



Reading Between the Lines of Today's Media and Commentary

YOU DO THE MATH The last time you read an essay on “What I Did on My Vacation” was probably sometime back in grade school. But I’m going to share a few snapshots from our family’s just-concluded excursion anyway, because I, for one, learned a thing or two that might interest some of you as well.

As our family made vacation plans, my son-in-law, son, and I firmly resolved that we would do everything we could to ensure thrice daily davening with a minyan. With this in mind, we rented a house in the Lake George region of upstate New York, where our research found that Chabad of Saratoga sponsored a tent in which reliably regular minyanim are held for the benefit of summertime vacationers. Our commitment not to miss *tefillah b'tzibur* was going to be more difficult than it might seem, considering we were to begin the four-and-a-half-hour trips both up and back in mid-afternoon.

And so, on Sunday afternoon, shortly after Minchah, we set out northward, timing things to have dinner, followed by Maariv, in Monsey, which is known to have more than a couple minyanim. From there we proceeded two hours further north to Albany, where we spent the night at a hotel that our research told us was just a few minutes’ drive from the shul of the warm and welcoming Rabbi Moshe Bomzer.

Arriving finally in the Lake George area, the next few days passed uneventfully, as we, along with scores of other *frum* vacationers, davened at Chabad’s Lake George Minyan in the Tent, featuring several different minyanim, along with coffee and *mezonos*, a true *chesed* of both *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*. For a change of pace, we davened Minchah and Maariv one day on an island in the middle of vast Lake George, having been graciously invited, along with others, by Dr. and Mrs. Yossie Gelbfish to their campsite for the *tefillos* and a barbecue, motorboat ferry service included.

It felt very good to have kept our priorities straight by designing our time away around a non-negotiable commitment to what’s really important. And, thinking about it, I traced some of that good feeling to the *mesirus nefesh* quotient involved, the fact that amid the relaxed — potentially a bit *too* relaxed — atmosphere of vacation time, we’d found a way to express our commitment to Hashem’s mitzvos by embracing the supposed inconvenience of an important mitzvah, rather than trying to escape it, or even to silently rue it.

But the story doesn’t end there. After a wonderful few days of enjoyable activities on and around gorgeous Lake George, the time to head for home was approaching and we’d been



PHOTO: EPHRAIM RUBIN

wondering how we’d manage to daven Minchah *b'tzibur* on our return trip. Our soon-to-be *mesivta bochur*, Yehoshua, was particularly concerned, suggesting several times that we ask around at the minyan tent if there was any interest in forming an early Thursday afternoon Minchah. Ultimately, we decided to once more schedule our long trip back around Minchah by stopping off again in Monsey before heading home.

But it was not to be, because it would not need to be. My daughter, son-in-law, and family had left earlier, and the rest of us started out, planning to stop for one more activity before proceeding onto the Thruway due south toward Monsey. But as we passed within a few hundred yards of the minyan site, I suggested we turn off the road and stop by the tent to snap a picture for our vacation photo album in-the-making. My wife thought of disabusing me of the idea, but decided not to; my daughter, who was driving, thought to suggest that we pass by instead on the way back from the activity, but she didn’t do so either.

And so it was that as we pulled up to the Lake George minyan site, we saw, to our utter surprise, a group of six *yeshivah bochurim* preparing a late barbecue lunch under the tent as a light rain descended all about. Peekskill *talmidim* all, they’d decided to make a brief stopover at Lake George on their way back from vacationing in New Hampshire. And as we took in the scene, two more members of their group emerged from a car to complete their contingent of eight — a number kabbalistically symbolic of the supernatural. Well, you can, as they say, “do the math” of what eight plus two equals ...

“Open for Me an opening as narrow as a needle’s eye, and I’ll

open for you an opening as wide as a banquet hall’s doors.” All of life works this way: we do the initial, meager bit we’re capable of, with the exertion and *mesirus*, the giving of our selves, that Chazal had in mind when they said “all beginnings are difficult,” and HaKadosh Baruch Hu says, “I’ve

seen in you what I’m always longing for. You, my child, have shown your love and commitment, and from here on in I’ll take over.”

Even if it means bringing eight fellows from New Hampshire to complete our minyan ...

SAME TRADITION AT THE TIMES A few months back, I noted here that Bill Keller would soon be stepping down as executive editor of the *New York Times*, to be replaced by Jill Abramson, who, in an unguarded moment, remarked that in her “house growing up, the *Times* substituted for religion. If the *Times* said it, it was the absolute truth.” But her religious fervor is nothing new for America’s leading newspaper; indeed, she had a worthy predecessor in that regard.

Mr. Keller, after all, has displayed various attributes that, if liberal dogma is to be consulted, are clearly characteristic of a religious fanatic. An article Keller penned last week for the *Times Magazine* puts several of these tendencies on display. In the piece, he argues that “when it comes to the religious beliefs of our would-be presidents, we are a little too squeamish about probing too aggressively,” and that this year’s “Republican primary season offers us an important opportunity to confront our scruples about the privacy of faith in public life — and to get over them,” by asking them bluntly about the minutiae of religious beliefs.

So, let’s count the ways in which he’s getting religious on us. In arguing for choosing candidates based on their religious beliefs, he’s counseling contravention of Article 6, Clause 3 of the Constitution, which mandates that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” And isn’t it just like those religious types to trample all over the Constitution in pursuit of their cherished beliefs?

Next, after rather unsubtly smearing all of the viable candidates for their membership in religions that are “suspect to many Americans,” “that many... think is just weird,” and that “raise concerns about their respect for ... the separation of fact and fiction,” Keller writes:

And I care a lot if a candidate is going to be a Trojan horse for a sect that believes it has divine instructions on how we should be governed.

In other words, Keller makes Glenn Beck seem like a rank amateur in the spinning of conspiracy theories, something we know religious types excel at. To appreciate just how deeply hypocritical this is on Keller’s part, simply substitute in his above sentence the words “Barack Obama” for “a candidate” and imagine how visibly bulging would be the veins on the side of the *Times* editor’s neck at such an assertion.

Then there’s Keller’s curiously selective curiosity in fact-finding and investigative journalism. We all know that one of the defining features of the fervently religious is their simpleminded disinterest in the factual and rational. And now along comes Bill Keller, ablaze with a newfound curiosity about the most intimate details of Republicans’ religious beliefs, when just two and one-half short years ago — and continuing to this day — the publication he captains has shown a complete disinterest in knowing anything at all about Mr. Obama’s longtime pastor and the church he led, or, for that matter, any one of a long list of sinister characters with whom Obama has associated for decades.



Texas Governor Rick Perry: a religious fanatic?

PHOTO: AP

Indeed, Keller actually invokes Jeremiah Wright to argue his case, since if

Candidate Obama was pressed to distance himself from his pastor, who carried racial bitterness to extremes, then he doesn’t see why Perry and Bachmann should be exempt from similar questioning.

Let’s put aside the fact that the problems with Wright, Obama’s self-described “mentor,” extend far, far beyond carrying “racial bitterness to extremes,” into his rabid anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism. Speak straight, Mr. Keller: which media outlets were those that “pressed [Candidate Obama] to distance himself from his pastor,” and whose courage Keller now invokes on behalf of his Republican witch hunt — and which, by contrast, were those that squelched the truth about Mr. Obama’s background and associations?