

SUNRISE SUNSET

A visit to a Nazi concentration camp and a strong family faith has helped one student find a renewed pride in his religion on this new dawn.



BY JOHN LEBAS
THE BATTALION

A couple of years ago, Judaism was just another part of junior computer science major Uri Geva's hectic college life. But after visiting a Nazi concentration camp in Europe this summer, Geva found a new sense of pride in his religion and heritage.

The third generation Holocaust survivor said the visit illuminated the Jewish people's triumph over possible extinction more than four decades ago. "That moment made me so proud to be Jewish," Geva said. This newfound appreciation of his faith, Geva said, has given him courage to enjoy Jewish holidays and customs, which are often overlooked in Texas A&M's predominantly Christian society. Classes and club meetings often conflict with Jewish holidays such as Yom Kippur, he said, presenting Jewish students with a sometimes difficult choice: respect the dictates of their faith or carry on with school commitments.

"Many professors look at [holidays] as just another day," Geva said. "But if I don't respect my own holiday, who will?" Geva said more professors are beginning to understand the importance of Jewish holidays, but campus organizations should try to schedule mandatory meetings around all faiths' holidays. Despite these conflicts, Geva said he finds life in Aggieland to be mostly compatible with Judaism. Geva, who spent 13 years on and off in Israel, now lives with his mother, father and sister. His parents, both teachers at A&M, are instrumental in helping him meld his faith and college life, he said.

"It's fantastic," he said. "My parents are great, and they know how student life is. We've developed such a close relationship." His parents are his "guiding roommates," he said, offering him advice that non-Jewish roommates might not be able to give. Dr. Anat Geva, Uri's mother and a visiting assistant professor of architecture, said she loves sharing a home with her son. "I love to have him, and I love to host his friends," she said. "They can eat here, sleep here, have parties here."

Dr. Nehemia Geva, Uri's father and an assistant professor of political science, said the close relationship he and his wife have with Uri did not start when their son entered college. "It's an open relationship you have with kids from the beginning," he said. Uri Geva said this home life makes Jewish holidays more meaningful.

"There's a feeling of holiday in the house when there is a holiday," he said. "It's very supportive."

On Sunday evening, the beginning of Yom Kippur, the Geva family enjoyed a formal holiday meal, ending with cake and hot tea, Uri said. At 8 p.m., the family went to the Hillel Foundation for prayer on this holiest of Jewish holidays.

Yom Kippur was a day of prayer, reflection and relaxation with the family, Nehemia Geva said.

Anat Geva said Judaism is a family-oriented faith and more than a religion — it is a way of life.

Anat Geva, who received her Ph.D. from A&M, said the traditions of Judaism parallel the Aggie traditions she and her son cherish. Like Aggie traditions, Jewish traditions are the building blocks of the culture and heritage she treasures.

This pride is also found in family members' names, which have biblical origins.

"Uri" was the first architect in the Bible, and means "my light." "He really is my light," Anat Geva said.

"Ronnie," Uri's sister's name, means "my song." "Nehemiah" led the Jews out of the first exile and helped rebuild Jerusalem. Biblical judge Shamgar was the son of "Anat."

Nehemia Geva said most of his students who ask him about Judaism are simply curious about this heritage. He said he wants people to know Judaism is an open way of life.

"It's a way of life that looks positively at life," he said.

Anat Geva said she has run into people, including some at A&M, who have tried to convince her to turn from Judaism. She said she hopes more people learn to respect Judaism as a viable religion and way of life.

Uri Geva said he wishes Christian students would sit down with non-Christians to learn more about their religions. He said this is the best way to overcome ignorance.

"I'd like for them to know what all faiths are about to have a more vast understanding of the human nature," he said.

Jewish holidays combine celebration, solemn prayer

By Aaron Meier
THE BATTALION

This week the Jewish students of Texas A&M practiced traditions that are about 5,000 years old. The Jewish high holiday season, currently underway with the three holidays combined, wraps up this week with a combination of celebration and solemn prayer. Rosh Hashana kicked off the holiday season. This year, the Jewish new year fell on Sept. 14 and arrived with excitement among the Jewish community at A&M. According to the Shir Ami home page, most Jews take the year with more solemnity

Imagine if Congress had to fast for just one day. The suffering of children would be the most important thing on the agenda."

Rabbi Peter Tarlow
Director of the Hillel Foundation

Samuels said on Rosh Hashana, the book temporarily holds the names, but on Yom Kippur, the names become a permanent entry in the book.

According to the Shir Ami home page, Yom Kippur is the most holy day of the Jewish year.

Samuels said on this day, one tradition exists — fasting. Food, water, sex, bathing, cosmetics (including deodorant and makeup), non-essential medications and leather shoes are forbidden. The fasting process starts during sundown on the day before Yom Kippur and lasts until sundown the next day.

There are exceptions to the fasting laws. Children under the age of nine, pregnant women and the elderly do not have to fast during Yom Kippur.

"In the Jewish religion, life is the most important thing above all else," Samuels said. "My mother has thyroid problems, so she only fasted for three hours because it wasn't medically good for her."

Tarlow said the fast is a time to reflect upon his own spirituality and a time to contemplate the state of other people in the world.

He said if everyone fasted, perhaps the world would demonstrate more compassion.

"Imagine if Congress had to fast for just one day," Tarlow said. "The suffering of children would be the most important thing on the agenda."

Jewish students do not have to attend class on Yom Kippur, and Samuels said he will spend most of the day in synagogue.

At sundown on Yom Kippur, the services continue until three stars are seen in the sky, and the "break the fast" begins.

The "break the fast" concludes Yom Kippur with a large celebratory meal.

The final holiday of the high season is called Sukkot, a seven-day harvest festival.

Tarlow said over the years, the most well-known tradition of Sukkot became the building of temporary booths known as a Sukkah. Sukkah, temporary structures with no walls and a minimal roof usually made of tree branches, possess historical value.

Tarlow said the Sukkah were dwellings used by the Israelites during harvest season. He said city dwellers would leave the urban areas and go to the fields, where they would build the Sukkah, and eat and sleep under the shaky roof.

"My grandfather lived in Chicago during the Depression, and he used to work for a door manufacturer," Samuels said. "He built the Sukkah in the backyard and used leftover door parts for the roof."

With Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur over, and Sukkot nearing its end, the Jewish high holiday season draws to a close, awaiting another 5,000 years of traditional celebration.

Highs & Lows

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David House, THE BATTALION

This photograph is part of the display "Jews of Kiev: Renaissance After Baba Yar" on exhibit at the Hillel Foundation at 800 George Bush Drive. The display is sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal and contains pictures of the people of Kiev. Rabbi Peter Tarlow, director of the Hillel Foundation, said community interest has been overwhelming. "Whether if it is for their interest in history or religion, it doesn't matter," he said. "It shows their interest in the world."

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