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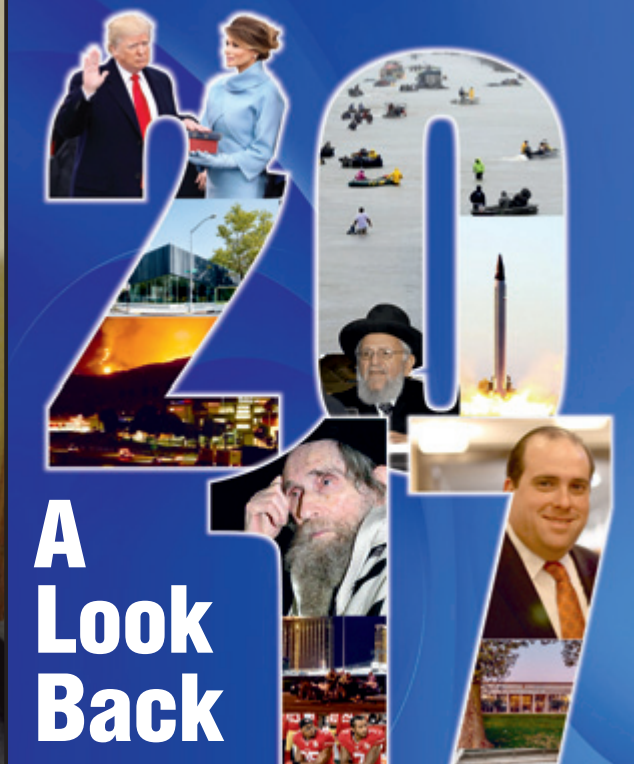
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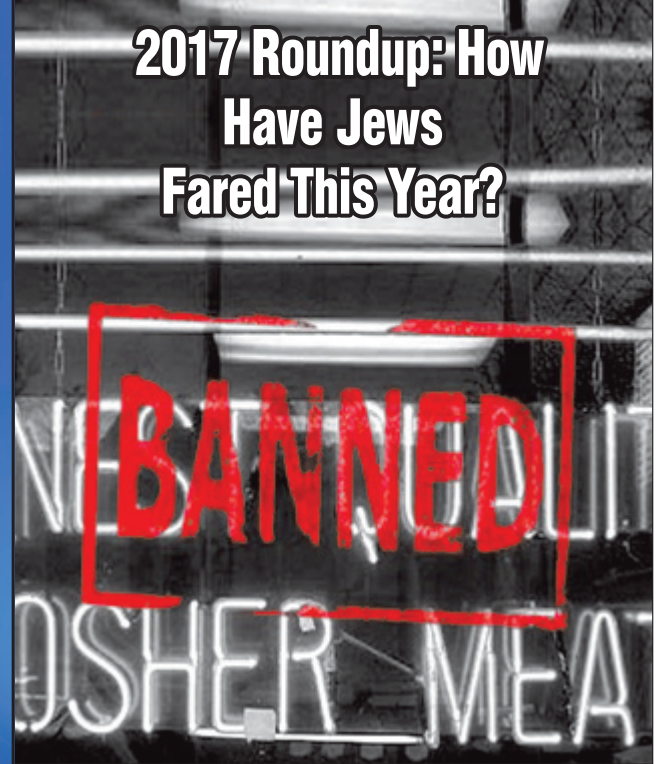
Locals React To Rubashkin's Release

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A Look Back

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2017 Roundup: How Have Jews Fared This Year?

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This Is Loit

What Rav Shteinman Taught Us

By Simcha Loiterman

Imagine two men walking in the vast countryside together. As they stroll, taking in the picturesque scenery surrounding them, they see trees

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Rabbi's Musings

True Superheroes

By Rabbi Dani Staum

As I was preparing the wicks and oil for the menorah during one of the mornings of Chanukah, our four-year-old son, Dovid, commented that he would like to light with oil, too. I replied that when he becomes an

CONTINUED ON P. 11

From Our Rabbinic Consultant

Jonathan Rubashkin

By Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld

Some time in the middle of Chanukah, I received a phone call from a good friend of mine, a rabbi who is very well connected politically, especially with Republicans. He also likes to kibbitz with me. "Hey,"

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Dating Today

Love At First Sight

By Goldy Krantz

I grew up watching Disney movies and how the characters fell in love with each other at first sight. Ariel fell in love with Prince Eric when she watched him playing the flute on the ship during a celebra-

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Hooked On Healing

Holding On, Hoping, And Having Faith

By Caroline Schumsky

As cynical as you may find yourself one day, we humans tend to seek comfort and companionship in each other. In spite of all our losses or

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Message From Our Rabbinic Consultant

R' Yoel Schonfeld

Opinion

Jonathan Rubashkin

CONTINUED FROM P. 1

he said. "Sorry I missed you at the White House Chanukah party." Naturally I had to play along with him, so I asked him if he accomplished anything by being there.

"What would you have liked me to accomplish?" he responded. To which I said "How about getting Rubashkin freed?" He was a bit stunned for a moment. "Amazing that you ask that!"

He went on to tell me that just the week before, he was asked by White House officials to get Senator Rand Paul to sign on to a petition to free Rubashkin. If they got enough United States senators and representatives to sign on, there's a good chance the White House would work on getting his sentence commuted. He told me not to tell anyone at the time, but there's a good chance it would happen. I wasn't sure whether to believe him or not. Then, two days later, the news broke that President Trump indeed did commute Rubashkin's sentence, though understandably not vacating the charges against him.

The reaction to this commutation varied from one end to the other. People in Crown Heights, Boro Park, Monsey, and Lakewood were seen dancing in the streets. Non-Orthodox were uninterested. People like Open Orthodox Shmuly Yanklowitz took to *Newsweek* (yes, the secular leftist media) to trash the decision and demonize *sh'chitah* the way it is practiced today. And some mainstream Orthodox rabbinic and lay

organizations were caught in a dilemma. They were personally happy for Rubashkin, a Lubavitch *chasid*, but were afraid of the message of condoning his financial misdeeds if they send a public congratulatory message.

I think we need to be clear on what happened. Rubashkin did commit some type of bank fraud. I am not an expert in the matter, but from what I understand, the crime he committed deserved a sentence of about three years. Not 27. Those guilty of the Enron scandal, for example, which robbed

What is heartening about the frum reaction, as it was disturbing, was that Jews who had no connection to Rubashkin or Lubavitch felt as though it was their own father who was freed

untold hundreds of investors of their pensions, were given far shorter sentences. As for the charges of immigration abuse: First of all, those charges were dropped by the FBI, so they were not factored into the sentence. Secondly, as to whether Rubashkin actually abused his immigrant workers remains unclear. I recall seeing interviews with the workers who were crying over Rubashkin's fate as he was so kind to them. I really don't know the truth with that.

We also know that Judge Linda Reade engineered the immigration raid and then had the gall to preside over the financial case. No conflict of interest, of course.

I suggest that you Google "Dershowitz-Rubashkin" and you will come across an interview with Alan Dershowitz, not exactly a chasidic Jew, who speaks in defense of Rubashkin's release in very strong terms. He was not the lawyer in this case. Nat Lewin was. He only came to know about the case following the sentencing.

What is heartening about the *frum* reaction, as it was disturbing, was that Jews who had no connection to Rubashkin or Lubavitch (like me) felt as though it was their own father who was freed. In fact,

board. They made him into a hero figure. He is not. He did commit thievery, which led to a *chilul Hashem*. There were scenes of people lining up to shake his hand as though he was a rock star in their world. I even saw a poster calling for people to get a chance to meet this *tzadik*. How wrong! Now, it's possible he was a model prisoner and he exhibited great *emunah* that he would be freed one day. But I'm sorry; he is no Yosef HaTzadik who was imprisoned for no reason other than being framed.

But to those who are actually bitter that he was freed by our very not anti-Semitic President Trump, let's make a comparison to another criminal who shared a similar fate under our justice system – namely, Jonathan Pollard.

Rubashkin

Did he commit a crime? Yes

Is he a hero/*tzadik*? No

Did he get railroaded by the justice system? Absolutely!

Should we be happy for him and his family that he is out? Absolutely!

Should we be grateful to President Trump for the commutation? Absolutely!

Should we celebrate his release from prison? In a private manner only.

Is it wrong to make him into a hero figure?

CONTINUED ON P. 19

The problem is that many went over-

Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld is the Rabbi of the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, former President of the Vaad Harabonim of Queens, and the Rabbinic Consultant for the Queens Jewish Link.

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Locals React To Rubashkin's Release

By Sergey Kadinsky

The massive outpouring of euphoria on the streets of Borough Park and Crown Heights was not planned. It was spontaneous, the result of President Donald Trump's commutation of the sentence meted out to meat executive Sholom Rubashkin, a cause célèbre among Orthodox Jews who argued for his release in a movement that attracted a wide array of legal and political luminaries.

"The President's review of Mr. Rubashkin's case and commutation decision were based on expressions of support from Members of Congress and a broad cross-section of the legal community," read a statement issued by the White House. "A bipartisan group of more than 100 former high-ranking and distinguished Department of Justice officials, prosecutors, judges, and legal scholars have expressed concerns about the evidentiary proceedings in Mr. Rubashkin's case and the severity of his sentence."

The White House also named more than 30 members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, from both parties, who wrote letters in support of Rubashkin, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and high-ranking Republican Senator Orrin Hatch. Among the former attorneys general writing on Rubashkin's behalf, the spectrum ranged from Republican John Ashcroft to far-left firebrand Ramsey Clark.

Within hours of his release from prison, Rubashkin and his wife took a bus to his parents in Borough Park, where the crowds danced in joy, comprised of Jews from all walks of life and various chasidic courts. "It was one of the greatest *simchah* experiences I've ever witnessed," said Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer, who rushed to Crown Heights from his home in Kew Gardens Hills to join in the celebration. "No one was claiming that he didn't do things that are wrong."

At the same time, the image of Orthodox Jews dancing in honor of a man convicted of more than 80 counts of financial fraud can be misinterpreted as glorifying a criminal. "I'm seeing a lot of feedback on my friends' feeds, a lot of it very negative about him. I get it. He did wrong and we, being the Jews that we are, cannot accept that," wrote Rabbi Eli Blokh on his Facebook page. "Here's

my reason why I'm happy for his release: It's a tribal thing. You stand up for one of your own, and unless something really heinous is involved (murder, abuse...you get the picture)." Rabbi Blokh added that, in contrast to Rubashkin, executives who have committed far worse white-collar crimes never spent a day in prison, subjected to the smallest of penalties, if any at all.

Rabbi Blokh runs Chabad of Rego Park, and Rabbi Wertheimer serves as a *shaliach* on the campus of Queens College. In the aftermath of Rubashkin's release, they've heard cheers for Rubashkin's release, but also critique of the public celebrations. "I was speaking to a left-wing Queens College alum; he thought about it rationally," said Rabbi Wertheimer. "He is happy that

There must be a communal recognition that the release of Rubashkin should inspire action on some front

Rubashkin is out, but there is a larger issue."

On this note, there must be a communal recognition that the release of Rubashkin should inspire action on some front. Perhaps recognizing that, as visibly Jewish individuals are scrutinized in more detail, ignorance of the law is not an excuse. Considering the punishment meted out to Rubashkin, how many other individuals are serving disproportionate sentences but lack the political clout to have their stories heard? Conservative Rabbi Morris Allen, who was active in having Agriprocessors investigated, made that point in his *Forward* column, using the opportunity to discuss immigration, child labor, and working conditions.

At the same time, Rabbi Blokh's point about the "tribal thing" is potent, as we live in a time when Orthodox Jews have never had a stronger voice in Washington. In his Shabbos morning *drashah*, Rabbi Herschel Welcher credited the commutation to attorney Alan Dershowitz, a Trump supporter and staunch defender of Jewish and pro-Israel causes.

Looking at the progressive Jewish response to Rubashkin, it is a cry of resentment and envy, having lost its access to the president. "The commutation of his sen-



Defense attorney Montgomery Brown, right, and Sholom Rubashkin talk during Rubashkin's trial

tence is a cynical move meant to kiss up to the Jewish community (a small part of it) and to reinforce that this administration is anti-immigrant, anti-worker," tweeted Jill Jacobs, a Conservative rabbi who runs the social justice group T'ruah. "And there are thousands of people in prison for far less serious crimes (or even violations that shouldn't be crimes) who deserve to have

matter of justice rather than politics.

Reading such tweets and op-eds reminds me why so many Orthodox Jews danced with Rubashkin on the last day of Chanukah. In their view, Rubashkin was one of them, subject to the same invective from liberal activists for their persistent observance, support for Israel, and President Donald Trump. Rubashkin's continued observance while incarcerated also inspires Orthodox Jews, a lesson of faith under adversity.

It was not a surprise then to see Trump banners being waved alongside "Moshiach" flags in Crown Heights, and Orthodox Jews holding "Thank You Trump" signs along Southern Boulevard in Palm Beach as the president's motorcade drove by on its way to Mar-a-Lago. These were displays of unity comprised of many streams within Orthodoxy. This was the inspiring *achdus* that Rabbi Elan Segelman spoke about in his Shabbos morning *drashah* at Kehilas Torah Temimah. "One can't help but feel inspired," said Rabbi Segelman. "This is what happens when we work together."

Jonathan Rubashkin

CONTINUED FROM P. 9

ure? Absolutely.

Does it reflect well that so many Orthodox Jews feel a personal joy for his release? Yes!

Pollard

Was he a spy? Yes

Did he commit a crime? Yes

Was he a hero/tzadik? I don't know: Was it only out of a love for Israel? Was money a factor?

Did he get railroaded by the justice system? Absolutely!

Should we be happy for him and family that he is out? Absolutely!

Should we have *hakaras ha'tov* for whoever was involved in his freedom? Absolutely!

Should we celebrate his freedom? Yes, but in a modest form only. Don't forget he did expose the Jewish people to the old canard of dual loyalty.

I think it's fair to say that if we are happy about Pollard we should be equally happy for Rubashkin. Both did something wrong. Both deserved punishment. Both received many, many more years than they deserved. Was being Jewish a factor in their mistreatment? In my opinion, yes.

No doubt that financial integrity has to be seriously addressed. Based on some of my previous articles in this paper, there is a major Torah education organization that is taking major steps in that direction. But injustice to Jews, chasidic and non-chasidic alike, must also be addressed.



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