beth Jacob in Toco Hills began to prosper, Jews started to move to Toco Hills, which in turn caused other Jewish-oriented enterprises to move to Toco Hills.

Would this cycle of Jewish migration have happened if Beth Jacob did not exist? Of course not. Toco Hills would be just another nondescript older suburb, with as much of a Jewish presence as East Point or College Park.

To be sure, broader demographic trends have brought Jews -- especially Jews who are less affluent, less committed or both -- to move to Christian-dominated areas. For example, the quest of middle-class families for cheap real estate has scattered Jews to Cobb and Gwinnett Counties.

But even there [in suburbia], the Jewish elites' investment patterns have an impact. Because the region's major Jewish community center is in Dunwoody and its day schools are mostly in Sandy Springs and Dunwoody, Jewish families who can't afford to live in those ritzy suburbs are more likely to live in nearby northern outer suburbs than in cheaper, newly gentrifying intown neighborhoods such as East Atlanta.

Sometimes the "predict and provide" model fails on its own terms: Attempts to predict the Jewish future often just plain don't work. For example, in 1964 Look Magazine ran a cover story on "The Vanishing American Jew." Today, American Jews still exist and Look Magazine has vanished.

Even within Judaism, all manner of predictions have gone into the ash heap of history. For example, the 19th-century architect of American Reform Judaism, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, called his prayer book Minhag America (in English, "custom of America"); evidently, he believed that Reform Judaism would become the "custom of America." Instead, Orthodox Judaism (as well as in-between alternatives to both Orthodoxy and Reform) thrived in the 20th century.

Similarly, attempts to predict where Atlanta's Jews will live have occasionally misfired. A decade ago, the conventional wisdom was that intown Atlanta is dying. By the end of the 20th century, it was predicted [a casual reader of the Jewish press might have believed that], Atlanta would look like Cleveland, which has only one synagogue within the city limits and where synagogues in the inner suburbs are dying as the population moves further out into the exurban wilderness.

But instead, the old-line intown shuls and the middle-aged inner-suburban shuls have been joined by newcomers: the Virginia Highlands/Morningside area boasts two older

synagogues, [and also] Chabad Intown and Shomrei Shamayim. Similarly, Toco Hills Beth Jacob has been joined by Young Israel and two small Sephardic synagogues, while two small Reconstructionist congregations are taking root a few miles away.

Are older intown synagogues losing members? Perhaps but if so, the lost members are moving not just to suburbia but also to smaller, more intimate intown congregations.

In other words, any attempt by our community's leaders to predict and provide for future Jewish migration is a self-fulfilling prophecy when it succeeds and just plain wasteful when it fails. Either way, what's the point?

## IF I WERE A RICH MAN: THE INTOWN SOLUTION (5-3-02)

Atlanta's Jewish billionaires Arthur Blank and Bernie Marcus have made headlines by spending money on a football team [,]and an aquarium and Atlanta's Jews have responded by inflicting their unsolicited opinions on each other.

Some argue that Jewish tycoons should spend less money on secular toys and more money on Jewish causes, while others point out that the same tycoons have already done plenty for their coreligionists.

These arguments caused me to ask myself: What would I do if I was very rich rich enough not just to write checks to other people's good causes, but to start my own good cause? (It goes without saying, of course, that any billionaires reading this article should do whatever I would do).

My unique good cause would combine my religious interests with my major secular interest the promotion of good urbanism, by which I mean places that cater to people as well as cars.

I believe that tomorrow's children should not grow up as prisoners of mommy's car, but instead should have the opportunity to live in places where they can walk, bike or take the bus to synagogues, stores, community centers and the rest of the world outside their backyards. That means neighborhoods where sidewalk-lined residential streets are within walking distance of civic amenities and where neighborhoods are connected by bus routes. But all too often, families have to choose between Jewish life and neighborhood livability. Most of Atlanta's Jewish day schools and community centers have moved to suburbs where children are condemned to a state of infantile dependence on their parents' cars until they turn 16. Then they suddenly (according to Georgia laws) become mature enough to create havoc on the highways. My ideal charity would end this problem by bringing major community facilities to pedestrian- and transit-friendly communities (most of which are in intown neighborhoods).

The most commonly discussed solution for the Jewish community's failure to adequately serve intown residents is a Jewish community center (JCC) certainly a worthy cause. But were I a community-oriented billionaire, a JCC alone would not be my first choice for two reasons.

First, a family's housing choices are more likely to be based on the desirability of the nearest school than on the proximity of a place to work out or play ball (to name a few of our JCCs' many worthy activities).

Second, I suspect that a Jewish day school education does more for a child's Jewish identity and level of Jewish learning than proximity to a JCC.

So I would spend my money on heavily subsidized Jewish day schools in the sort of places I would like my children (if I had any) to experience in walkable, transit-friendly neighborhoods (such as the Virginia Highlands-Morningside area) or near MARTA stations. A few more Jewish day schools would not only promote Jewish continuity but also make



intown life a viable option for families who have been scared into the suburbs by Atlanta's public schools.

In addition, my schools would be far more successful in attracting students than suburban day schools. Because suburbs such as Alpharetta already have highly reputed, taxpayer-subsidized public schools, only

The most Jewishly committed parents there are willing to forego the primary benefit of suburbia (its "good schools") by spending thousands of dollars on private Jewish schools. By contrast, the low prestige of Atlanta's public schools means that intown parents are a captive audience: an intown Jewish school might attract the majority of Jewish city children instead of a tiny share of suburban children.

Some philanthropists have apparently followed my advice by giving Torah Day School enough money to move to the heart of Toco Hills thus giving Atlanta's Orthodox parents an intown alternative. Now all we need is a zillionaire who would do the same for the rest of Atlanta's Jewish families.

## TORAH, TRADITION AND THE NORTHERN ARC PROPOSAL (2-21-02)

Gov. Barnes wants to spend \$2.4 billion in taxpayers money to build the Northern Arc, a highway that would span Cherokee County, Forsyth County and other areas far from the Perimeter.

Why could such a dry, technical issue have to do with Jewish values? Plenty.

For more than 3,000 years, Jewish tradition has condemned those who sought to impoverish the needy and disabled. Leviticus 19:14 states: "You shall not curse the deaf, and you shall not put a stumbling block before the blind" words that, read literally, condemn mistreatment of the disabled.

In the very next verse, the Torah urges government officials not to favor the rich over the poor, asserting: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty" (Leviticus 19:15).

Centuries later, Maimonides instructed us how to help the needy, writing: "The highest degree [of charity] is that of a person who assists a poor Jew . . . by putting him in a position where he can dispense with other peoples aid."

But throughout the 20th century Georgia's transportation policies made the poor and disabled more dependent on charity and welfare. By building highways like I-75, I-85 and I-285, the state has made it convenient for businesses to abandon Atlanta in favor of its suburbs. And because these suburbs often have minimal or nonexistent public transit, nondrivers have no access to the jobs the state enticed into suburbia.

While government has built a 24-hour highway system to serve drivers, the majority of metro Atlanta jobs are not within walking distance of a bus stop. And according to the Atlanta Regional Commission, only 34 percent of the regions jobs were within a one-hour public transit ride for low-income Atlantans in 2000.

Furthermore, contrary to popular myth, there are plenty of transit-dependent Atlantans: In the city of Atlanta (hardly one of America's most transit-friendly places) 28 percent of households and more than a third of African-American households had no car in 1990 according to Census figures.

The Northern Arc will worsen the mismatch between low-income workers and jobs.

Supporters of the road which would link I-75 and I-85 admit that they support the highway because it will encourage businesses to move from Atlanta and older suburbs such as Sandy Springs and Dunwoody to Cherokee and Forsyth Counties.

For example, Cherokee County J.J. Biello states that the highway will "attract industry and

jobs" to the county. (Conversely, the Forsyth County Commission voted 4-1 in favor of a resolution opposing the Arc because members fear the development that Biello welcomes). Cherokee and Forsyth Counties have no public bus service whatsoever. That means the Northern Arc would increase the number of jobs that are unreachable by the carless, who are usually urban, poor or disabled.

So if the state builds the Northern Arc, it will do exactly the opposite of what Jewish tradition recommends. Torah and tradition command us to employ the poor, but the Northern Arc will freeze nondrivers out of the labor market, and thus force onto the welfare rolls those Atlantans too poor to buy cars or too disabled to drive.

Jews should oppose auto-oriented transportation policies for a more selfish reason: More jobs moving to places like Forsyth County means more driving, which means consumption of oil, which means more revenue for Arab oil producers, which means more money going to Israel's enemies in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

To put the matter crudely, a vote for the Northern Arc is a vote for the bankers of Hezbollah and Yasir Arafat. The most common argument for the Northern Arc is that it will relieve traffic congestion. But like criminals trying to hide their misdeeds, the Arc's backers cannot keep their story straight.

On the one hand, Arc proponents claim that it will unclog traffic a claim disproved by the fact that metro Atlanta's most congested streets are in the city and its inner suburbs, far from the proposed route of the Northern Arc.

On the other hand, Arc backers claim that it will bring jobs to outside-the-Perimeter counties. But if employers move to Cherokee and Forsyth Counties, those counties will have more people on the roads which means more cars and more traffic congestion, not less. Thus, the claim that the Northern Arc will reduce congestion is simply rubbish.

So if you believe that work is better than welfare and that the state doesn't need to export inside-the-Perimeter congestion to places like bucolic Forsyth County, you should write Gov. Barnes and the other gubernatorial candidates, your county commissioners and your legislators telling them that Georgia can find better places to spend \$2.4 billion. To learn

more about how to fight the Northern Arc, contact the Sierra Club at (404) 607-1262.

#### SUBURBAN SPRAWL AND JEWISH DISCONTINUITY (4-7-00)

Over the past few decades, metropolitan Atlanta, like the rest of America, has been transformed by "suburban sprawl" -- the movement of middle-class families and jobs from older urban cores to newer, more automobile-dependent suburbs. Between 1970 and 1998, the city of Atlanta's population declined from 495,000 to 403,000, while its suburbs mushroomed.

And over the past several decades, the area's Jewish population has moved outward along with the rest of the population: first from its traditional south Atlanta core to north Atlanta neighborhoods such as Morningside, and more recently to a variety of suburbs.

This migration away from the central city has had a serious negative effect on the city itself, of course, by removing an educationally accomplished and economically vibrant set of residents and potential leaders. The movement was part of a larger [trend of] "white flight" that has been well-documented and analyzed.

Less well-understood is the impact that this migration has had on the Jewish community itself. What is now becoming clear is that the dispersal out of the core city neighborhoods has frayed the bonds of acquaintance and friendship that had made a Jewish community

coherent and strong and thereby contributed to the increasingly severe problems we face with continuity and identity.

The shift in Atlanta is less pronounced than in Rust Belt cities like Cleveland and St. Louis. In each of those cities, only one synagogue remains within the city limits, and even the inner suburbs -- [the ones] closest to the downtown and most walkable -- like Cleveland's Cleveland Heights and St. Louis's University City [--] are losing people to outer suburbs. For example, only 28 percent of Cleveland-area Jewish households now live in the traditionally Jewish inner suburbs of Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights, and University Heights.

In 1996, one Conservative rabbi whose congregation voted to leave Cleveland Heights for an outer suburb described the neighborhood it was abandoning as "dying."

At the same time that the nationwide migration to suburbia was happening, the Jewish community was losing its continuity through intermarriage.

In 1912, less than 3.5 percent of American-born Jews married non-Jews. In 1968 (the heyday of the Jewish inner suburb) Albert Vorspan, director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Commission on Social Action, wrote that "many more Jews are marrying out of the faith than anybody had realized" because between 20 and 30 percent of Jews married non-Jews. Today, 40 percent or more of Jews (depending on whose survey you believe) "marry out."

Are urban decay and Jewish decay linked, or is this correlation a mere coincidence.

Common sense suggests that suburban sprawl and intermarriage do in fact go together.

During the first half of the century, most Jewish children, no matter what their parents' theology, grew up in heavily Jewish urban enclaves where they walked everywhere and were thus in constant contact with their Jewish neighbors. In such an environment, it was relatively easy for young Jews to grow up with, and later to love and marry, their co-religionists.

By contrast, many of today's young Jews, especially in Atlanta, grew up in areas totally dominated by the automobile. I grew up in an area where the nearest regular MARTA bus stop was a mile away. I couldn't safely walk to the bus stop or to a neighbor's house because there were no sidewalks and the neighbors' trees and shrubs went right up to the curb, preventing me from walking on the grass as one can in many sidewalk-less Midwestern suburbs -- or in Toco Hills near Beth Jacob.

Even if a Jewish family's neighbors are disproportionately Jewish -- itself an unlikely event outside chasidic or Orthodox circles where residents walk to synagogue as a matter of religious duty -- most young Jews do not see their neighbors particularly often in unwalkable outer suburbs.

Historically, familiarity was the precursor to romance. Now in our dispersed suburban lives, the ties to Jewish neighbors have been weakened. One result: a rise in intermarriage.

Admittedly, it is possible for Jewish parents -- or their children, after they reach driving age -- to drive outside the neighborhood to socialize with other Jews. But this requires a level of commitment that, in practice, deters all but the least motivated. By contrast, Jews who grow up in a walkable ethnic enclave, such as Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill, need not make such an effort; instead, they will meet other Jews as a matter of course.

There is little statistical evidence one way or the other as to whether suburbanites are more likely to intermarry or abandon Judaism. However, it does seem clear that city dwellers are more likely to identify with Judaism.

The book "Jews on the Move" by Sidney and Alice Goldstein, divided Jews into "core Jews" -- Jews who practice Judaism or at least regard themselves as Jewish -- and the "peripheral population" -- non-Jews of Jewish ancestry. In 1990, 51 percent of the "core Jews" but only 41 percent of the "peripheral population" lived in central cities.

Similarly, city dwellers are more likely to be observant. For example, 15 of Illinois's Orthodox congregations, but only 8 of the state's Reform congregations, are located in central cities . . . [NOTE: I am using ellipses to delete a sentence that turned out to be not quite right; I said there was a similar gap in Atlanta, because I thought a couple of Orthodox shuls were within the city limits which are in fact just a few blocks outside).

This may be so because intown living is more compatible with the mitzvah of walking to a synagogue. By contrast, I have seen Reform synagogues in sidewalk-less areas where it was physically impossible to walk on the street without endangering one's life.

What can we do to break the pattern of linked urban decay and Jewish decay?

As individuals, we can oppose government policies that accelerate suburban sprawl, like the billion-dollar highways that shift development outside the Perimeter or the zoning decisions that encourage ever-lower residential density. We can also support public and private spending that hastens the renewal of walkable city neighborhoods.

As a community, we can also contribute to our continuity by putting more of our dollars inside the city, building a Jewish infrastructure in the city and in walkable suburbs like Decatur that makes it more comfortable for Jews to stay in town.

Now, for example, most of our Jewish day schools are in the suburbs, where they must compete with high-quality public schools that were the primary factor in luring parents to live in the suburbs. With good schools close by and already supported by required taxes, only the richest or most motivated parents are likely to send their children to a Jewish school.

By contrast, a day school or two in the city of Atlanta, like Christian religious schools in most American cities, would benefit from a "captive audience" of Jews who want to stay in the city but will not send their children to Atlanta's public schools with their records of generally inferior academic accomplishment. As the new community high school searches for a permanent home, it should consider how it might help continuity by looking inside the city limits.

It is too late to rebuilt the demolished community center in Midtown or to unbuild the expanded center at Zaban Park. But it is not too late to explore a small satellite JCC facility to serve the continuing recreational needs of the intown community.

Divesting in the city has come at the price of a weaker communal identity. Reinvesting in neighborhoods where our children can truly grow up together could pay a rich dividend of a strengthened Jewish future for them -- and for us.