



Hashanah, and its sobriety, it is also a time for joy. And not only because of the customs we have developed, from apples and honey to new wardrobes. And not only because the kids are back at school. No, also because it is the first holiday of the year, and a reminder that there are more holidays to come—quite a few more, in fact—and because holidays are necessary timemarks (that's like a landmark, and it's not, but ought to be, a word) in our meandering stroll (or furtive hunt) through life. Holidays not as three-day weekends, but as holy days, reference points, days to catch your breath, rekindle your ambition, find ways to start again and more certainly. The pauses that refresh.

This holiday, especially, the Birthday of the World, is an annual rite of passage. Another year, and, whatever our assessment of that year, another chance, a new opportunity. And maybe, just maybe, this year will work right.

So, Shanah Tovah—a good year. And, herewith, a translation of the greetings which appear on our cover, a reproduction of cards from the early part of this century. Reading from the back cover, at top left we have, "On the basis of the charity we give, for all occasions, from small to large, inscribe us, God, in the Book of Life, and never ever erase it"; to its right, "Up, up the eyes, the flowers in hand, two small beautiful birdies, two children together; they go and tremble, they place step after step, near them a good shepherdess, a mother angel with them"; below, still on the back cover, we have, "The sound of the shofar blasts, a new year is coming soon which encourages every weak spirit, and brings you happiness, joy and comfort." On the front cover, the legend on the bottom right card reads, "Yesterday groom and bride, today a young couple! No, it's not a dream, the happiness is real."

Quaint, to be sure, but the sentiments are timeless. As the card at the bottom left of the back cover says, "A gut yor eich alemen." From all of us.

I want to thank those of our readers from Skokie who responded to our invitation to share their thoughts and reactions to the "Skokie affair" with us. The material they sent was interesting, but we couldn't make a section worth publishing out of it.

This issue goes to press shortly before the Camp David meetings, hence the absence of comment on the results of that meeting. I realize that without the *Times*, still on strike as I write, and without MOMENT, with whose schedule Mr. Carter neglected to synchronize before scheduling his meeting, our readers will not know what to make of the events. We'll simply have to cope until October's issue, when the dark shall be made light and the complicated made simple. In the meantime, this issue happily focuses on other aspects of the Jewish agenda. And there are other aspects, well apart from the world of politics and crisis. That's a useful thing to remember, since it is those other aspects—broadly, the substance and quality of Jewish life—that justify our preoccupation with Jewish survival.

A few minutes ago, we had occasion to place a call to Israel. Herewith, the conversation between the Israeli and the American operators:

"Is this really the U.S.?"

"Yes, it is."

"I can't believe it. You sound like you're in Tel Aviv."

"This is Boston."

"Really, I can't believe it. Give my regards to Jimmy Carter. Tell him we want peace. Tell him to make the Russians free our Jews."

Which seems to me as good a thought as can be with which to end, wishing not only each of us well, but the entire world, whose birthday we approach.

Shanah tovah.

## LETTERS

### Cuba

To the Editor:  
Congratulations on the fascinating, magnificently illustrated article "The Jews of Cuba" (July/August 1978).

However, one reference in the article requires comment because it may lead to a somewhat misleading impression: "After all, the overwhelming majority of the Cuban Jews left at the same time that 600,000 Cubans were leaving. There wasn't a holocaust, there weren't pogroms. The community just upped and left."

It wasn't quite like that—the community didn't just up and leave. In the early 1960's HIAS helped rescue most of the 10,000 Cuban Jews who desperately wanted to leave that country. In those days, Castro had originally demonstrated no anti-Semitism or anti-Israel tendencies, but many who reestablished themselves in Cuba, after harrowing escapes from Nazi-dominated Europe, could not accept a communist regime. Most were professionals or small businessmen and had very limited resources. Their material possessions were confiscated by the communist government, not because they were Jews, but because this was the policy of the regime towards all middle-class persons.

I shall not soon forget, as I was then Executive Director of HIAS, meeting a Cuban Jewish refugee family, a middle-aged couple and their teenage daughter, who were at the Miami reception center. The husband described how he and his wife had managed to escape from Europe during the Hitler period, and later establish himself in Cuba where he set up a small business.

The business could not function under Castro, nor were they willing to have their daughter indoctrinated in a communist regime. Their sole possessions were now in three suitcases. He described how the Cuban customs authorities took away many of their possessions, finally including his watch. Up to that point he had maintained a calm stoicism, but as he related the loss of the watch, he burst into tears. It was as if he could face up to a second exile but this final crude indignity was just too much to bear.

Another implication of the article needs to be clarified: that the escape from Cuba to the United States was relatively easy. At the beginning, this was far from the case. Exit permits were not handed out freely; some Cuban Jews, together with other Cubans, desperately resorted to leaving the country in small boats to other Caribbean land. HIAS established offices throughout that area, and sent representatives to Cuba to try to arrange various methods of departure. Since America had broken diplomatic relations with Cuba, it was necessary to call on colleagues from various parts of the world to undertake these delicate missions to Cuba. The frequent midnight telephone calls from Havana to my Scarsdale telephone must well be inscribed in the archives of some Cuban and Washington agencies.

Subsequently, as the flood of refugees of all faiths continued, and unofficial agreement was reached between the Cuban authorities and the United States whereby Pan-American planes were permitted to shuttle between the two countries, bringing over hundreds of thousands of refugees. Long before that exodus terminated, most of the Jews had been able to resettle in the United States with the help of HIAS and the American Jewish communities.

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To the Editor:  
As a Jewish woman who has visited Cuba a few times I do not share your perspective on either the country or the Jewish community there. Yes, it is sad that so few Jewish people are left but its important to emphasize that unlike Russia, the people are free to practice the traditions of their faith. It is also sad that the Jews who appear in your pages are not happy in the socialist country, which I see as a Jewish ideal. The Jews in Cuba have not yet (after 20 years) adjusted to the revolution by learning to adapt their faith and tradition to a less affluent lifestyle.

The comments on the Cuban economy were incorrect, revealing a lack of information of their political history. Cuba is not such a poor country when compared to most Latin American countries (instead of constantly comparing every place to the United States). Prior to the revolution, there was poverty, disease, starvation. This has been eradicated, despite the fact that there were so many hardships. Why is the author surprised that sugar export doesn't solve the problem of rationing and shortages. The U.S.-Cuba embargo is the main reason for the economic problem. If there was trade with the U.S., Cuba would not have to spend so much money importing materials from great distances.

And although you state there are "no unions in Cuba" and the government is the only employer, that is not so. There are workplace organizations in schools, hospitals, farm communities, government, factories, etc. These organizations decide on raises, hours, vacation benefits, retirement and handle all suggestions and complaints. A representative from each place joins in area, city, county and finally government organization for participatory decision-making.

We need to overcome the anti-communist propaganda that we have been taught and view Cuba with open minds. In order to support, to keep in touch with the Jews in Cuba we must understand their country. It is possible to keep a