

Family values

At the age of 47, Baron Benjamin de Rothschild has put the 4-billion-euro family fortune in the hands of his wife, Baroness Ariane de Rothschild. 'I think women today are better suited for business than men,' he says. In an extensive, and rare, interview to Haaretz-The Marker, Baron de Rothschild talks about his brand of Judaism, his distaste for trading gold and his love of speed.

By Eytan Avriel and Guy Rolnik | Nov. 5, 2010 | 11:15 AM | 14

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Benjamin and Ariane de Rothschild. Photo by Photo courtesy of the Rothschild family

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If I were Rothschild," we hummed to ourselves from the Hebrew version of "Fiddler on the Roof" as we walked along Rue de l'Elysee in Paris. We were on the way to interview Baron Benjamin de Rothschild, the last scion of the dynasty's French branch, who is considered the world's richest Rothschild today. Rue de l'Elysee is not just any street. On one side stands the Elysee Palace, the official residence and office of President Nicolas Sarkozy. The street is closed to traffic and pedestrians are subjected to the suspicious scrutiny of the gendarmes surrounding the palace. On the other side is a row of stately old homes, including, at No. 10, the residence of Baron Benjamin de Rothschild. This is not his permanent home. He and

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High Holy Days in unholy places

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By Gregory J. Wallance | Opinion | 3

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By Carlo Strenger | Strenger than Fiction

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By Noam Ben Zeev | Arts & Leisure



'Ready maideleh': 100 years since Marcel Duchamp

The shift Duchamp made from the hand to the head was revolutionary: no longer was the artist's hand at the center of things, but the head, the idea.

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his family live in a palace on the shore of Lake Geneva, outside the Swiss city. This is the baron's address in Paris, and it is where he meets with the boards of directors of his many companies. It is less a home than a museum: The design, the carpets, the furniture, the shelves, the manners and even the scents send the visitor into a time machine and far into history.

In the 19th century the Rothschild family was no less than the central bank of Europe. States and monarchs turned to the Rothschild bank to raise capital or to receive loans, usually by means of the new instrument of government bonds. The Rothschilds issued, sold and disseminated the bonds of kings and governments in European capitals, often investing the family's own capital in them. Without the financial backing of the Rothschilds, kings found it difficult to go to war.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Mayer Amschel Rothschild, the dynasty's Frankfurt-based founder, sent his five sons to establish financial centers in Germany, Austria, France, Britain and Italy, a strategy that led to its domination of European finance. The sons founded banks in the Continent's capital cities. They issued bonds, traded in gold and currency, managed investments and engaged in commerce and any other financial activity for which there was a demand. They worked in coordination with, but also competed against, each other. Only the name Rockefeller vied with them as a symbol of wealth and power. The Rothschilds were undoubtedly the richest family in the world at the time.

In the 20th century the Rothschild empire gradually declined in strength. The family's banks increasingly lost ground to new banks that raised capital from the public through share issues, while the two world wars changed the world order. The Rothschilds remained key players in London and Paris, however.

Baron Edmond Benjamin James de Rothschild, "the Benefactor," laid the foundations for Jewish settlement in Palestine through his economic support for what came to be known as the First Aliyah, the wave of Jewish immigration from 1882-1903. In the second half of the 20th century the British Rothschilds sold their securities trading businesses, and in 1981 the French branch of the family was forced to watch as President Francois Mitterrand's socialist government nationalized its bank. The world had changed. The Rothschild dynasty, too, seemed to be on the verge of disappearing into history. But that did not happen.

A Google search of Baron Benjamin de Rothschild produces little in the way of information. One can learn that he is a seventh-generation descendant of dynasty founder Mayer Amschel, and that as the great-grandson of "the Benefactor" he controls the Caesarea Edmond Benjamin de Rothschild Foundation. The foundation, through the management of the Caesarea community, provides financial support for education in Israel and has land and cash holdings worth more than NIS 700 million. Googling also reveals that the baron controls private banks in France and Switzerland, owns a number of the world's most famous palaces and wineries and is very fond of sports, particularly sailing. He rarely gives interviews; there are a handful of articles about him in the French press but none in the English-language media and certainly not in the Israeli media.

Hooked on adrenaline

Baron Benjamin de Rothschild, 47, tall and blue-eyed, and his wife, Baroness Ariane de Rothschild, entered the salon where we waited. No entourage, no aides, advisers or PR people. Just he and his wife. Any

THIS STORY IS BY

Eytan Avriel

Guy Rolnik

By Allison Kaplan Sommer | Routine Emergencies | 2

Poem of the Week / How to count to 5774

By Vivian Eden | Poem of the Week

MAGAZINE

My father, Edward Said: First the show, then the book - and now the interview

By Nirit Ben-Ari | 07:32 PM | 4

How pink is too pink? Raising daughters in the age of Disney

By Naomi Darom | 05:54 PM

Fear of buying: My part in inflating Tel Aviv's real estate bubble

By Dani Bar On | 03:47 PM | 2

Istanbul on a platter

By Hedai Offaim | 03:22 PM

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preconceived notions we had entertained about noblesse oblige with regard to formality, ceremoniousness, seriousness and diplomacy were soon dashed. Our interlocutor turned out to be easygoing, quick to laugh and a chain-smoker. In the course of our 90-minute interview he polished off an entire pack of Marlboro Menthols.

The baron is a shy man. At first he agreed to be photographed, but just before the interview his assistant requested that we drop the idea. The pictures he sent us largely point to the way he sees himself: Only one of him in a suit, many of him on his racing sailboats, and in nearly all the photos he is unshaven. Right at the start, when we asked why he spends most of his time not in Paris but rather in the isolated palace near Geneva, he replied that he was not a social person: "I do not go to parties. I do not know the high society of Paris. That is not my thing."

So what is his thing? Sports. He doesn't run, swim, cycle or work out, but he's hooked on adrenaline. He has a fleet of competitive sailboats - of the type that can circumnavigate the globe - and his crews often come first place when they race. He enjoys hunting. ("I hunt everything - in Africa, Russia, Europe, everywhere. It's hunting and conservation at the same time, because these are places where certain animal populations need to be reduced.")) He drives Formula 1 Ferraris, acquiring them when the official team gets new cars, and rides racing motorcycles. He also skis competitively. (His grandmother founded one of the first ski resorts to target the wealthy, in the French Alpine town of Megeve. He goes there to ski and to check on his hotels.) When the baron wants to clear his head he flies a private helicopter bearing the Rothschild coat of arms to the Atlantic-coast anchorage of his sailboats.

Baron Benjamin de Rothschild, you are media- and publicity-averse. Why did you agree to this interview?

"We are becoming more and more important in the Israeli financial system, and our philanthropic activity in Israel is also growing. So we decided to open ourselves a little bit more to the Israeli public, so we can be better known, if only because my great-grandfather started the country. We would not want people to forget that. Lately I have been gradually transferring to Ariane responsibility and handling of the family's assets around the world and also in Israel. She is now in charge of the Caesarea Foundation."

Do you visit Israel often?

"In the past I used to come to Israel quite often, but less so in recent years."

Do you follow developments in Israel, even though your life is in Europe?

"It is not difficult to follow developments in Israel - you see it every day on television, on CNN, for example. I follow the events in Israel as a Jew and also because I am interested in the peace process in the region. I would very much like to see the process go ahead."

Can you elaborate? What are your political views?

"It is not easy to elaborate on such a complicated problem. You know, when you don't live in a country you don't know all the ins and outs. More than 10 years ago, when my father died, Benjamin Netanyahu called and asked if he could help with anything. I told him, 'Make peace, advance the process.' I told Netanyahu that I know it's complicated but that if he is asking me if my father had a wish, it was to see peace in the Middle East.

"I understand that it is a complicated business, mainly because of the fanatics and extremists - and I am talking about both sides. I think you have fanatics in Israel: They do not serve in the army and they attack the soldiers who guard them. Extremists are a disaster on any side. In France there are the extremists of Le Pen. I am especially against religious extremists: It infuriates me to see the pope asking for 40 euro so people can attend a mass in London. In general I am not in contact with politicians. I spoke once with Netanyahu, as I mentioned. I met once with an Israeli finance minister, but the less I mingle with politicians the better I feel."

Has that always been the approach of the Rothschild family, across the generations?

"In general, yes. Our family always supported democracy, and therefore we supported Israel. That is why my great-grandfather donated a great deal of money for the education of the young, so they can travel and see how democratic systems function in other countries and then apply this at home. We are continuing in this vein with the children in Israel through the Caesarea Foundation. We support them in their studies and educate them about the process. In return, we expect them to devote time afterward to help educate other children in the same way."

The Rothschild holdings in Israel include a bank branch that provides services to insurance companies, institutional investors and private clients as well as two buildings on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv that are being renovated.

"I believe that there is a demand for international investment services for Israeli institutions. In my opinion, the rules in Israel are too tough for institutional investors who want to invest internationally, and they are unable to act as they would wish. Israelis should invest abroad more than they are doing today, for two reasons: First, because investments should be diversified; and second, because the Israeli market is simply too small. In one way or another, Israeli institutions should be allowed to invest more in global markets."

The Rothschild Group manages around \$3 billion in foreign investments for Israelis, mainly institutional investors but private individuals as well.

"I would like to increase this to about \$10 billion within five years. In general we invest our clients' money in funds that we manage throughout Europe, or in funds of funds that are based in France and Luxembourg. We manage a large range of funds based on investment strategies and according to geographic regions. In the funds of funds we also manage large amounts of money through funds of others, not just our own."

With the name comes responsibility

After World War II, only the British and the French branches of the Rothschild family remained. In Britain the family has a "boutique" investment bank, NM Rothschild & Sons, which engages mainly in consulting, underwriting and mergers and acquisitions. In France the primary businesses are Rothschild & Cie Banque, owned by David de Rothschild, and the banks of his cousin Benjamin. David's has a higher public profile in Paris, because of its involvement in large industrial transactions, but the banking branch controlled by Benjamin is several times the size of Rothschild & Cie.

Benjamin's banks may be more boring and conservative, but before the global economic crisis they were valued at between 3 billion and 4 billion

euro, compared to 1 billion for his cousin's bank. Moreover, banking is only one part of Benjamin's empire, which also includes wineries, hotels, real estate and a dairy farm specializing in making fine Brie cheese. The best known of his Bordeaux wineries are Chateaux Clarke, Malmaison and des Laurets, while the most famous, Chateau Lafite, is held in partnership with his cousins. Chateaux Mouton Rothschild and Mouton Cadet, two other wineries closely identified with the family, belong to a cousin, Philippine de Rothschild.

How much money do you manage in all your banks?

"Our total managed assets, depending on the specific period, range between 130 and 150 billion euro. The branch in Israel is a subsidiary of the bank in Paris, and the bank in Switzerland is a public company whose shares are traded on the Zurich stock exchange."

What is the bank's balance sheet?

"You have to remember that we are a private bank. The balance is of no interest because we do not provide credit. Our service takes the form of asset management and banking services, so that our risk is also very low. I hold 88 percent of the shares in the Swiss bank. The bank's market worth today is around 800 million Swiss francs [about \$800 million - E.A. and G.R.]. In the other banks I hold 100 percent of the shares and everything is private."

So how much are you worth, in total?

"That depends a great deal on the value of the Rothschild brand name. It is difficult to know or even to estimate the worth. It changes. In any case nothing is for sale, but it's not clear how much our businesses are worth without the name. Until not long ago a private bank's value was usually calculated according to a ratio of 5 percent of its managed assets, but today that has dropped to 2 percent. The French press has estimated the worth of the banking group at 3 billion euro, but if you ask me, you can just as well flip a coin."

You are not just any tycoon - you are a scion of the Rothschild family. Does the family name bring with it a commitment, and if so how would you characterize it?

"It is definitely a commitment. It is responsibility that comes with the name, a tradition that has continued for a great many years. We have an obligation to continue the dynasty and a commitment to the employees and the clients. We have never followed the 'stop and go' method - meaning recruitment and dismissals according to the state of the business - as other banks do."

You have never laid off employees?

"Never. Even if there have been occasional hard times, we absorbed the blow but we kept the employees. You have to understand that when you have the name Rothschild people expect a great deal from you: donations, advice. They think you understand everything about business and they expect top performance and success. People think it's great good fortune to be part of the Rothschild family. I tell them it's not all that simple. There are pluses and minuses."

What are the pluses?

"The big plus is that the name opens all doors. People know me in every

part of the world, even in problematic, remote or difficult countries. It is a highly regarded, well-known name."

Even now, with all the anti-Semitism?

"Even now. We do business with all kinds of countries, including Arab countries."

You have said that the future of the global economy lies in the East. But what does the Rothschild brand mean there, and how does it connect to the fact that it's Jewish?

"I think that for most people the brand is no longer Jewish. Here in France, for example, it is already a fully integrated part of the culture. In France and in many other countries the brand is actually associated more with our wine business and less with the banking end. It is extremely strong in the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, which of course includes Israel, where we have a long history. No streets in Tel Aviv have been named after HSBC or Barclays, but there is a Rothschild Boulevard."

How different are you from your father and your grandfather?

"I am very different. I am from a different generation; we don't live in the same world anymore, so it's not possible to be the same. They had a different lifestyle, a different way of working, different interests. The economic environment then was very prosperous, whereas the current financial situation is not good, and I don't think it will be good for the next 10 years."

Why not?

"After World War II it was difficult not to make money. In Israel 10 years ago it was difficult not to make money. Nowadays it is a very different story everywhere. There is low growth in the United States, maybe 1 percent. On the other hand, the developing countries are growing stronger and they control the world."

I understand that you put a lot of focus on emerging markets.

"Just this morning we had a discussion about the subject. Did you know that until 250 years ago China was the strongest country in the world? We already have a branch in Hong Kong and we are working with the Bank of China. We intend to increase our focus in that region. Our activity in Israel is also important to us. I see it as a bridge to developing countries, through our people there and your brains."

How does the Rothschild brand work in China?

"It turns out to be very well known. People carry out checks and research, discover the family's story and are very impressed. The Chinese are also amazed at the family's ability to maintain a dynasty for seven generations - that is a very important matter for them. The first question they always ask us is how we managed to maintain the family and the business dynasty for such a long time. And by the way, that is something the Israelis will have to learn. You never see more than two or three generations in Israel. For that, you need a good tax system and you need to open up to the world. International consultants who specialize in this should be brought to Israel. Your financial system needs to open up, in the same way the industrial sector did."

Why doesn't the family have businesses in the United States?

"We had a few assets there. My father owned the third largest bank in California, but he sold it. It is very difficult to run a bank across a nine-hour time difference. You have to deal with details and it's not convenient at all."

Recipes are for cake, not solving crises

After high school Benjamin de Rothschild was sent to the United States to study business. He chose California's Pepperdine University, on the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu.

"Sea, sex and sun - we frolicked there. I achieved a very high level of surfing," he told a French newspaper a few years ago. After graduating he worked for family-owned banks in California before returning to Europe at 26 and establishing a financial risk management company. He went on to join the family business and in 1997, after his father died, he succeeded him as the group's owner and chairman. Along the way he married Ariane Langner. (See separate interview with the baroness .) They have four daughters.

Did you always know you would continue the dynasty and go into the business?

"I knew from the age of 4 - I was an only child. It was always clear and I was educated for it. It was clear that I would not go to work for a cellular phone company and that I would not launch a windmill business. I knew I would be a banker and I expect my girls to follow the same path." In the past, the Rothschild family did not always advance the women of the family. It's quite well known that the business was passed down only through the sons.

"That is true, but the world is changing. I think women today are better suited for business than men. The laws have also changed: One can no longer pass on the ownership and management to sons alone. That is no longer legal. My cousin has three daughters and a son, and even if he wanted to leave everything to the son he could not do so legally."

How did you come through the financial crisis?

"We came through it well, because our investment managers did not want to put money into crazy things. In 2010, for example, our portfolios yielded 5 percent, whereas the stock markets fell by 8 percent. People do not come to us to make a big profit but to preserve their wealth. The client knows we will not speculate with his money. In the crisis we also had clients come to us who fled from the big banks that encountered difficulties."

And you weren't involved in other investments or in real estate?

"We were not involved in real estate and we had no ties with [Bernard] Madoff. True, we missed part of the big surge that preceded the crisis, but we also missed the crisis and the collapse. Conservatism is genetic in our culture."

Looking back, what was the major cause of the crisis?

"Greed! Pure and simple. And it is going to happen again. This time it will happen in life insurance surety bonds. Wall Street is now making the same mistakes with insurance that it did with mortgages. They will never learn. When you see the amounts that are being paid now to securities traders in

insurance bonds, you see pure madness. That is the difference between American capitalism and family capitalism. Unlike the Americans, we do not have to report on performance every quarter. We can take a much longer perspective and wait four or five years to get results. Quarterly profits will not change my life."

Looking at the aftermath of the financial crisis, would you say the problem lies in the world of finance, or is it due to a flaw in the free-market model?

"I think the problem lies in both. The American capitalist model has failed. Managing a family company is different from managing a company that is owned by others. In the latter situation you simply don't care about the shareholders - you do what you want. Look at what they did in Lehman Brothers: A few days before the crash they paid themselves bonuses and salaries of tens of millions of dollars. I'm sorry, but in my opinion that is a crime and they should have gone to jail. And, by the way, they also had a 'Jewish' name for a reputable business which they should have safeguarded."

What stage of the crisis are we now in - the beginning, the end, the middle?

"I don't have a clue in hell. You tell me. Anyone who answers that question is either a genius or a fraud. The American economy is still in the grip of a serious crisis; they have an employment problem that is going to get worse. One of the strengths of the United States lay in people's ability to move from one job to another. That has now come to a halt. They can't relocate because they can't sell their home. The United States is finished, at least for the moment. There will be more oversight, but people will always come up with new financial products that are not amenable to oversight. What's happening is that the firefighters keep arriving after the fire."

Is Europe in a better position?

"In many ways they do not have the same problems that the Americans have, but they also cannot print money like the Americans. There will be problems of ratings downgrades for countries and problems of market values. If you take the market value of the Greek government bonds, which is something like 70 cents on the euro, and make the European banks enter that value in their books, you will find that you have created a loss of more than 100 billion euro. For companies of the family capitalism type, by the way, I don't think the method of cost-accounting according to the market price is right. If you depreciate the reputation of a company like mine, what is left? There are cases in which write-offs are necessary, such as if a company you acquired is hurt. But if the conditions have not changed, why write off reputation?"

Do you have a recipe for resolving the crisis? What should the American and European governments do?

"I do not have a recipe for solving the crisis, but I do have a recipe for a good cake. I think that the leaders don't have a clue and don't have a solution, which is why they are compelled to behave mainly like politicians and mainly to talk. Look at the situation in France, for example: There are countrywide strikes because of a 1992 decision that set the retirement age at 60 and set a 35-hour work week. That has cost France hundreds of billions of euro. Now the retirement age has to be raised to 62 - and a million people take to the streets. The state is caught in a trap, the government can't lift a finger. It seems to me that both Europe and the United States will face large-scale problems of social unrest.

Unemployment will increase and the middle class will lose a large portion of its wealth and its worth." What are the risks in the emerging markets - markets you are enthusiastic about - and the risks created by zero interest rates in the United States and Europe?

"The risks in the emerging markets are both political and legal: You should always think carefully about who you are cooperating with. The zero interest is a terrible thing: It suggests that money has no value, which I think is a very bad mentality for people and especially for educating the young generation. Even if the zero interest lowers the price of assets like real estate in the short term, I think money has a cost. Ultimately, the interest rates will return to their regular level, and in another 10 to 15 years could even be back to 8 percent.

"In Russia the interest rate is very high. At the same time, low interest creates inflation. Take, for example, the price of apartments in Paris. Ten years ago the prices were the same as they are today, but in French francs. In other words, they have risen more than sevenfold. The price of food and the price of a cup of coffee have also jumped. Sorry, but that's inflation. It's like financial reports: You can juggle them any way you like, but in the end the economic reality comes to light."

What will happen when interest rates rise? Will there be losses?

"Not necessarily. There are companies that pay handsome dividends, and if they want to hold on to their shareholders they will continue to pay. People are issuing bonds that will never reach redemption, and if there are people who will buy them it's their problem."

'I don't report to God'

Each of the family-owned companies has a board of directors. The French bank, for example, has eight directors. As the owner of 88 percent or 100 percent of each of the businesses, the baron notes, he is accountable only to his children and his ancestors.

But your daughters are still teenagers, not businesspeople. Who oversees your management of the companies?

"I am accountable to the people I employ. I am accountable to my wife and my children. I do not believe in God - I do not report to him."

What is the primary mission of the Rothschild family today? To what extent is it preserving the family's worth and wealth, and to what extent is it using its capabilities for socially responsible activities?

"It is a combination of the two, and the proportion changes every day, depending on which area one is talking about. Our philanthropic foundations are one thing; preserving the dynasty is another. I have to be certain that the next generation will also be able to engage in socially responsible activity, which is why I am not doing what my grandfather did. We were the first to launch activity aimed at forging a dialogue between Muslims, Christians and Jews, between imams and rabbis, and it was very successful. We sponsor considerable activity in the areas of social responsibility and environmental quality. We have hospitals, a drug rehab center and we offer scholarships. But we also have a responsibility to pass on to our children more wealth than we received."

What is your philanthropic strategy in Israel?

"The budget is about \$16 million a year, and the main goal is education.

That is the family's vision. In my father's time a large part of the money was earmarked for higher education: We distributed scholarships for study at universities such as INSEAD ["The Business School for the World," with campuses in France, Abu Dhabi and Singapore and a research center in Israel]. However, today the problem in Israel lies in more basic education, at the primary and high-school levels. The institutions are failing, so we are turning the spotlight on them. We will soon launch a major project called Leadership in which we will make money available to young people but will ask them to give in return - to society - during their studies."

What proportion of your total donations go to Israel?

"They constitute a major part. Ten years ago we opened a center for adults in France, which carries a yearly cost. It is not exactly traditional philanthropy, but it is a not-for-profit enterprise."

How important is it for you to preserve the family's Jewish character?

"It is important for us to preserve the Jewish memory. I am not a believer or a religious person, and my father was not religiously observant, either. I uphold the tradition on Yom Kippur, like everyone, and I send greetings at Rosh Hashanah."

What about your daughters? Would you want them to marry Jews?

"You try telling them what to do. My oldest daughter's boyfriend - she is 15 - is a Saudi. He is a great guy and if she will want to marry him, she can. If she brings home a black man and he is a good person, she will be able to marry him. Our role will then be to educate him to be part of the family. She will have to choose the right person. Nowadays it is impossible to force a person to choose a particular partner. It doesn't work anymore."

"And while we are on the subject of religion, let me tell you that the Jewish people made a very serious mistake by turning conversion into such a difficult process. Mathematically, if it goes on like this, the Jewish religion is liable to disappear. If someone wants to convert, let him convert. Don't make the procedure so complicated that people despair. If you want to become a Muslim it is very simple; if you want to become a Jew it is almost impossible. My mother was converted by a rabbi in Paris but the Orthodox establishment does not recognize her conversion, so that technically I am not a Jew. If so, why do you ask for money from a goy? I think the religious establishment will have to change a great many things in this area, because it's a matter of survival."

How technological are you? How much do you use cell phones or the Internet?

"I have the privilege of existing without a cellular phone. I don't have a BlackBerry or an iPhone. I have never had a mobile phone. The only time I use that kind of phone is when I am skiing with my daughters and we have to coordinate the time for lunch."

"I love computers and use them a lot in my work, of course. But no more than that. I don't read newspapers on the Internet, because I find it uncomfortable to read on the screen. I read the [International] Herald Tribune, the Financial Times and The Economist. I don't like the French papers because their approach is too political, from both sides. I use Reuters for news updates. I think the media should report the facts and not be political the way it is in France."

Yet your family has investments in the media, such as in the French newspaper Liberation. Why?

"It is not I who invested in Liberation but Edouard de Rothschild. I would not invest in that industry. The papers will write whatever they please anyway, so that even if you have a paper you cannot influence the content. Newspaper owners told me that their own paper writes the worst things about them, maybe due to competitive pressure. In any event, I think people will read fewer and fewer newspapers and that the Internet will become the main source of information. I'm sorry, but I think the newspaper business is dead. I am not saying it will happen within five years, but people are reading less and less."

How would you describe your management style, the organizational culture of the Rothschild Group?

"Our employees receive good salaries. We do not give many [stock] options or bonuses, but the employees know they will not be fired. Everything has a price. The salaries that were paid to managers in the United States make me boil. Instead of going to jail, people who failed in their jobs and harmed the business go home with salary packages of tens of millions of dollars. They are no better than Madoff."

What do you tell clients who ask you what to invest in?

"I tell them that if they want exact advice I will connect them with our experts in the areas about which they have expressed an interest. I always tell them that they should diversify their investment portfolio broadly and invest also in gold and commodities. And I don't like gold."

Why don't you like gold?

"That is a sensitive personal matter. Trading in gold has the feeling of something from the past. I know our family used to trade in gold, and as a trader or the owner of a business that trades in gold I actually like it. But to hold gold as an investment, in a safe - for me that is like holding government bonds. Both bonds and gold pay close to zero interest and for me that is untenable. Maybe it's an approach I adopted because the family had the good fortune not to get entangled in the failure of Russian government bonds in the early 20th century. My grandfather went to Russia and decided to sell all his holdings there. It was sheer luck that the family did not lose money in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Personally, I no longer trade, so I am less involved in what is happening in the market."

Still, people want you to whisper them some tip.

"You want names? Fine: These days it's good to hold shares of international corporations, companies that sell globally and especially in the East. There are quite a few Swiss firms like that, such as Nestle, but also American firms such as Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer. In my opinion, the technology industries will produce good yields, because the world is becoming increasingly high tech. I see my children playing on the computer and on their cellular phones every day, and the way they communicate among themselves. They no longer use the phone - it's all Internet."

Is anyone in your family on Facebook?

"Yes, I am. Someone opened a fake page in my name and I checked it out and then created a real page. But I don't think I have looked at the page for

the past two years. I don't know how many friends I have. I think that Facebook and similar networks are open to investigations by the police and secret services, and I do not like to be under surveillance. I take great care to ensure that my life and my family's life are kept private. As far as I am concerned, the less we stand out the better. Why? First, I don't want my children to be surrounded by 40 bodyguards, because that is not a proper way to live. Second, there are people who don't like us. That is always a risk. In the past, when horrific stories about the family were published in the press, one could respond. Today, everything is uploaded to the Internet and YouTube and there is not much we can do. There are groundless, horrible stories there."

What does your schedule look like?

"I spend 90 percent of my time thinking about the business, but I don't feel I have to be in the office all the time. My work and my hobbies are very diversified, because we also have the wine business in many countries, and the cheese farm. So I find myself spending a great deal of time in many countries and in many places and also engaged in many fields of endeavor. And of course I like my own time: I love skiing and fast cars and motorcycles. There isn't a bone in my body that I haven't broken."

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No such thing as an Agnostic Jew.

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Feeling Jewish has no bearing on your allegiance to Halacha, dude!

ByZev Davis | 07 Nov 2010 | 00:43AM

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A Saudi Boyfriend and peace in the region


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family values
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4




0
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A very friendly gentleman
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Ladies, knock yourself out!
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1
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On Being A Rothschild
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1




0
- 03

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1




0
- 02

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0




1
- 01

Amen
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17



4

Back to top

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