

The Dynamic Psyche of Erotic Judaica: An Interview with Rebbitzin Gertie Takel

by Airy Daffodil

One of the most astounding revelations in recent weeks has been the discovery that the Lebanon hostages, some held in captivity for several years, have actually been free since 1988 and living as baalei she'ela in the Chelmnicker Yeshiva in the Mea Shearim quarter of Jerusalem. In a special investigative effort, Tikkun has discovered that the yeshiva's Rebbitzin, Gertie Takel, was the person directly responsible for the bold Israeli initiative that freed the men. Daughter of the last Chelmnicker rebbe, grandmother of three, and former owner of Israel's first erotic book store, Eros, Ms. Takel long been a controversial leader in the Israeli Feminist movement. In town recently for the traditional New Year's eve performances of the Grateful Dead, the Rebbitzin was interviewed by Tikkun Sprots editor, Airy Daffodil.

AD: First off, I have to ask you how you got tickets to the entire New Year's series of concerts, whether or not they played "Dark Star" this year, and what you think of the Tikkun plan for peace in the Middle East by moving the Temple Mount to a lake in Arizona?

GT: Oh, the tickets I got through protexia. The Chelmnicker Rebbe, my second husband A.D. Takel, has been a Dead Head from the beginning. He even took guitar lessons from Jorma Kaukonen back in 1966 just because Bob Weir was doing it. Unfortunately, Takel was considerably less successful in his efforts than the Dead—after one concert in Haifa, his band was banned from further appearances by every independent municipality in the Middle East, by seven movements for national liberation (including four Fatah splinters), the United Trotskyite Coalition of Petah Tikvah and the Republic of Azerbaijan. But he's stayed friends with Jerry, and Mickey, and the rest of them—Micky Hart was by us for the Passover Seder last spring, in fact.

AD: As you know, this magazine has always made it a point to stick up for the rights of DeadHeads in Israel, and in fact we have often proposed a plan whereby the Grateful Dead would play a peace benefit in the Old City of Jerusalem on a moving stage which would take them back and forth between the Temple Mount (site of the Al Aqsa Mosque), the Holy Sepulchre Church, and the Western Wall. We also led demonstrations when they refused to visit Israel during the Cairo tour a decade ago.

GT: To be perfectly frank, I think it's a fascinating idea, but to some degree it sounds like the usual American lefty intellectual pap devoid of a solid basis in reality. Everyone in America is busy coming up with venues for the Dead to play, but no one has bothered

to set the stage, so to speak. I'd feel a lot better if the people involved were talking with one another. Once the concept feels right, and Palestinians and Israelis are both excited about the concert, I have no doubt that a suitable plan would evolve. That's why I was so excited when Phil Lesh agreed to record with the local Nazareth women's chorus, *Intifada Beatnikot*, in Tel Aviv. It would have been nice if Chava Alberstein or Shoshana Damari had been allowed to appear on the album, but the important thing is to create a context for working together. Once that happens, it really won't matter what the plan is. Good will would surely enable us to find the proper equipment, and to select an appropriate location that will allow persons from all over the Middle East to attend.

AD: The fact that you rescued the Lebanese hostages was quite a coup, but how did they end up as Ba'alei Shela at the Chelm Yeshiva? They aren't even Jewish!

GT: Well, first off, at the Chelm Yeshiva we don't discriminate because of a person's religion, race, or sexual preference. Second, the rescue was a reaction to that stupid Rambo movie. We went to see it at Cinemateq in Jerusalem a few years ago and when we walked out, Takel was all puffed up at how Stallone resembled him in his younger years. Then he started mooning on and on about how anyone could win a war with that type of ordinance, but back in '48 Israel had had to make do with a few used Koltchikovs and a war surplus Piper Cub. Takel was chief propaganda officer for the Haganah in those days, and takes direct responsibility for some of the seedier actions in the war. Usually he has enough sense to be ashamed, but that stupid movie made him see himself in a new light.

I got him to get us invited to the villa of Sheikh Omani in Lebanon. The sheikh and Takel had been runners up in the 1936 Giza Invitational backgammon tournament, and Omani had been after Takel for forty years for a rematch. While the two of them sat in the living room throwing dice and watching some rebroadcast of the Oakland Raiders on TV, I asked around and found out where the hostages were being hidden. I told the guards that the Sheikh needed them to go out to the local *McKolet* and pick up some fresh supplies of "Nargila" ('Have a Nargila.') and some double-humus *McFefafels*. Then I just hid the hostages in the back of the van, and we had no choice but to take them back to Jerusalem with us. The main thing, though, is that I got them out without shooting anyone. I'm not a bad shot, myself, mind you, but at my age it just doesn't look right to be dragging an Uzi around. Besides, ever since they became a weapon of choice for drug dealers, the Uzi has rather

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