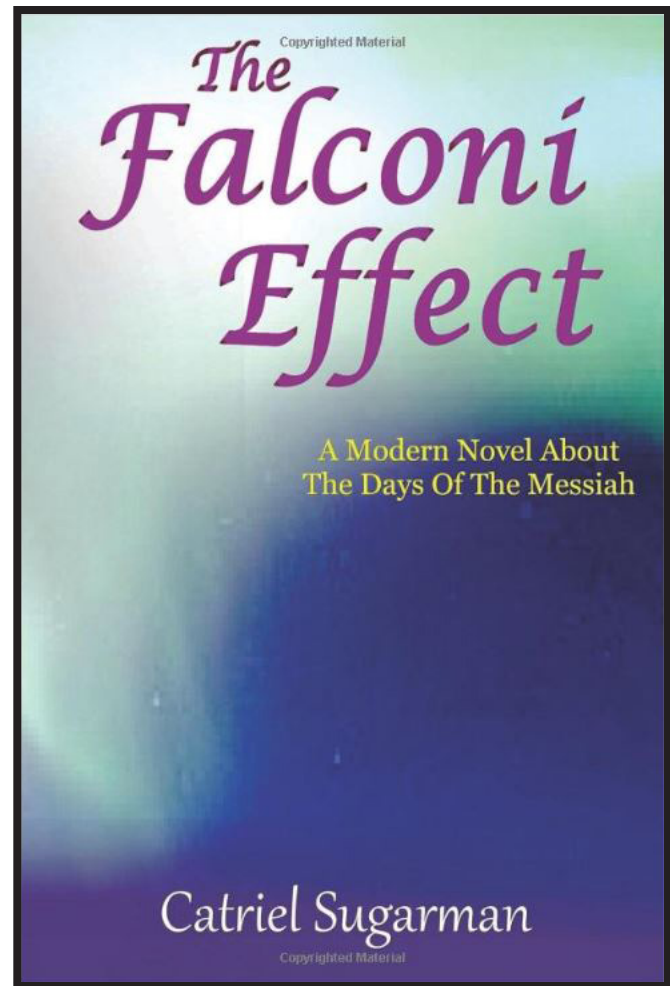


THE FALCONI EFFECT: A MODERN NOVEL ABOUT THE DAYS OF THE MESSIAH

NEW BOOK BY CATRIEL SUGARMAN,
REVIEWED FOR THE N'SHEI CHABAD
NEWSLETTER BY ELLEN APPELBAUM



Here is what I predict will happen when you get to the last page of *The Falconi Effect: A Modern Novel About the Days of Moshiach*. You will sigh—deeply—both from satisfaction and from yearning.

Then you will go back and begin reading again.

This is a novel, but it is so much more. It's an inspiration, and an informal overview of the *halachos* and practical considerations in running a Beis Hamikdash with all the technology at hand today — online reservations for *korbanos*, anyone?

On that backdrop plays out the thrilling

tale of the transformation of all humanity as the *Geulah* begins to take hold. Specifically, we are witness to the inner thoughts of an inner circle: A bitter world leader, a media mogul, and his top staff of (jaded) journalists.

These individuals, guided by Eliyahu Kagan, the *kohen gadol*, begin to tap into and manifest their highest ideals.

As the book opens, the world is in the throes of economic depression and political turmoil: Anarchist Antonio Falconi is at the helm of a worldwide revolution, seeking revenge on the crime bosses who took the life of his father decades earlier.

Meanwhile, in Eretz Yisroel, the Third Beis Hamikdash is in full operation in its rightful place—incense, *korbanos* and all. The mosque is simply gone. (We never find out exactly how this has happened; it doesn't matter. This is not a story of politics or war, or conflict between Islam and Judaism. The Temple is back where it belongs, and this is enough.)

Catriel Sugarman's description of the scope and complexity of operations involved in running the day-to-day activities of the Temple range from making sure there is enough flax to provide linen *bigdei kehunah* for all the *kohanim* during the Yamim Tovim, to ensuring that there are enough animals for *korbanos*, to setting up purification centers for those who wish to enter the Beis Hamikdash, to running the website and Mikdash Broadcasts ("Mikbro" to the trade). It's an enormous operation that makes full use of modern technology.

But then, there's a glitch. Overnight, the flax has spoiled. The cooling system has

failed and so has the double alarm system that would have alerted the crew to danger. It's potentially a major crisis, since so much is at stake: the *avodah* of the Yamim Nora'im, and, by extension, the future of the world. A thorough Internet search reveals that more flax is simply not to be had—except for a batch in Milan, which just happens to be the city where the angry and vengeful Antonio Falconi is based. For now a recluse, he has hidden himself away behind layers and layers of security.

"The Phone Call That Saved Europe" between the *kohen gadol* and Falconi fast-tracks the greatest turnaround in history. Falconi emerges from hiding and conducts a press conference viewed live across the globe. If anyone doubted up to that point that he has had a change of heart, his interchange with the press leaves little doubt:

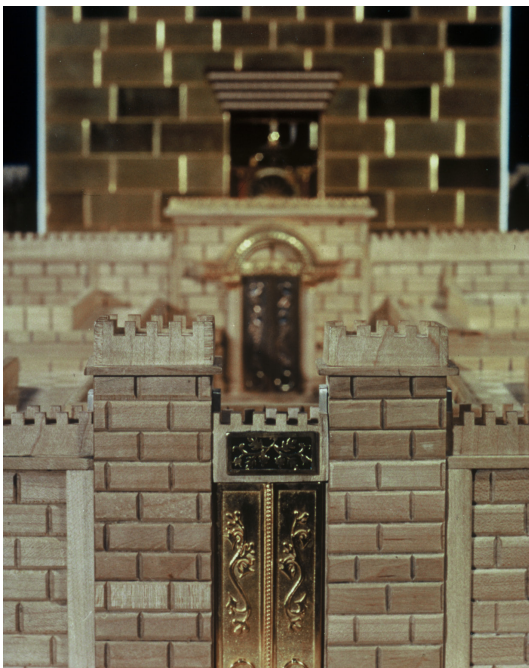
Someone called out, "Professor, what about the flax fiber?"

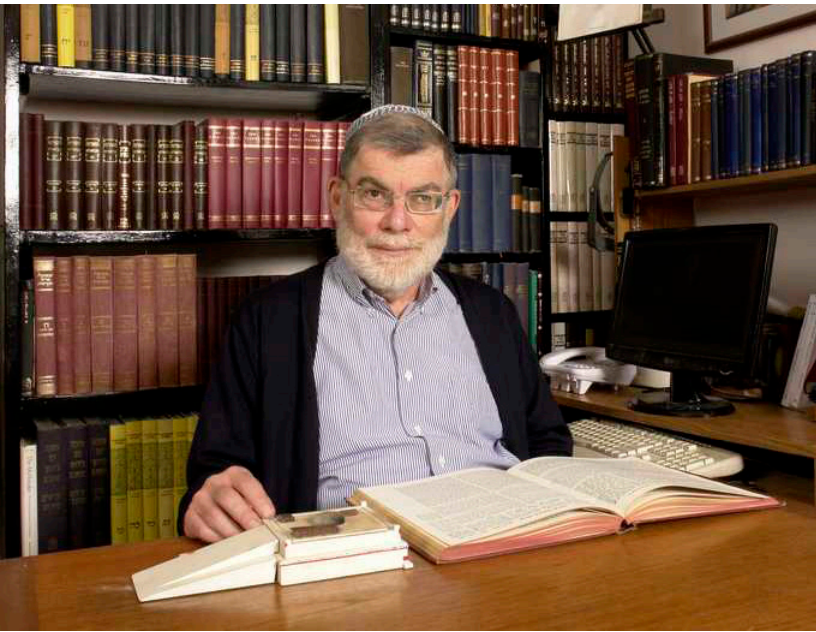
Though he had not mentioned the

Left: The miniature Mikdash that Catriel Sugarman made, from the east looking west. Over the towers abutting the Eastern Gate (*Hasha'ar asher b'mizrach* in the language of the *Mishnah*), looking west, you see *Sha'ar Nicanor* (the Nicanor Gate). In the background is the gold-covered facade of the Bayit.

Bottom right: This is a view of the tables and the *nanasim* (low pillars capped with cedar blocks in which hooks were embedded on three sides) in the *azarah*, north of the *mizbe'ach*. There were hooks on three sides. The *kohanim* would hang the bodies of the sacrificial animals on them, and dismember them. The nearby tables were used as needed. The dismembered parts (the *netachim*) would be washed down and then the *kohanim* would take them to the *mizbe'ach*. To the left of the *nanasim*, you see the domed *beis hamokeid*, the "Chamber of the Hearth," which served as a resting area for the *kohanim*. Those who served the early shift slept there the night before. There was access to underground *mikva'ot*. They also ate there.

Top right: The *ezrat kohanim* and the *ezrat Yisrael* were east of the Bayit, the main Temple building. The *taba'ot* (rings), the *shulchanot* (tables), and the *nanasim* (low pillars capped with cedar blocks in which hooks were embedded on three sides) were north of the (three-leveled) *mizbe'ach*. The domed *beis hamokeid* abutted the northern wall of the *azarah*. In front of the Bayit was the *kiyor* (laver) where 13 *kohanim* were able to wash their hands and feet at the same time.





CATRIEL AT HIS DESK

Catriel Sugarman in his work area. On the table is a *Mishnah* and a model of the *mizbe'ach*.

CATRIEL ON THE GOLAN

Catriel Sugarman sitting on some stones in an ancient synagogue (1,600 years old) in the Golan. The synagogue is constructed of basalt which is almost black. There are beautiful grape carvings on the pillars behind the author, which formed part of the *aron kodesh*.



flax fiber, Falconi took the subject in stride, even though the news of its release had obviously been leaked. He raised his hand for silence.

"I am descended from a very old family. We trace our lineage back to Roman times. It's likely that my forefathers helped destroy the second Temple of Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago. Did you know that in the Temple they offered 70 sacrifices to effect atonement for all the nations of the world? The Jewish rabbis say that if the nations of the world had known what benefit they derived from the Temple, instead of destroying it, they would have built a belt of fortresses around it to protect it. As I have aged, I have come to believe them. If I could not help in building the Temple as atonement for the sins of my fathers, at least I am privileged to help out in other ways..."

The domino effect of Falconi's transformation is rapid, thorough and far-reaching. Characters and events converge in a tale that becomes more

thrilling with each turn of the page.

Catriel Sugarman is a superb craftsman in more than one sense of the word. He is a master storyteller, full of original ideas and sharp insight, which he presents in a fast-paced and engaging way. Readers are swept along as he shares with readers "the Falconi effect," and how this is just as much an inner revolution as an outer one.

Actually, the creation of this book is a story in itself. Catriel Sugarman recounts the process in the book's Preface:

One Tishah B'Av, I was walking from the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem down to the Western Wall Plaza. I paused and looked up. I saw an outlandish eight-sided blue building with a golden dome perched on Har Habayit, the Temple Mount—site of the destroyed First and Second Temples. But instead of being overwhelmed by sadness, I thought of the future Tishah B'Av whose destiny it is to be a time of exultation for Am Yisrael, the people of Israel.

Then at that moment, in my mind's eye, I "saw" the reconstructed Beis Hamikdash, the Temple complex, in its entire splendor, and, at the same time, almost like an epiphany, the plot of The Falconi Effect: A Modern Novel About the Days of the Messiah filled my brain.

For a long time now, Catriel Sugarman has been uniquely prepared to take on the task of evoking every detail of that future time. As he writes:

For many years, I had a studio-workshop in downtown Jerusalem where my staff and I crafted fine Judaica from rare woods. We frequently incorporated elements of silver, gold, and mother-of-pearl.

And then, this self-admitted "Temple buff," who had yearned to build a scale replica of the Second Temple, got his chance. "One of our major customers came through the door and said, 'Catriel, build me the Beis Hamikdash!'"

And that's how the even-more-total-immersion began.

Once we started cutting wood and crafting the hundreds of (gilded) silver and bronze parts (and there was quite a bit of preparation before we reached that comparatively advanced stage), the project took us a year and a half to complete. As month followed month, we saw the Beis Hamikdash gradually take shape in all its detail and majestic beauty. Finally with great joy (and relief), we finished the project. Seeing the Beis Hamikdash laid out before me, I thought, "The ge'ulah sheleima—the Final Redemption—is so close that I can taste it."

That model, considered a masterpiece and now part of a private collection, is the product of hundreds of hours of research and two years of construction.

It is awe-inspiring to contemplate the idea that a customer's commissioning of a replica of the Beis Hamikdash provided an intensive

tutorial for Sugarman. By the time he was ready to put pen to paper to bring *The Falconi Effect* to life, his great familiarity with the minutiae of the day-to-day goings-on at the Beis Hamikdash allowed him to recast a modern story upon an ancient backdrop.

For readers with some degree of familiarity with the Temple, sections of this book are like going on a tour of a place you have long heard about but have never visited. The mind is struck by one recognition after another: "Oh, of course, they *had* to plan for the linen so far in advance!" "Oh, *that's* how everyone found somewhere to sleep!" "Oh, so in the modern world, the *urim v'tumim* allowed the *kohen gadol* to..."

In fact, who among this readership has *not* imagined how the era of the Third Beis Hamikdash might play out in the future? But who among this readership imagined that *olei regel* would reserve and book their *korbanos* online? At this point that's certainly a likely option, and its matter-of-fact presentation is perfectly believable.

One of the reasons I appreciate *The Falconi Effect* is that I believe that to attain one's greatest successes and accomplishments, one should imagine them in the greatest possible detail. Reading Sugarman's descriptions about tasks carried out in the days of the Beis Hamikdash, I can imagine them as clearly as if I am there. I came away from the experience of reading this book changed and uplifted.

My favorite part of the novel concerns the fictional story of George Prince, founder and CEO of Prince Global Media. Because real-life 2017 finds us living in a time when a principal political character is also a billionaire businessman, George Prince's inner debate over "What's it all worth?" does have a special resonance. Even more so because he is headquartered in Manhattan.

There's one major difference between Sugarman's character, George Prince, and a certain U.S. president, however: George Prince was born Greisha Shmiel Pressman, and he has done everything in his power to put light-years between the bullied, beat-up child who

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asked his father, “Why do they hate us so?” and the much-feared, always-obeyed bullying world figure he has evolved into.

Each of the major characters that Catriel Sugarman brings to life in the pages of the book is fleshed out with great craft and insight: Falconi muses on a lullaby that his mother composed and sang for him alone. George Prince physically trembles when he comes face-to-face with what he has become. High-powered international journalist Samantha remembers how, during her childhood in Los Angeles, questions about the family and its history were entirely off-limits.

Catriel is aware of the many layers in this novel:

The book I am placing before you may well be the beginning of a new genre in Jewish literature. We have a plethora of historical novels and many children’s books about the Second Temple. But there are no futuristic novels about life in the era of the Third Temple. As far as I know, no contemporary author has presented a possible scenario of how it might be...

But know that this is a serious book and

many important concepts germane to the age of Moshiach are examined within its pages. It is my hope that you will find this book not only enjoyable, but also stimulating and thought-provoking. And as you continue to read, I pray that you too will come to yearn for the Geulah shleimah.

And, you learn a tremendous amount.

As Rische Deitsch told me about *The Falconi Effect*, “I learned so much about the Beis Hamikdash that I didn’t know, but it never felt like work. I enjoyed every minute of it and had trouble putting it down.”

Susie Rosenbluth, in her review in *The Jewish Voice and Opinion*, wrote, “The book is teeming with information, but, because it is such a good story, the facts—historical, religious, and even architectural—go down easy. This is not a dry textbook. It is a fun read.”

The Redemption will arrive, says a *Midrash (Yalkut Shemoni)*, “in the blink of an eye.” Catriel Sugarman’s statement that the book “arrived” in his consciousness pretty much fully formed, on Tishah B’Av of all days, makes me ask myself, “Is *this* book part of *that* greater plan?” Personally, I believe that it is. And here we are at Pesach, a true time of redemption. What an opportune moment to take in what this book has to offer!

Catriel Sugarman plans to be in the U.S. in November to promote his book, The Falconi Effect. To have him speak for your group or school, please email him at acatriel@013.net.net.



Ellen (Rubin) Appelbaum, who reviewed *The Falconi Effect* for the *N’shei Chabad Newsletter*, has three and a half decades of experience as a writer and editor. Her professional goal is to publish her own non-fiction on a topic of Jewish interest. One of her personal goals is to reside in the Shomron.

EXCERPTS FROM THE FALCONI EFFECT

SAMANTHA'S EYES ARE OPENED ABOUT HERSELF, HER MOTHER...

Samantha stared at the man sitting across from her and slowly nodded, trying to absorb all she had seen and heard since she landed in Israel and this morning in particular. In her mind's eye, she pictured a glorious sun-lit cathedral with magnificent spires soaring to the very heavens. But the dank cavernous interior was filled with thousands of Jews — her ancestors — bound with thick ropes, who, with all their hearts, felt nothing but revulsion and disgust. Lurking in the shadows and barring their path were iron-faced men in cross-embossed armor with drawn swords in their hands, soldiers of the Inquisition.

Suddenly Samantha sat up with a start. Could it be that all the events of the past few days were a wake-up call from God?

She remembered the inexplicable connection she had felt to the dancers on the Ben Yehudah Midrachov. She never felt connected anywhere, and she'd been just about everywhere on the planet. After hearing Bernstein's narrative, there was no doubt in Samantha's mind that she *was of anusim descent*. Bernstein solved the mystery that had troubled her all her life.

Maybe this was the real reason she had come to Jerusalem! The eerie string of "coincidences" that had brought her to Milan and then to Jerusalem were not coincidences at all!

Shaking her head, Samantha wondered why Bernstein's explanation — that her mother's strange customs had their roots in some sort of tradition — had never occurred to her before. Maybe the time for her to understand this had just not come until now.

Eyes filling, Samantha stared across the table at Bernstein. For the first time, she thought of herself as a link in a chain, a chain that went back over 600 years. What 600 years? She was a link in a chain that went back 3,600 years! Like the dancers on Ben Yehudah Street, like Dave Bernstein, like Nimrod Pringsheim, she was Jewish!

Samantha closed her eyes. *My God, what is it about Judaism that inspires such passionate loyalty?*

She owed it to her tenacious *anusim* ancestors and to herself to find out...

PRINGSHEIM TRIES TO GET INTO THE BEIS HAMIKDASH BEFORE HE IS PURE...

Looking around, he prayed that he would not bump into any of his political associates, colleagues from the university, or former students; he would never live it down. He could not explain what was going through his mind at that moment. Falconi's crazy press conference had shaken him more than he cared to admit, a lot more. Falconi! How could he? Covering his eyes, he recalled that press conference with horror.

The line was long, but it moved quickly. The Levite guards didn't seem to be paying attention at all; they kept waving everyone through the *soreg* entrance. Once he passed through the *soreg*, another few steps would bring him to the Eastern Gate of the *ezrat nashim*. Once he passed through that gate, he would be on Temple ground! He'd show Bernstein a thing or two! Another three, four minutes should do it. In front of him, two *olei regel* families with their sacrificial animals just about ran through the *soreg* entrance in their eagerness to get in. The smiling Levites barely looked at them. Now it was his turn.

As Nimrod Pringsheim started to enter, he came face to face with six stern, broad-shouldered Levites who blocked his entrance.

"*Adoni*," one of them said in polite Biblical Hebrew. "Excuse me, sir, please step to the side."

Stunned, sheepishly, he obeyed. He

moved a couple of meters to the right. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed that the Levites kept whisking the people behind him through the *soreg* entrance. How did the Levites know to hold *him* back? Maybe Bernstein had tipped them off somehow?

Speaking in the extremely formal third person, the Levite now said, "May the master forgive me, but he is in a state of ritual impurity. His Excellency may not enter the holy courts of the Beis Hamikdash."

"W-what? Why, why not?" Pringsheim stammered. *How had they known? Was it written on his forehead?*

"Anyone who wishes to enter the holy courts of the Beis Hamikdash must be in a state of ritual purity. If he is not, he must purify himself first. His Excellency has failed to do so."

"What exactly do you mean?" Pringsheim asked, taken aback. "What about all those people you just let through? How do you know that they're all pure?"

"Even Jews who observe the *mitzvot* fastidiously and live in *Eretz Yisrael* are assumed to be *temei'im*, ritually impure," the Levite explained patiently, respectfully. "That's why before entering the holy courts of the Beis Hamikdash, they must purify themselves. The people whom we are admitting to *Mikdash* grounds did so, and therefore are in a state of ritual purity."

The Levite looked Pringsheim straight in the eye. "In your case, yet another factor comes into play. May I remind His Excellency that he traveled abroad recently? The *Gemara* notes that the sages Rav Yosi ben Yo'ezer and Rav Yosi ben Yochanan decreed that *eretz ha'amim*, all lands outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, are *temei'im*, are impure."

"How do you know I've been abroad?" Pringsheim asked suspiciously.

Pointedly ignoring Pringsheim's

question, the Levite continued, "Furthermore, his Excellency attended the funeral of a Jewish colleague who was killed in a car accident five weeks ago in Paris. The funeral was held in the Montmartre cemetery on Rue Caulaincourt. When a Jew enters a cemetery, attends a funeral, or comes in contact with the dead, he acquires the severe form of ritual impurity, *tum'at meit*, corpse impurity. While it is not a transgression for a *Jew* to be ritually impure in his normal day-to-day life, he may not enter the Beis Hamikdash in that condition." Before sending him on his way, the Levite invited Pringsheim to visit one of the new Mikdash Purification Centers. He even recommended one in particular...

FALCONI THINKS BACK TO HIS EARLY LIFE...

I was 17 and my father was still alive. In a few weeks I would leave home to attend university in Palermo. It was a hot, humid day. The air was heavy with the scent of deep summer; the sun was golden overhead and the clouds rose like white tree tops from behind the distant mountains. Four birds flew overhead in formation. I was working in my father's orchard, pulling weeds. Suddenly I sensed that someone was there, and I looked up to see a stranger.

He was an old man, shabbily dressed, sitting on a tree stump. He was wearing a tattered gray shirt with a frayed collar, blue trousers held up with a thick leather belt, brown sandals, and a wide-brimmed straw hat. I was sure that I had never seen him before. His strange luminescent face frightened me. I could tell he was blind.

"Mio padre," I asked politely, "who are you and where are you from? I'm sure you're not from around here. May I help you?"

"No, Antonio," he smiled. "I am not

from here."

"Signore," I asked him with surprise, "How do you know my name?"

"Who I am or what I know does not matter. What does matter is who you are." Nodding his head, he slowly rose to his feet and gently took my hand. His grip was surprisingly warm and firm. "Magnanimous Antonio, I do have a request. Could you take me to the bus stop to Siracusa?"

"Mio padre, unfortunately, our truck is in the garage being repaired so I can't drive you. However, I'll gladly walk with you there if you wish and I'll wait with you until the bus comes. But if we do go on foot, it will take almost an hour and it's mostly uphill. Are you sure you're up to it? Perhaps I can offer you something cold to drink before we start?"

A sweaty hour later we arrived at the bus stop to Siracusa. I was soaking wet and exhausted from the heat of the blazing sun, but to my amazement the blind man showed absolutely no discomfort at all. I looked at him closely and marveled. Then he gazed at me with his sightless eyes and opened his mouth to speak. I mentally prepared myself to listen very carefully. Without thinking, I bowed my head.

Somehow, instinctively, I knew that what he was going to say would be of great importance and I didn't want to miss a single word. At that moment, I felt that my senses were heightened a thousandfold. The sunlight was dazzling and the verdant Sicilian countryside was an unnaturally bright green. Even the stones seemed to sparkle like diamonds. The very air, suddenly redolent with the sweet fragrance of orange blossoms, was electric.

At that moment, my entire universe came to a complete halt. My eyes riveted on the blind man. I watched as he slowly raised his right hand heavenward in benediction and then he began to speak, emphasizing every word... ■