



Shalom Maker

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Notes from the illustrated fringe...

Think clearly? Think everything is always in focus? Think the world spins in order to make sense? Think again!

Think, therefore, existence is guaranteed? Think that everything will work out in the end? Think the end is karma/dharma come full circle? Think again?

Better to believe in surprise, in mystery and in anything that can happen might happen.

Mystery is the final frontier.

Ah, sweet mystery...



...sweet mystery of life... and the most Profound Mystery... death.



Don't like mystery? It's not for folks who do crossword puzzles, not for problem solvers or for solutionists. Mystery is inexplicable. It defies an answer. It's tougher than returning a Rubik's Cube back to its pristine starting place, infinitely more impossible to line up the color tiles.



Mystery is vastly more powerful than we happen to be even when equipped with a crafty, speedy Cray Computer, with a passel of Crays.

You see, a mystery is not a problem. It's beyond problem. A problem takes a moment or a think tank or a coin toss to solve. Mystery remains mystery.

So sit back, open a good book, a mystery, of course, and listen for the great unknown calling out.

How filled with awe is this place, with excitement and with dangers, filled with

enchantments and uncanny things, with strange phenomena and with infinite possibilities. What would we be, where would we be without the miraculous, the numinous, the mystical – mysteries, all.

Where would we be without love - now there's a mystery for you. Or, without friendship, unsolicited support, an unexpected word of encouragement? Where would we be without trust or loyalty or honesty or compassion?

It's a mystery to me why so many never raise these values or qualities into the realm of the sacred.

It's a mystery!



Nine-Eleven

On Rosh Hashanah it is written,
And on Yom Kippur it is sealed.

How many shall leave this world, and how many shall be born; who shall live and who shall die, who in the fullness of years and who before; who shall perish by fire and who by water, who by sword and who by wild beast; who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague; who by strangling and who by stoning, who shall rest and who shall wander; who shall be serene and who disturbed, who shall be at ease and who afflicted; who shall be impoverished and who enriched, who shall be humbled and who exalted.

BUT REPENTANCE, PRAYER, AND DEEDS OF KINDNESS CAN REMOVE THE SEVERITY OF THE DECREE.

It has been decreed. Of that we can be certain. When we reduce humanity to its ignoble components we know the consequences. When we destroy relationships and deprive an infant of a loving touch we know the results. When we abuse and abandon the weak we can anticipate their reaction. When we demoralize and demonize another we know what happens. When we hate with all our heart and with all our soul

and with all our might we know what to expect. When we deprive another of dignity and of hope and of economic opportunity we know what emerges from their desperation. When we grind the lives of others into the sands of passing time we know that they and those around them will also turn to dust. We know then that civilization is lost. We know that victims will seek out victims. We know that fury will fuel revenge and vengeance and the circle will never be unbroken.

Who shall perish by repressive laws and who by intolerance; who by subjugation and who by torture, who shall perish by ancient custom and who by assassination; who by a war of territorial or economic expansion, who by civil war or tribal war, who by religious war, who by racial war, who by guerilla war and who by surprise attack; who by suicide bomber and who by terrorists making a snuff film, who shall perish by the GPS targeting of missiles and who by a meandering cloud of poisonous fumes; who by explosive and who by radioactive waste and who by burning oxygen and who by a contaminated, diseased powder and who by a sniper's bullet?

It has been decreed. Of that we can be certain. When we kill the spirit and

crush the soul of another we know the consequences. When we isolate people and repress them, denigrate them and relegate them to untouchable social status we know the results. When we subvert the rights of women, children, the elderly, the infirm, gays, strange ethnic types, religious undesirables and people of color and of difference we can anticipate their reaction. When we take away the means to make a living, when we tax the poor, when we deny others food and shelter, education and health care we know what happens. When we build walls and ghettos and Gulags and concentration camps and social barriers and barrios and permanent refugee camps and when the prisons become a growth industry we know what to expect. When we steal the courts and prevent and pervert justice we know what emerges from the desperation of the downtrodden. When we look the other way and refuse to accept that we have become the victims victimizing others then we have lost our way and we are the well-privileged broken ones.

Who shall perish by race riots and by hate crimes and who by indifference and by moral blindness, who will be locked in a hot truck while crossing the border, whom shall we loose by lack of nutrients to the brain and who by the ravages of a mutated virus out of control; who by anger and who by brutality, who by false accusation and who by three strikes and you are out; who in the name of homeland security; who by post partum depression and who

by losing touch with reality, who by the mauling of a dangerous dog and who by the neglect of a child in an unsafe car; who by abandonment and who by persons familiar or by a stranger's hand, who by accident and who by a random drive-by gun shot?

It has been decreed. Of that we are certain.

When super empowered socio-paths replace our usual matinee idols, when the dark side of our being feeds on the hatreds of a thousand years, when the earth on only one side of the border is bleak and barren we know the consequences. When the holy men preach that a martyr's death is better than life, when our leaders say that the nothingness of isolation is patriotic and the international treaties must be abrogated, when the newspapers scream of imaginary indignities we know the results. When a bullet replaces a ballot, when the grenade replaces the pruning hook, when the landmine takes the place of the plowshare we can anticipate the actions and reactions of others. When terrorists stall negotiations, when moderates and those leaning west are killed off, when radicals impose their rule we know what happens. When the past is brighter than the future, when the promises of Literature held sacred become the signal flags of battle, when cartoons breed destruction, when a peaceful settlement leads to the destruction of the innocent, when the songs of peace give way to the

commands of war we know what to expect. When the people of a martyred race are attacked, when synagogues burn and the Jewish Community Center becomes a battleground, when the mob reverts to primitive passions and when prejudice and amoral political agendas skew and slur the truth we know that these desperate days are similar to former days of desperation. When the ignorant and the extremists and the fatally flawed punish the righteous, when the economic unions boycott the blameless, when the enemies of the west draw courage from such prejudicial proceedings we know the attacks will never end.

As it is written so shall it be.

Who shall perish by terrorist provocation and who in a crowded Moscow theater, who in a Shiite Mosque or in a Sunni shrine and who by riding home through the streets of Jerusalem, who while waiting for a cup of coffee on ben Yehuda Street or lined up to dance at a Tel Aviv disco. Who shall perish by a commandeered aircraft, who by jet fuel ablaze and who by leaping to the earth; who by acrid suffocating smoke and who by falling steel beam, who by sharpened blade and who by counter attack; who by flying home and who by flying to work; who by investing capitol and who by trading commodities, who by recording data and who by running errands; who by prepping a kitchen station and who by advising a client, who by calling for

help and who by expressing their love; who by rescuing others and who by being rescued, who by providing medical assistance and who by receiving it; who by living the life of a victim and who by not knowing they were to be a victim?

Dust and debris covers this world. Smoke and a haze of sadness cover the globe. Shock and awe envelopes the earth. A worldwide nuclear winter of grief may yet freeze this warming planet.

Remember how the symbol of America's military power and manhood, the Pentagon, was crippled. Remember that irreplaceable gap that formed in the Manhattan skyline, ghost towers looming in laser light. The fortress America is no long impregnable. The naïveté of America is spoiled. The intelligence of America questioned. The gullibility of America weaponized and used against us.

Of course we remember. We are the people who remember. The sign on the concentration camp wall at Dachau reads: Never Forget.

A while ago New Yorkers buried mementos of the last New York City Fireman who died a tragic and a heroic death two years ago. And there were funerals in Jerusalem as well.

Afterwards, we raised the flag and talked of war and clenched our fists and

vowed retaliation.

For two years New Yorkers removed the dust and the debris from lower Manhattan...until only the empty space remained and was mis-named Ground Zero. And into that abyss our nation poured its wrath against the clerics of Afghanistan and their Kelochnikov allies. Vengeance returned for the brutalities of nine-eleven. Revenge for the innocent blood that was shed. And then we generated fearful myths about weapons of mass destruction and pinned a tall tale on yet another brutal regime in Iraq. And then we unleashed another war. War was the state of our imperial mind. We added to the devastation with the pinpoint targeting of very smart munitions and ordinance.

And all the families that lost a loved one and every child that lost a parent needed counseling and the soldiers and the construction workers needed an understanding and a comforting shoulder and the New York Coroner was left with unimagineable tasks. The trumpets sounded taps. The Kaddish was cried. The dust and debris was everywhere.

And what happened to us? We were shocked. We needed someone to comfort us. We needed to wake up from this impossible dream, this nightmare of near holocaust proportion and see a bright and beautiful day. We needed to get back to loving, to defending our edges from all the

unpleasantries that life always manages to offer up, back to our normal routines. We wanted to set the clocks back to sweeter times, read yesterday's news, watch re-runs, re-boot our computers to previous settings.

But the fact is, my friends that every one of us living so comfortably in America had to learn the relative value of the words safe and secure. Denying the events of five Septembers ago was useless. We watched those towers fall hundreds of times. And so the nine-eleven syndrome set in and took hold. And we were depressed and for good reason. We had to deal with our anger and with our frustrations and with our fears. After the shock came the denial but the images before our eyes were too real and the stories were too compulsive and the three thousand who perished then and the tens of thousands who died later in Afghanistan and in Africa and Bali and Chechnya and India and Iraq and Israel and Pakistan and Palestine and the Philippines and Russia were all too heart-energy consuming.

And so we were angry at God, at each other, at the Rabbi, minister, priest and Imam, at the newspapers, at our government, at Israel, at bin Laden and the Princes of the House of Saud, at Arafat and at Saddam Hussein, at the loss of our financial reserves and at that as yet unknown bio-technician who had access to Anthrax spores. We were angry because we were forced to accept a new reality, a new world of violence

close to home and a new resolve to be vigilant. We had to acknowledge that we were not prepared and that we as individuals, as families, as a Jewish community, as citizens of this land are still unprepared. And that is the nature of terror and the debilitating effects of nine-eleven and of every act of shock and awe.

All that dust and debris is now in a New York State landfill. The search for body parts has officially ended. It's back to basics, time for road maps to peace in the Middle East, time to rebuild Iraq. It is back to mending, to healing, to lifting those felled by loss and to honor those who sleep in the dust and in the debris.

Remember the prayer, my friends.

BUT REPENTANCE, PRAYER, AND DEEDS OF KINDNESS CAN REMOVE THE SEVERITY OF THE DECREE.

The authors of the prayer are telling us that no one may ever stand in the way of the unfolding of history. That choosing life is a choice that brings all things and that all things are possible and we are all in mortal danger. The authors of our Prayer Book believed whole-heartedly that repentance, prayer and deeds of kindness do indeed remove the severity of the Lord's decree. They did not say that the decree would be changed. They said that personal faith, individual spirituality, communal interconnectivity softens

tragedy. Thus, we may pass through even the most difficult of moments in a state of painful acceptance. Our paths always lead home... always to the Sacred and always to the next event horizon, to the next kindling of the Ner Tamid.

The authors of the prayer also said that the Book reveals who shall live to love, who will live to create, who will live to honor another and to be honored, who will contribute, who will model the ethical and the moral life, who will gain in wisdom and in understanding, who will teach valuable lessons, who will raise the standards of justice and of compassion and who will guide the next generation to a Torah inspired heart and soul.

Our names are inscribed on those illuminated pages of the Book of Life/Not Life because we, the Jews, stand for something. We are the partners of the Infinite, Eternal All. And so, the All needs us to complete the work of creation, the good work, the blessed work. Who else is as committed as we are to this fundamental tenet of faith: to do the deeds of loving-kindness and by so doing, to repair the world? Our names are written in the Book, written for the good we will do, for the love we will give, for the simchas we will experience and for the sorrow we will feel remembering the devastation of the nine-eleven and the searing sting of every homicidal Hamas or Hezbolah attack, every British bus

blown up and every Spanish train
destroyed and every evil deed in Darfur.

Pages from A Visual Prayer Book

San Francisco, California
September 2006



Blessed the hand that flows the eye.
Blessed the darter's toss and the
archer's release. Blessed the one who
hits the mark. And blessed the one who
misses. Bless the champ for there is
only glory. But, bless the one who is
wide of the mark, for a whole world is
there, waiting to be discovered.

Blessed the corrections to form and
mechanics. Blessed the practice that
makes almost perfect. Blessed the
concentration required to take the lead.
Blessed the opportunity to make
amends, to make it right, to be better, to
change a small circle in the center of the
world.

San Francisco, California
June 2006



Blessed is the wait...for the dawn and the day, for the evening and its comforts of home, for that blessed event, for that significant milestone, for that dreaded phone call. Blessed is the watching... for a child's personality to self differentiate, for that slow-mo feature film to play out in the mirror...for the seeds sown to bear fruit.

Blessed is the wanting...to see all safely home, to feel the power of love returned, to not be a burden. Blessed is the wishing...for a peaceful countenance, for a sense of purpose, for a little acknowledgment.

Blessed is the wrestling... with the pace of time, with the uselessness of hostility, with all the inner commands that precipitate outer events.

Blessed is the waiting...for the umbrella to unfold, rain or shine.

On the Bookshelf

Many of you have asked me for book titles of Jewish interest. Some want information that advances your adult concepts of Judaism, ideas and events that will replace Sunday school lessons partially learned long ago. Others want to use the material while engaged in the process of Conversion or to supplement what was learned during your initial course of Jewish studies.

Your local Judaica shop is your first stop to find or to order these titles; local independent bookstores, the chain stores and the on-line book dealers are the next best sources.

I recommend the following titles:

- [Jesus and Yahweh, the Divine Names](#) by Harold Bloom, Riverhead Books/Penguin

Bloom makes a distinction between an historical Jesus

and a faith based Christ. He believes that Jesus searched for his God, the God of the Jews, Yahweh. He also reveals his discomfort with an absent Yahweh.

- [Unsettled, An Anthropology of the Jews](#) by Melvin Kronner, Viking Compass/Penguin

I liked this study of Jewish survivability throughout the ages. Kronner discusses the adaptability of the Jews and the evolution of Jewish ideas in times of relative peace and in times of extreme coercion.

- [The Origins of the Final Solution](#) by Christopher Browning, The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942, Nebraska press/Yad Vashem

This is a well-documented manuscript on a most

difficult subject. With archives opening throughout Europe, especially in Germany and in Russia, books like this take on an eerie quality. The Holocaust happened due to Nazi policy, lack of policy and under its own power.

- [The Pity of It All, A History of Jews in Germany, 1743 – 1933](#) by Amos Elon, Metropolitan Books

This is another tragic tale of the Jews in Germany from the time of Moses Mendelssohn to the night the Synagogues were burned, Kristal Night. The story is indeed tragic because it tells of the urgency of Jews to be accepted, of their lack of acceptance and of the dire consequences.

- [What Went Wrong, Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response](#) by Bernard Lewis, Oxford Press

It's difficult for peoples living side by side, one people inventing silicon

computer chips and the other 700 years behind to understand each other, to communicate, to come to terms and to make peace.

- [Jews And the American Soul, Human Nature in the 20th Century](#) by Andrew R. Heinze, Princeton University Press

The book starts slowly but does build as the Professor at San Francisco State begins to write about the contributions to popular psychology made by Dr. Joyce Brothers, Gertrude Berg (Yu Hu, Mrs. Goldberg), Dr. Laura and Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman. The book traces the influence of Freudian theory in the practice of the Jewish Psychoanalysts in America. This book is not for Youngians.

The Gallery



The Gallery



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version of Shalom Maker, please contact me:
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