

Addiction

Mehran Etessami

The human brain is designed to be addicted. From the moment an infant tastes his or her mother's milk for the first time, chemical and biological mechanisms in the brain start to train us to seek to repeat experiences that stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain.

This propensity for addiction within our brains is a necessary and important part of our nature. The release of chemicals like dopamine, epinephrine, and endorphins and their interactions in the neural pathways of the brain, is what makes it possible for people to seek excitement and take risks, for soldiers to overcome their fears during battle, for athletes to tolerate pain and continue to compete, and for couples to enjoy marital relations.

Unfortunately, it is also very easy to abuse this tendency in our nature by artificially stimulating our brains to replicate the feelings of exhilaration, excitement, joy, and ecstasy. And humans have certainly found many unhealthy ways to do so. One addictive way to stimulate the brain is by introducing various drugs and substances into our bodies that mimic the effects of the brain's natural chemicals. These drugs usually have destructive effects of various magnitudes on our brains and other organs. The stronger drugs damage brain cells and reduce its function rapidly. The weaker drugs can damage many organs like the lungs and the liver, cause many health problems such as cancer, and shorten a person's lifespan.

Another addictive way to stimulate the brain is by behavior that replicates the adrenaline rush of a thrilling, dangerous, or exciting situation and tempts the brain to repeat that behavior to reproduce the same feeling.

A tremendous amount of commerce in the world is based on getting us hooked on various kinds of brain stimuli. From illegal and destructive drugs like heroin and opiates to legal ones like alcohol and tobacco, from gambling casinos to children's video games, from unhealthy processed foods to soft drinks loaded with sugar, we are inundated with so many options and opportunities to harm our bodies and our minds.

Some of these brain stimuli, like heroin for instance, are so highly addictive that it is virtually impossible for humans to give them up without professional help and monitoring at a rehabilitation center. Others may not be harmful at first and in moderation, but when indulged in repeatedly, they can start to change the chemistry of the brain and be destructive to our lives in many ways. These addictions might take a longer time to show their negative effects, but the harm they cause is unmistakable.

For a close-knit community such as ours, the second, more subtle type of addiction could be much more dangerous than the obviously harmful kinds. When a hard-drug addiction is discovered, almost everybody immediately recognizes the danger. Parents and community leaders get mobilized and make each other aware of the risks. Lectures and programs are organized and parents are educated about how to look for signs of the addiction in their children. In short, at least for a brief period of time, the problem is brought to the front and center of the community's consciousness.

Editorial

But very often, with soft addictions, not only is the danger not realized, but the negative behavior is very quickly disseminated among various age groups and grows uncontrollably. Some behaviors are such an ingrained part of our culture that even when they grow to unsafe levels, no alarms are raised.

We could talk about the potential harm caused by excessive indulgence and addiction to many things, like video games and television for kids, to unhealthy foods, tobacco smoking, or even the new phenomenon of Internet addictions, like Facebook.

But, at this time, in all probability, the two fastest growing and potentially harmful addictive patterns in our community are alcoholism and gambling. It is so important for us to recognize social problems before they grow to an uncontrollable level, and it seems that both alcohol consumption and gambling are speedily on the rise, especially among the younger generations.

It is easy to see how alcoholism could become a growing problem in our community by observing the drinking behavior of our young – and even the not so young – at any wedding or party. Alcohol consumption has increased and become a central part of many celebrations. This was not the case in our community parties in prior generations, but we are quickly adopting the behavior of the advanced culture we live in. Aside from the fact that the caterers now have to spend a lot more money on the alcohol, it is becoming an accepted fact among our youth that the way you celebrate is by drinking shot after shot of top-shelf alcohol. Unfortunately, this behavior is even commonplace at bar/bat-mitzvahs, where many pre-teens observe and learn from the older youth.

Another growing and harmful trend in the community is gambling. Among some people, gambling can quickly turn into a dangerous compulsive addiction that can manifest many social problems for individuals, families, and the community.

For many problem gamblers, their addiction occupies so much of their time that they spend a lot less time with their family than they should. Some lose great amounts to casinos and hurt themselves and their families even more. Others get so preoccupied with gambling that they seriously damage their work or business.

With the popularity and growth of various kinds of gambling options available, such as on the internet, many of our very young are also gambling on a regular basis. This means that gambling problems in our community can only grow in the coming years, unless we find a way to stem the growth.

Almost certainly, nobody reading this article will feel that they have an addiction problem. The nature of addiction is such that the addict usually lives and carries on in denial, until a great amount of damage is done.

Although we don't want to preach to any individual about how to live their lives, since we want to raise our children in this loving and nurturing community, we are all affected by the cultural and social trends that affect the community.

We have a duty to ourselves, our families, and our community to recognize negative dependencies and addictive behavior and fight them in whatever way we can.

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Central Board Report

November 2009 – February 2010

Ephraim Aminoff

YMJC Plaque Dedication Day

This event is planned for Sunday February 28th (Purim). A special festive Purim meal will be served, the Dedication Plaques will be unveiled, and over 54 Mezuzot will be affixed on this historic day. A follow up summary will be provided in the next report.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah “Jamaati” Party

Due to the efforts of some dedicated volunteers, this popular celebration has been revived. The Bat Mitzvah party is scheduled for October 10, 2010, and so far, twenty-four girls have registered.

Yeshiva Scholarship Fundraiser

This very successful event was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fatollah Hematian. Approximately \$170,000 was pledged and we thank all those who did so and also a special thanks to the hosts.

New Talmud Torah Program

This year Talmud Torah has begun a new midweek program for ages twelve and above. Also new this year, all the students learn about Mashadi history through the book “Rachel’s Diary.” The children learn about Ghazvin, Allahdadi and what life was like in Mashad.

Mashadi Directory

The UMJCA has created a new independent organization called *Mashadi Jewish Media* and they are creating the new Mashadi Directory which is expected to be published this year. Everyone in the community should have received and returned the information form by now.

IAJF Dinner (Iranian American Jewish Federation)

The dinner was a great success. Total pledges came to approximately \$2.2 million. As per an agreement made, the IAJF will work with UMJCA and send 80% of the pledges received by Mashadis to Mashadi causes in Israel.

Dedication of Fourteen Sifrei Torah in Memory of Sam Aharonoff z'l

On Sunday, November 22, 2009, the Great Neck community witnessed the historic dedication of fourteen new Sifrei Torah. This dedication took place in a ceremony to celebrate the community’s Shivtei Torah Campaign and to complete the last twelve letters of each Torah. Hundreds of community members, leaders, and dignitaries took part in the dedication ceremony.

Fourteen North Shore Hebrew Academy families, including two Mashadi families, each donated one of the fourteen Torahs in this project that was named in memory of the late Sam Aharonoff z'l. The twelve Sifrei Torah were escorted from two locations, the intersection of Middle Neck Road and Old Mill Road, and the intersection of Polo Road and William Penn Street. The Torah procession arrived at Great Neck Synagogue where the ceremonies, celebrations, lunch, dancing, and festivities took place.

GMJF (Global Mashadi Jewish Federation)

This newly formed organization met in Israel over the winter break. Among the subjects discussed were: 1) The proposed Mashadi Heritage Center. 2) a new advisory board for the Senior Home (Bet Avot). 3) Obtaining preferential discounts from Israeli universities and yeshivas for Mashadis who want to study in Israel. 4) Federation to organize a Heritage trip to Mary, Tashkent, and Bukhara in May.

House at the Rear of Shaare Shalom

This house is due to be renovated this year for use as a storage area. The cost of constructing a brand new building is prohibitive, especially as it would involve moving the Synagogue’s sprinkler system (in the basement) at a cost of approximately \$100,000.

Evaluation of Party Guidelines after 6 Months

This policy has been in effect for several months now, and automatically many parties have become smaller. These guidelines were adopted based on the response received from an online survey. On the whole, the policy has been universally accepted and complied with. However a few minor changes may be necessary and these will be implemented after considering all viewpoints.

Mashadi Community Website Raises Funds to Help Haiti

A website was created to help raise funds for earthquake relief for Haiti. About \$5,000 was raised in total, and all proceeds will be paid to those Jewish and Israeli organizations helping in Haiti.

Congratulations to a New Community Rabbi, Mr. Simon Basalely

We are pleased to announce that one of our community members, Mr. Simon Basalely, has recently completed his Rabbinical Studies at Yeshiva University. Mr. Basalely will be introduced in our synagogues on March 5th, 2010. Mazal Tov on your achievement!

Mashadi Jewish Center

Shaare Shalom Synagogue Report

Mark Karimzadeh

Social Hall Additions

We were happy to have completed the installation of a new and large size flat screen television in the Social Hall. This new television takes up no floor space, as it has been specially fixed on the corner wall. It will allow those attending the Senior Lounge to see programs and videos more comfortably. We will soon be adding Persian cable TV, to make a new variety of Persian programming available. The TV can also be used for other programs that may require any kind of video to be shown.

New Heichal's and Bookshelves

The synagogue has commissioned the building of two new *Heichal's* – one for the youth in the gym minyan, and one for the youngsters praying in the C floor minyan. These are being made to replace the current ones, which are in poor condition, and they will also allow for better storage of a greater number of *Sifrei Torahs*. There will also be additional bookshelves built at various places throughout the synagogue, to allow for greater storage and easier access to *Siddurim* and other prayer books.

Assignment of Wheelchair Areas

We have assigned areas in the main sanctuary for those who are attending services in wheelchairs. Since we are required to keep all of the aisles empty so that they are not blocking people who wish to walk through, these new areas will allow those in wheelchairs to attend services while not blocking any aisles.

New Siddurim

We would like to thank those people who donated new *Siddurim* for the various Holidays as well as regular Shabbat and weekday services. We are happy to have an abundance of *Siddurim* of different types in our Synagogue, but due to lack of storage space, we would like to kindly ask anyone who is planning to donate *Siddurim* to the Synagogue in the future to please **first** consult with the Synagogue Board before purchasing any more *Siddurim*. We would like to thank the Hakimian and Hariri families, Mansour and Babak Zar and their families, and Shmuel Roubini and family for their generous donations of new *Siddurim* for our Synagogue.

Car Pooling

We would like to take this opportunity to remind and encourage people to make their best efforts to car pool when attending a Didan event in the Synagogue. This will avoid any problems getting in and out of the parking lot.

Collection of Clothing and Food

With the help of the ladies in the community, we arrange the collection of used clothing and certain other items, to be given to charity twice a year. Throughout the rest of the year, many people have been bringing old clothing and just dropping them somewhere in the synagogue. Please note that the synagogue is not a place for anyone to use as their personal deposit area for unwanted clothing and other items. If anyone leaves any clothing or other items at the synagogue, at any time other than the designated biannual collection days, these items will immediately be thrown out as garbage, and will not be passed on to a charity. Please do not use the synagogue as a place to get rid of unwanted personal items. At the same time, we have a *G'Neza* box situated in the synagogue. This box is only for placing religious items which have the name of G-d printed on them, and cannot be thrown away. Please do not throw any other flyer, publication, or books that do not have the name of G-d written on them into the *G'Neza* box. This is not a garbage can, but specifically placed there for the proper disposal and burial of religious items that cannot be destroyed because they have the name of G-d written on them.

Yom Kippur Services

After much preparation, last years' Yom Kippur services, for those attending the Minyan with Rabbi Ben Haim, was held in the Social Hall. In order to avoid any sound issues between the social hall and the main sanctuary, a special curtain was specially made to be hung up next to the room partition. We must thank Mr. and Mrs. Essi Yaghoubi for the generosity in the donation of all the curtain materials. The services were very successful, with full attendance throughout the Yom Kippur services.

Winter Hours

Due to the shorter winter hours, there is very little time left on Shabbat between the morning services and the afternoon services. Since the Synagogue has to be cleaned and prepared for the afternoon services, we urge the whole community to do their best to avoid littering the floors, and to keep the Kanissa clean when attending Shabbat services.

Shiras

If you have a *Shira* and are planning to hold a *Shira* at the Synagogue, please make sure you notify the Synagogue in advance of planning to celebrate your *Shira*. This will help us properly plan for your *Shira* on the day you will be having it.

Youth Committee Report

Steve Kohan

I have titled this report “**Dedication and Triumph**” because it characterizes the new MYC term’s activities to date and reflects our new theme. It conveys the commitment of our fresh and diverse group of youth organizers with a common goal to sustain Mashadi Jewish tradition through various social and religious events. On November 15th, 2009, a record 309 members of our youth casted their votes and a new board of fifteen members and several alternates was elected – only after undergoing a series of creative and exhilarating campaigning. Campaign slogans like, “Vote tall, vote small,” “Your home-run choice” and “Make mamanjoon proud!” set precedents of creativity and enthusiasm. A sequence of web-broadcasted videos and a great deal of candy handouts after Kanissa services comprised a truly exceptional election. Below is a compilation of summaries to highlight the most recent and upcoming MYC events.

Religion and Heritage Subcommittee

Rosh Chodesh Lectures Tevet

Our first Rosh Chodesh lecture of the term was held at the home of Elan and Emil Ben-David on December 17th. With a turnout of about 100 people, the night included dinner and dessert, a special Menorah lighting, and a fascinating speech by Rabbi Bitton correlating the new moon which marks the first of every Hebrew month, a history of Chanukah, and the fixation of “New Moon,” the second installment of the Twilight Saga. The MYC would like to thank the Ben-David family for hosting the night.

Sh’vat

On January 21st, 182 people, a record breaking turnout, attended the Rosh Chodesh lecture held at the residence of Jordan and Jared Karmily. The night included dinner, dessert, and a panel-type lecture on Ayen Hara and Superstitions by Rabbi Bitton and guest speaker Rabbi Solomon Cohen. The MYC would like to thank the Karmily family for hosting an unforgettable evening.

Special thanks to Stephanie Nematzadeh and Moshe Aziz, the directors of the Religion and Heritage subcommittee, for organizing these events.

Parties And Recreation

New Years Eve 2010

3, 2, 1...Happy New Year! Over 200 people attended the MYC New Years Eve Party at Banyan. Catering from La Pizzeria, the amenities provided by Banyan, and a spin of DJ Matt Ebrani’s greatest hits resulted in a fantastic start to 2010.

Thank you Matthew Zaroovabeli and Igal Nassim, the directors of the Parties and Recreation subcommittee, as well as Yossi Abrahami, Yasmine Rahamanan and the entire MYC, for putting together an awesome night.

Israel And Zionism

Israel Trip Registration

Our community’s continuous passion and support for the state of Israel sends a message from our members young and old – we stand by you, Israel! This year’s MYC Israel Trip will take place starting June 24th and will conclude on July 11th. As of now, forty teenagers have signed up and spots are still open for those born in 1994. The trip will tour every part of Israel from North to South and we welcome anyone new who is interested in joining us!

Thank you Rachel Kamali, Rachel Hakim, and Sean Hakimi for helping organize this voyage!

Mashadi Teen Club Subcommittee

Chanukah Ice Skating

There's nothing like gliding gracefully across the ice with the wind in your hair and the New York City skyline as your backdrop. On Saturday Night, December 12th, buses departed from the Young Mashadi Jewish Center for a night filled with holiday spirits. After a special menorah lighting at YMJC, the MYC took seventy-five participants to the famous Rosa's Pizza in the Empire State Building and skated at Bryant Park.

New Years Eve Bash

Seventy-eight teenagers gathered at 130 Steamboat for the MTC 2010 New Years Eve Bash. With a lounge setup, the night included dinner from La Pizzeria, live music by the talented DJ David Nadri, and a countdown on the big screen.

Many thanks to Igal Nassim and Jessica Kashinejad for arranging two successful MTC events.

Culture Club

Movie Night @ 130

The Culture Club recently launched a series of movie nights at 130 Steamboat. On January 4th, forty people gathered to watch *Inglourious Basterds*, one of the year's most critically acclaimed and popular films. The second movie night was on January 18th where we watched golden globe nominee for best picture, *500 Days of Summer*. On February 1st, *The Hurt Locker* played on the big screen at 130.

The MYC would like to thank to Rachel Hakim and Nicole Rahaman for getting the Movie Night tradition started.

Health and Fitness

Mashadi Soccer League

The health and fitness subcommittee is launching its 3rd season of the Mashadi Soccer League. With 42 community

players, we hope to begin the series of games at the Shaare Shalom Gym right after Passover. There will be six teams and seven games, with semifinals and finals for the four best teams.

MYC thanks David Karimzadeh and Rachel Kamali for giving the Health and Fitness subcommittee a kick-start into 2010.

Substance Abuse

Teen Forum

MYC plans on having a Teen Forum, as we have in past years, focusing on the dangers threatening teen students with regard to drugs and alcohol. The tentative date of the program is set for April. More info to be announced!

Special thanks to the 130 Board and Central Board for your continuous support on MYC functions. We hope to lead a successful term by your example!



The New MYC Board from top to bottom, left to right: Row 1: Igal Nassim, Jasmine Dilmanian, Matthew Zaroovabeli, Nicole Rahaman, David Karimzadeh. Row 2: Shana Hazghiyan, Adin Levian, Mosheh Aziz, Stephanie Nematzadeh, Rachel Kamali. Row 3: Sheina Hakimi (Secretary), Andy Levian (Vice President), Steve Kohan (President), Yasmine Rahaman (Treasurer). Missing from photo: Jason Hakimi.

Community Debates

Would Memberships Work for our Community?

Bahman Kamali

The Mashadi Community's synagogue and operational expenses have traditionally been pledged by our community members on a voluntary basis. From time to time, the question is posed as to whether or not our community would benefit from imposing a synagogue or community membership fee. After having reviewed this possibility and having spoken to several fundraising professionals and many synagogues that are losing their members and being forced to close down or merge, I would like to share my own point of view.

The following are some of the reasons why a community or synagogue membership may actually hurt the Mashadi Community more than it might help it, in addition to an explanation of why our current system actually does work.

- Who says we do not have a membership? What we have is a volunteer membership fee: every year, community members voluntarily pledge on the Holidays and donate the amount that they feel they can pay, anywhere from twenty-six dollars to thousands of dollars.
- If a membership is imposed and certain people do not pay for any reason, they may be embarrassed to attend or use community services. Membership of any kind implies that non-members are not welcome. Are we ready to not accept people due to the fact that they can not afford it, or that they are not generous enough, or that they are indifferent to the community? That could potentially turn away anywhere from five to fifteen percent of the community.
- Affiliation to any religion in the world is free. It does not cost any money to be Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. Why should it cost money to be a Jew in America? Observing Judaism is a difficult commitment as is. Why make it more difficult?
- Already, our community raises close to \$2.5 million a year (seventy-five percent from voluntary pledges on High Holidays), and the operational expense of the community is, on average, about \$2.5 million. Therefore, we do not have any major issue with raising the operational costs, even in a bad year. The reason our community is in debt nearly \$3 million is due to the capital investment at YMJC, which was actually at \$5.0M two years ago. The current Central Board is making a special effort to reduce this debt through

innovative fundraising methods.

- According to a UJA study on assimilation (which several Mashadis, including myself, were involved in), one important reason for the current high assimilation rate is membership fees. The conclusion of the study was that at first, membership fees work. But, as soon as a recession hits, one of the first moves that families make is to stop paying their various memberships since they need to cut down on expenses that are not absolutely necessary. And when they end their memberships, they usually are embarrassed to participate again, so they quietly withdraw and do not reinstate. Therefore, this dynamic gradually leads to non-affiliation of the masses (which is what happened to many Jewish families in the last twenty to thirty years). However, within most Mizrachi communities – including our own – where membership fees have never been implemented, we see the highest attendance and participation. Why should we take a chance to lose this status?

Therefore, in my opinion, the best model to create additional new funds for the community, on top of the pledges we already receive, is to allow dedicated fundraising at people's homes for the causes that they believe in the most. For example, over the past year, in addition to all the pledges at our synagogues, we had \$150,000 raised for the Angel Fund and \$180,000 for Jewish Education at several family residences, and \$200,000 for Israel Charities that we raised by joining forces with the Iranian American Jewish Federation. Likewise, this model of dedicated fundraising can be used again for future projects that require capital.

All of this, so that G-d forbid we do not lose any community member for the reason that they cannot afford a membership, or are indifferent about being a part of the community, or are too stingy with their money.

Some people set a certain budget for themselves for pledging on Yom Kippur. However, if they are invited to ten events for ten different community programs, the same people might pledge an additional \$500 or \$1,000 at each of those events. But if we impose a membership fee, we will not have enough of a reason to repeatedly tap into people's money! People donate more voluntarily for the cause that they believe in the most.

If you have an opinion about this issue, please share your thoughts with *Megillah* for the *Community Debates* column.

Global Mashadi Jewish Federation Report

Beit Mashad: Our Community Old Age Home in Israel

Bahman Kamali

During the Global Mashadi Jewish Federation Conference that was held in Jerusalem on July 6th, 2009, the Beit Mashad Old Age Home of Israel gave a report, and asked the Global Mashadi Community to organize an advisory committee to their current Board. This advisory committee was formed and a meeting was already held on January 7th, 2010 in Israel. From the USA, Mr. Albert Hezghia and Mr. Bahman Kamali were present. The main topic discussed was regarding the future management of Beit Mashad and its By-Laws. The following is a report of this magnificent facility's history, current management, and future plans.



The vision to create Beit Mashad started in the late 1980s by the efforts of women within the community of Israel as well as Mashadi leaders in England, Italy, USA, Israel, and Germany. The project was entirely funded by Mashadis from around the world, and cost approximately seven to eight million dollars to build; the Home is located in one of the most prime areas of Israel, conveniently in Herzelia Pituach.

Currently there are over 140 elderly members of this old age home, of which forty members are Mashadi (first priority is always given to those from the Mashadi community). The home is ideal for those who are elderly; there are different levels of care taking based on every individual's needs. Beit Mashad is obligated to operate a kosher kitchen, maintain a Synagogue, and preserve Mashadi traditions.



הפדרציה העולמית של יהודי משהד
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Thank G-d, the facility has been financially self-sufficient for all the years that it has been in operation, and its funds are solely for the purpose of re-investing in the home, itself. In fact, those running Beit Mashad have been able to save some money, which is solely reserved for future possible improvements and repairs in the building. They are also planning to create a new fund for subsidies for anyone in the Mashadi community who may need it. Additionally, anyone who moves to Israel and lives there for six months can get subsidies from the government.

This institution has recently created its By-Laws and the ownership of this center is given with the following share distribution: for Israel, New York, and Milan, two shares each, and for London and Hamburg, one share each.

The Board of Directors is composed of members according to this share distribution.

For nearly nineteen years, the Board has worked voluntarily and tirelessly to make sure that the home be a success and a welcoming place for all, and just recently, they have hired an expert organization that specializes in running and managing retirement facilities.

In order to appreciate this magnificent structure that our last generation had the vision to create, the Board of Beit Mashad is asking from Mashadis in England, Italy, and American to come and visit the facility whenever they are in Israel, and they invite

the American Mashadi youth of the Bar Mitzvah Trips and Singles Trip to make a stop there whenever they are on their tours. All they ask is that their board be informed in advance.

The Mashadi Old Age Home in Israel is a magnificent facility that we are very fortunate to have for our global community, and it is a great model for a Mashadi Heritage Center in Israel that our community can hopefully have one day.

Community News

Establishment of New Education Fund Laleh Hannah Nassimi Memorial Foundation

The Mashadi Cultural and Education Committee (Higher Education Committee) is pleased to announce that Mr. Albert Nassimi and Family have recently established the "Laleh Hannah Nassimi Memorial Foundation" for the promotion of higher education within the Mashadi community.

The Foundation will provide financial assistance to qualified applicants selected on the basis of both need and merit. The Foundation will be capitalized with \$250,000 and is intended to encourage Mashadi youth to pursue higher levels of education after earning their undergraduate degrees. Funds are available to qualifying Mashadis worldwide, for pursuing post-graduate studies in the United States only.

The Foundation is being established by the Nassimi family on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the passing of their beloved wife and mother, Laleh Nassimi, who was exceptionally gifted academically and, for the standards of her time, obtained a high level of educational achievement. Throughout her whole life, she maintained a keen interest and curiosity for knowledge, and it is in her memory and spirit, that this Foundation is being created.

The Foundation will be administered as a separate Endowment Fund under the umbrella of the Mashadi Higher Education Committee. It is the intention of the Foundation to commence funding beginning with the Fall 2010 semester. The Higher Education Committee strongly encourages all qualifying post-graduate students to apply. Applications will be available in July 2010 at www.mycweb.com. For all inquiries and to submit an application for the upcoming Fall 2010 semester, please contact Mr. Marty Bassaly at 516-277-4023.

The Mapping of the Jewish Genome Project

A team of doctors and scientists from the NYU School of Medicine, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and Israel's Sheba Medical Center are in the process of mapping the Jewish Genome, in which they are trying to identify the exact nature of Jewish people's DNA.

This process, which is being based in part on small blood and tissue samples recently collected from volunteer participants at Shaare Shalom, seeks to identify what is the exact genetic makeup of Jews, and how our genes differ from those of Ashkenasim and non-Jews. The study also seeks to find the frequency of the "Kohanim Gene," and to better understand the effect that our community's historically insular nature may have had on our gene pool. For more information, please contact Dr. Gidon Akler at (646) 515-0473.

The History of the Mashadi Jews

This past November and December, in loving memory of the late Mr. Behrouz Dilmanian, the Mashadi Heritage and History Committee presented a discussion series regarding the history of the Mashadi Jewish community. The series combined elements of both lecture and discussion, as various participants, including Bahman Kamali, Amir Kohan, Bernard Livi, Lerone Edalati, Nabila Levian, and Michelle Sabzevari shared their research and insights into how the Mashadi Jewish community came into existence and how it has survived to this day through centuries of hardship and migration.

The series began by focusing on the origin of the Mashadi Jews, tracing back to the Jews in the Sinai dessert, through the Diaspora, and eventually to the Persian town of Kazvin, where in 1746, Nader Shah brought forty of these families to Mashad to safeguard his money. This community grew over the years, as did the Mashadi Muslims' antipathy and jealousy toward them, leading to the infamous Allah-Dadi pogrom of 1839, in which the Mashadi Jews were brutalized and forced to either convert to be Jadid-Al-Islam, or be killed.

Many Mashadi Jews converted, and many fled to other territories, including Herat and various parts of Europe, but most feigned conversion in public, while steadfastly maintaining their Jewish identity and traditions in private.

The period of pretending to be Jadid-Al-Islam lasted until 1926, when Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power in Iran, bringing religious freedom to minority groups. Another setback occurred in 1946 when Nazi sympathizers in Iran incited riots by accusing the Mashadi Jews of using children's blood to bake their matzohs for Pesach. By 1955, many Mashadi Jews had immigrated to Israel, but most that stayed in Iran moved en masse to Tehran, where they prospered during the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi. Muslim fanatics fomented change in Iran throughout the 1970's, culminating in the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the ascendance of Ayatollah Khomeini, by which time most of the remaining Mashadi Jews left Iran for either New York, Israel, England, Italy, or Germany. In New York, the Mashadi Jews have grown and thrived, starting in Queens and eventually moving to Great Neck, where they have now become one of the most prominent and influential of Jewish groups.

This series provided an excellent overview of the historical roots of the Mashadi Jewish community, with many pivotal moments being pinpointed by the various researchers. Thanks to all who participated; we hope that the community will continue to explore and convey its historical background to the future generations of the Mashadi Jews.

Community News

Jewish Education Scholarship Fund Benefit

Rodney Hakim

On Sunday morning, January 10, 2010, a gathering was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fatollah Hematian in order to raise funds toward the furtherance of Jewish education. It was an inspiring event with a strong turnout of Mashadi Jews attending the morning session, which was comprised of a discussion about Jewish education with Mr. Hematian and Mr. Nassim Bassalian, and which was capped off with a performance by the dynamic singer, Avi Peretz.

The focus of the fundraiser was Jewish education and Mr. Hematian, a man who has been blessed with great success, said that when someone is granted good fortune from G-d in their life, it is incumbent upon them to help others succeed, as well. He posited his view of the five chief components of achieving good fortune and success as a Jew. The first is to always have faith in Hashem, and to love, trust, and fear

G-d, as He is the One who not only gives us life, but everything we have in life. The second is to be respectful of one's parents, as they are the ones that give us life in this world and raise us and teach us our values. The third is to get married, as marriage is at the heart of creating a Jewish family; to find a loving Jewish partner to spend your life and raise a family with is in itself a great triumph. The fourth is to keep Shabbat, as Shabbat is our eternal covenant with G-d, and the day in which we spend the most time renewing our knowledge and appreciation of the Torah, as well as spending time with our family and fellow Jews. The last is supporting Jewish education, as this is the most essential element in ensuring that our children carry on our values, traditions, and culture into the next generation, and as such, keep Judaism alive. The attendees expressed their appreciation and admiration for Mr. Hematian, his hospitality, and his support of Judaism and Jewish education, and kept the applause going for the next speaker, Mr. Nassim Bassalian.

The esteemed Mr. Bassalian echoed much of what Mr. Hematian had to say, adding that the Torah is the lifeblood of the Jewish people, and that the study of Torah is essential to maintaining our Jewish identity. He stressed the importance of Talmud Torah, the long running Jewish education program for our youths as they prepare for their Bar- and Bat-Mitzvahs, and how important it is for the new generation (and all future generations) to have this learning program available to them.



From right: Mr Nassim Bassalian and Mr. Fatollah Hematian

The learning must not end when our youths enter their teens, though, as this is one of the most crucial times in their learning and development as people, so Mr. Bassalian discussed the need for Yeshiva education, and for more such learning facilities to be available to our community. He suggested that we need to be brave and take the first steps toward creating these new facilities for Jewish learning, and that the more we provide Jewish education for our community, the more unity and togetherness it will provide us as the community grows and heads into the future. After further discussion and refreshments, the event came to a close with a rousing performance by one of the most popular Jewish singers in our area, the wonderful Avi Peretz, who regaled the crowd with a number of great Jewish songs.

The fundraiser at Mr. Hematian's house was a great success, with a significant amount of money being raised by the many in attendance, who resoundingly supported the themes of the discussion, including having faith in Hashem, respecting our parents, loving the Torah, keeping Shabbat, using our own success to help others succeed, continuing to seek good Jewish marriages, and supporting Jewish education. The overarching idea was that the future generations must learn our history, values, and Torah, and it made for a very compelling argument toward the creation of additional Jewish learning facilities for our community. May it be a great source of unity and joy.

Community News

Senator Evan Bayh Visits Members of the Mashadi Community

Rodney Hakim

On October 25th, 2009, Arezou and Mehran Hakimian hosted a gathering of several prominent members of the Mashadi Jewish community to meet with U.S. Senator Evan Bayh. Senator Bayh is an outspoken supporter of the State of Israel, and is actively involved in creating legislation to help the U.S. prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. The evening provided an opportunity to learn more about the Senator and also some of the intricacies of the U.S.'s policies pertaining to both Iran and Israel.

The Indiana senator discussed a variety of issues and fielded numerous questions, including one that was on everyone's mind; how to prevent a nuclear Iran. One avenue is the imposition of sanctions and political pressure by President Obama, which is at the heart of the legislation Senator Bayh recently authored, the *Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act*, which is the one of the strongest pieces of legislation regarding Iran in recent history, and which passed unanimously through Congress. The U.S. hopes that these sanctions will be particularly effective right now because of Iran's political instability, and that Iran will act in good faith and allow the U.N. inspectors to fully examine their nuclear facilities.

The U.S. must be careful in preventing Iran from stalling, though, and attempting to play games while they develop nuclear-grade weaponry. A less desirable option than the sanctions is to begin military attacks against Iran, but that is a last resort that the U.S. and the international community would like to avoid. The Senator pointed out that if those attacks ultimately do have to take place, it will have been necessary to impose the sanctions and political pressure first, so as to convince Europe, Russia, China, and the rest of the world that all diplomatic options have been exhausted, and that despite their hesitation or commercial interests with Iran, they must stand united with us, as no other options remain.

Neither the U.S. nor Israel can risk the outcome of Iran becoming a nuclear state and bombing Israel. Senator Bayh is optimistic that the U.S. and Israel will get through this current



crisis, much like we've gotten through other terrible crises in the past. While he does not expect Iran or the Arab countries to make peace with Israel or recognize it as the legitimate Jewish State anytime soon, he suggested that the peace process might start with a few small steps, such as a cultural exchange, allowing El Al flights in Arab countries, and encouraging the Palestinian people to demand schools, hospitals, and peace from their

leaders. Senator Bayh asked the audience if, being Iranians, they could give him any helpful perspectives on how to deal with Iran by suggesting a combination of punishments and rewards that would help bring Iran to the right place, but those in attendance did not think such a combination was possible.

When Senator Bayh was asked about President Obama's stance on Israel, he replied that Obama strongly supports Israel, and that he was not opposed to Israel building within its existing settlements. He urged us not to get too caught up in rhetoric and semantics, as much of it is meant to assuage the Arab countries, and to increase their support of the U.S. and its policies toward Israel and Iran. Senator Bayh said in no uncertain terms that the U.S. supports Israel, that Israel would not be divided or returned to its pre-1967 borders, and that Israel would keep its land. He said that the Palestinians are unfortunately not coming to the negotiating table anytime soon, and that the Senate would not support taking any land away from Israel.

Senator Bayh's visit to Great Neck proved to be an eye-opening evening, with a wide-ranging discussion of issues relating to U.S. policy regarding Israel and Iran. We must stand forever united in support of Israel, and be certain to prevent a nuclear Iran.

[Editor's note: Senator Evan Bayh recently announced that he will not seek re-election for a third term in the Senate due to his frustration with the partisan politics plaguing Washington. This article in no way signifies any political allegiances of *Megillah* magazine, its contributors, or of the Mashadi community.]

Israel to the Rescue in Wake of Haitian Catastrophe

On Tuesday, January 12th, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake rattled the last place on Earth that needed any rattling. Haiti, an already impoverished and politically unstable nation in the Caribbean, was inflicted with the devastation of this natural disaster that left, according to various estimates, over 200,000 men, women, and children dead.

Among the first to respond to the victims of the quake were the Israel Defense Forces, who set up field hospitals that garnered much deserved applause from the international community as well as several major American media outlets. The medical team conducted on-site surgeries and treated the wounded, many of whom were on the brink of death. American doctors praised the Israeli medical team for their courageous and risky procedures, delivering babies amid turmoil who perhaps would not have otherwise survived. Not to mention, the Israelis set up tents one full week before the Americans did, and compared to the IDF's hospital, the American one left something to be desired.

Once again, Israel has demonstrated that despite its size, its capabilities in terms of philanthropy as well as technology are not proportionately limited. Through its infinite selflessness and top quality humanitarian aid, Israel remains a force to be reckoned with on the world stage.

Haiti still needs your help. Here are a few organizations through which you can make a difference:

- **The Red Cross** – redcross.org
- **Save the Children** – savethechildren.org
- **AYFA Foundation** – ayfafoundation.org
- **UMJCA's effort** - active.com/donate/umjca-haiti – Our own community's efforts will direct funds to such causes and organizations as the IDF Hospital in Haiti and Chabad of the Caribbean.

“Undercover” Work: Blankets for Haiti

After the colossal natural disaster that struck Haiti this January, the already impoverished Haitian people were stripped of even the most basic necessities. Quaint homes became mountains of rubble and mothers were torn away from their children as the Earth literally came apart before their eyes. An immeasurable number of survivors of the earthquake were left without food, jobs, families, homes...and blankets.

Normally a place overshadowed by the comparatively wealthier nation on the opposite end of the tropical island, the Dominican Republic, Haiti has been receiving a great deal of aid world wide from every nation and organization imaginable. One local effort was a collaborative project in New York City headed by the self-proclaimed “down-towner,” Katrin Yaghoubi-Sosnick, called NYC Kids Help Haiti. On January 24th, a group of a few determined Mashadi down-towners collected blankets at the Yaghoubi-Sosnick residence.

In total, the joint effort resulted in the collection of over 1,000 blankets, pillowcases, and sheets and was considered a great success. After the new and gently worn items were gathered, children from all around the city participated in decorating several pillowcases with drawings and well wish for the inflicted children an ocean away.

The activity was organized through the AYFA Foundation, an organization “sustained by advocate support” that networks with donor hospitals and various health organizations in order to collect and allocate medical supplies. All of the donations from NYC Kids Help Haiti were airlifted to Haiti on Wednesday, February 3rd on a plane along with former President Bill Clinton. “[The blankets] will be filling up the Clinton plane,” one participant of the project noted on her Facebook page, “and more importantly, give some comfort to the thousands of Haitians living in tents.”



Lea Malul, the Public Affairs Director of Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon, Israel, wrote the following letter after she attended the special wedding of our community members, Regina and David Sianes on January 3rd, 2010.

The bride and groom and their families had decided to make a donation to the Barzilai hospital in honor of all their guests in order to promote the important work of the hospital.

We have all been to amazing weddings but some just take the cake.

This last wedding I went to was something special and I say this after just planning a wedding and giving away my own daughter a few months ago.

So I know the drill from both sides and still I was amazed and feeling the warmth from this family and their generosity to their kids, their family, their friends and a little extra for the State of Israel.

Dancing and eating until after midnight especially after a 12 hour plane ride from Israel is not my usual daily activity. But the families would not accept no for an answer. Neither from the moment of the invitation nor from the moment I stepped in the room. Everything perfectly planned and prepared, the chupa was very emotional, the flowers and the decorations made it seem like a fairytale down to the heart shaped lollipops.

And this from a family I have only known a few months.

Adam Hajibai, Ping Pong Champion

Adam Hajibai, the sixteen-year-old son of Violet and Moses Hajibai, managed to win the adults Mashadi Ping Pong Championship. Last year, Adam lost in the semifinals of the tournament; however, with lots of practice and instruction from the Mashadi Ping Pong Champion of the '90s, his father, Moses, Adam boosted his skills and techniques. Interestingly enough, Adam's opponent in the championship was his own cousin and former champion, Michel Nematnejad. Although it was a family affair, the championship game was intense and exciting to watch. When the game ended, the first thing Michel said to his little cousin was, "I'm proud of you." Everyone around Adam is proud of him too.

He is a hard-working student at the North Shore Hebrew Academy High School, as well as a member of their basketball and tennis teams. He also finds the time to play on our own Mashadi Magic basketball team.

Keep up the good work, Adam!

Letter to Megillah

From the first minute, I realized I was meeting unique warm beautiful people who welcomed me into their family.

So the 12 hour flight was inevitable. You see I am the Public Affairs Director for Barzilai Medical Center, Ashkelon, Israel. I meet with many lovely people who wish to assist Barzilai but most do not end up welcoming me to a fairytale with heart shaped lollipops. Most do not surprise me with wonderful Barzilai logos and donations noted on each table. From the bride and groom, David and Regina a real mitzvah and a unselfish act on such a day.

I applaud the parents Shmuel and Roya Sianes for raising the kids who have a love of Israel and Zionism in their hearts.

Barzilai Medical Center is Israel's front line hospital on the Gaza boarder and even with the constant barrage of hundreds of patients and Kassam rockets landing across the boarder, the medical center continues to provide the best in care, research and stability to an unstable region.

Their wedding, their gift will always be in my heart and remembered by all of us here at Barzilai Medical Center. Their gift bring us closer to providing a fairytale ending for many in the Gaza region and one day may cake and heart shaped lollipops be crossing over the boarder instead of rockets.

Lea Malul
Public Affairs Director - Barzilai Medical Center
www.FriendsofBarzilai.com



Mazal Tov

Mazal Tov To The New Baby Boys Of...

Poya and Annette Dilmanian
Ely and Ava Nassimiha
Leon and Sara Manoucheri
Fred and Natasha Asher
Emil and Corinne Hakimi
Justin and Sarah Hakimian
Joey and Jasmine Kashimallak
Jacob and Hedy Hakimi
David and Belka Liviem
Dr. Robert and Claudia Rachmani
Moossa and Elizabeth Levian
Oded and Lobat Hakimian
Shachar and Natalie Cohen
Raphael and Gabriella Nassimi
Peyman and Sheena Rafinia
Kia and Dorothy Rahamanim
Allen and Rebecca Enayatian
Kami and Dina Kalaty
Eddie and Romina Enayatian
Denis and Nazak Namdar
Farhad and Romina Ben Zakarya
David and Aimee (Dilmanian) Chabbott

Mazal Tov To The New Baby Girls Of...

Raymond and Vanessa Hakimian
Jackie and Shirley Kamali
Tony and Arezou Carmili
Navid and Shirley Kalatizadeh
Moshe and Monica Enayatian
Simon and Nicole Nassimi
Kenny and Adina Kalatizadeh
Edo and Nusha Livi
Kami and Dina Kalaty

Bar-Mitzvahs

Maxwell, son of Benny and Mojdeh Aziz
Kevin, son of Eshagh and Jila Kashimallak
Yoav, son of David and Sharona Arjang
Nathan, son of Jan and Fariba Namdar
Bradley, son of Kamyar and Mahtab Zar
Benjamin, son of Yoni and Raquelle Nitzani
Tyler, son of Siamak and Sudabeh Zar
Jeremy, son of Danny and Liora Livi
Zachary, son of Bijan and Vida Nabavian
Daniel, son of Maurice and Hediqa Azizi
Brent, son of Faramaz and Sigolit Hakimian
Daniel, son of Edmond and Rina Dilamani
Rafael, son of Michael and Nanaz Hakimian
Koby, son of Shlomo and Hilly Soleiman
Ariel, son of David and Katherine Sabzjadid
Simon, son of Drs. Khosrow and Minoo (Dilmanian) Kashfi
David, son of Allen and Fariba Levian
Emanuel, son of Gabriel and Kathrine Livian

Marriages

Jason and Ofra (Idjadi Nissani) Fuller (Canada)
Jason and Jennifer Kordvani
Arash and Jessica Dilmanian
Aaron and Nadine Hakimian
Farshid and Shiva Hakimian
Jonathan and Debbie Zaboulani
David and Regina Sianes
Robert and Lily (Moheban Hakim) Brodie
Joshua and Sandra (Sabzevari) Schulman Marcus
Robert and Sara Nowbakht
Justin and Nataly Hakimian
Payam (Moshiach) and Jessica Hakimian

Engagements

Shahin Shaverdi and Emmanuelle Dilmani
Daniel Nassimi and Chantal Hajibay
Rami Moheban and Catherine Haghighat
Neal Hakimi and Diana Nadri
Jeremy Nikfarjam and Raquel Hematian

For future issues of Megillah, those parents who would like their newborn's name to be published, please e-mail your full name and your child's first, middle and/or Hebrew names to MYCNY@aol.com.

Pictures

Left page, clockwise from top left: Joshua and Sandra Schulman Marcus, Jonathan and Debbie Zaboulani, Jason and Jennifer Kordvani, Robert and Sara Nowbakht, Aaron and Nadine Hakimian

Right page, clockwise from top left: Justin and Nataly Hakimian, David and Regina Sianes, Arash and Jessica Dilmanian, Robert and Lily Brodie, Payam (Moshiach) and Jessica Hakimian, Harris and Melody Clark







Heritage Report: Mashadi History in Israel

Mashadi Jewish Heritage Day in Israel

Wednesday, December 30th, 2009
Sion Mehdi

Mr. Sion Mehdi is a Mashadi resident in Netanya, Israel, formerly having lived in England. He was the former Hon. Secretary of The Persian Hebrew Congregation (Mashadi) of London, England, and Hon. Secretary of The World Sephardi Federation.

On a cloud-cast rainy day, a group of Mashadi Jews assembled in the lobby of a hotel in Tel Aviv early in the morning in anticipation of what was to be a memorable day. This was the first organized tour in Israel visiting sites of interest to the Jews of Mashadi descent.

The group consisted of Mashadi Jews from Israel as well as the U.S.A. and was joined by Mr. Beni Nassimi from Italy. Mr. Shmuel Ben-David, a member of the Mashadi Board in Israel, was to be our excellent "Tour Guide" for the day. We boarded our mini-bus to begin our trip.

Our first stop was the **Shabazi Synagogue** in the Neve Tzedek district of Tel Aviv. This was the first synagogue to have been built by Mashadi Jews in Tel Aviv and is of great historical importance to our community. In the pouring rain, we entered the neglected and derelict building, and we were shocked to see the state of the site. The rain was leaking through the roof in many places and making puddles on the floor, the walls were crumbling, the old battered furniture was scattered around and there was a pile of badly damaged prayer books and artifacts stacked to one side. The group was heartbroken to see what had



The dilapidated Shabazi Synagogue in Tel Aviv became of one of the important sites of the Mashadi Jews'



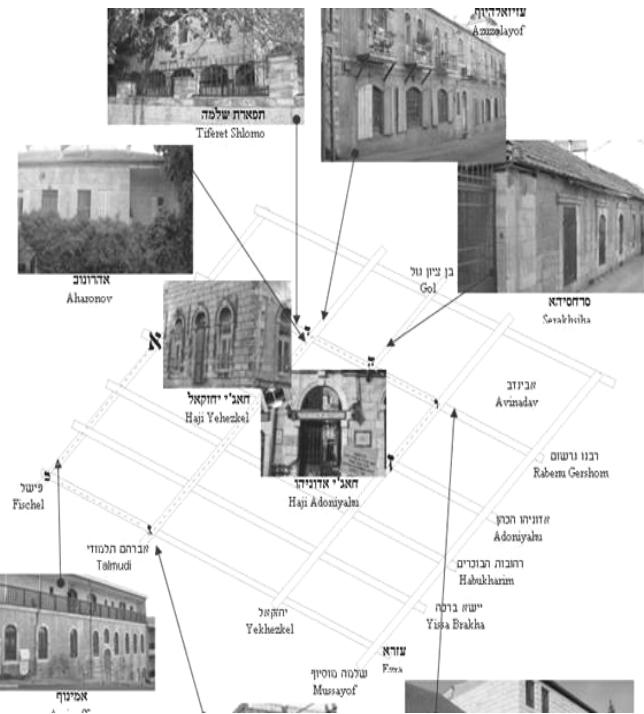
Some of the Israeli, American, and Italian Mashadi Jews who participated in the Heritage Day tour

heritage and history. A sense of nostalgia arose at the sight of the marble memorial boards on the walls with names of so many well-known members of the community.

Before leaving the building, the group resolved that every effort must be made to repair, renovate and maintain this historic building; the Israeli residents in the group undertook the mission of starting a local campaign to raise the initial funds and begin the work as soon as possible, to be followed by the assistance of the global Mashadi community. The group established a heartfelt agreement that under no circumstance should this valuable property be sold and lost from our community.

Our next stop before going on to Jerusalem was the local **Babylonian Museum**. This was built by the local Iraqi community as a memorial to their long and proud history and to exhibit their culture, much of which was unknown to the western Jewish world. Many are ignorant of the contribution that the Iraqi Jews had made to the Jewish people before being driven out of Iraq.

The museum had created a replica of a street in Baghdad, lined with houses and shops showing the interiors, with models of the people doing their work and crafts in authentic costumes as well as materials that had been contributed by Iraqi Jews worldwide. Showcases of their art, clothing, house ware, and religious artifacts led us to a large room where a full-sized Iraqi synagogue was built and with original Torah Scrolls displayed in the *Aaron Kodesh* (the holy ark). Throughout the sanctuary, there were boards of photographs and texts telling their community's story.



Map of Mashadi Sites in the Bokharian Quarter, including Sarakhsia, Haji Adoniyyahu Synagogue, Haji Yehezkel Synagogue, Tiferet Shlomo Yeshiva, and the homes of the Azizollahoff, Harounoff, and Aminoff families.

The Museum and its extensive library is now well established and is visited daily by dozens of visitors, tourists, and most important of all, groups of children from schools all over Israel who are given a tour and exposed to a segment of the Jewish people of whom they had been previously unaware. An Iraqi Jew, Mordechai Ben-Porat, who had served as a member of the Knesset and wanted to preserve his community's heritage, founded the museum. We were most fortunate that he was actually in the building during our visit and we had the opportunity to meet him and hear how he managed to get the museum built. We are thankful to have had the inspiration to follow this example for our own community's benefit.

It was evident that the Jews of Mashad had an equally important story to tell the Jewish world, particularly of our "conversion" to Islam and our "re-emergence" as devout Jews. It was agreed that, with the help of everyone in the community, that a Heritage Center of the Jewish Mashadi Community, possibly in Jerusalem, was a vital project which the Global Mashadi Jewish Federation is planning to undertake. If this project is completed successfully, it will be a centre of immense pride and importance to all Mashadi Jews globally, and will serve as a showpiece to the Jewish world depicting who we are and detailing our fantastic history. It is vital that this succeeds.

Next, we drove to Jerusalem and enjoyed lunch together and then continued our tour to the **Bokharian Quarter**, where the Jews of Mashad first established their presence in the land of Israel at the time of the Turkish Ottoman Empire (maybe even before).

Our first stop was at a building known as **Sarakhsia**, a compounded dwelling and courtyard that had belonged to the Mashadi community. This is now, unfortunately, dilapidated, uninhabited, and very much in need of restoration as part of the Mashadi heritage tribute project. It was sad to see its present condition, particularly as it was typical example of the living conditions and lifestyle of the early Mashadi settlers in Jerusalem.

We then walked around the corner to the **Haji Adoniyyahu Ha'Cohen Synagogue**, built in 1902, where we were joined by members of the Mashadi community of Jerusalem. The Synagogue was well maintained and in constant use; it was thrilling to stand in the place where so many Mashadis had spent their lives and then to say our afternoon *mincha* prayers there.

Equally, it was just as emotional to go on to the **Haji Yehezkel Ha'Levi Synagogue** and see the second famous synagogue built by Mashadi Jews after their enforced haj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

Due to the lack of time, we could only walk past our next stop on the way back to the bus: the prestigious **Tiferet Shlomo Yeshiva and Orphanage** founded by the late Rabbi Yitzhak Bessalian (Elishahoff), z"l., in honor of his teacher and Mashadi communal Rabbi, Ha'Rav HaMekkubal Shlomo Meshiah, z"l., which now houses and teaches hundreds of needy children. We also passed by a number of other sites of Mashadi interest such as the houses of the Azizollahoff, Harounoff, Aminoff families and those of other Mashadi families in the Quarter. It is obvious that more Mashadi heritage tours are needed to do justice to our past, present, and future generations of our community.

Our final stop was back in Holon, near Tel Aviv, as guests of the **Holon Annussei Mashad Center and Synagogue**. After having observed the magnificent marbled synagogue on the upper floor and given a resumé of its history and foundation, we were invited to a dinner (a Persian banquet of sorts) in the hall below, prepared and attended by the members of this congregation. This was surely a fitting ending to a memorable and emotional day. If ever the opportunity should arise, I highly recommend this experience for all present and future "Jadidi", that is, Mashadi Jews.

I would like to thank Mr. Bahman Kamali and all those involved in making this Heritage Day possible and so successful and for enabling me to participate in such an emotional and inspiring day.



Annussei Mashad Center and Synagogue in Holon

On Duty With Roya Gorjian

A mother and a registered nurse who has it all



Roya and Anthony with their children Raphael, Gavriel, Sarah, and Rachel on a recent family vacation

1) When and where were you born? Where did you grow up?

I was born on March 3, 1971 in Tehran, Iran. I came to the United States in 1979, where I resided in Queens and eventually moved to Manhasset in 1988.

2) When were you married? How many children do you have?

I got married in 1992. I have four children. Raphael is sixteen, Gavriel is fourteen, Sarah is nine, and Rachel is seven.

3) Were you working from a young age or did you start working later on, after you had children?

I worked a few smaller jobs but ultimately went back to school when my youngest, Rachel, was two years old.

4) What inspired you to become a nurse?

I always had interest in nursing. I just never got the courage or felt confident enough in myself to go through with it. I knew I

could finally achieve it when my father was ill for many months in the hospital. Staying by his side day in and day out made me realize that it was time to finally pursue my dream of being a registered nurse.

5) Where did you receive your graduate and post-graduate degrees? How long did it take you to complete your studies and to find employment?

I got my BA from Queens College in 1993 in Early Childhood Education with a minor in Hebrew Language. I got my BS from Adelphi University in 2006 in Nursing. I did my internship at North Shore University Hospital's Emergency Room, which was where I realized that wanted to be a critical nurse. I was hired soon after my graduation by North Shore Hospital and now I am studding to be a certified S.A.N.E registered nurse (Sexual assault nurse examiner) which will be completed by April 2010.

6) What are your hours? How does this job differ from a "typical" job, say, in an office?

I got hired for the night shift, which lasts from 7 PM to 7 AM. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine myself working the graveyard shift. The night shift, as hard as it may seem, works very well with my lifestyle. After a night shift, I get home around 7:30, I see my kids and often see my girls off to the bus. I get a few hours of sleep and I start my day at around 2 PM, when my boys get home. The girls arrive an hour later. We do homework and have dinner together. I drive them to their after school activities and, before I know it, its 6:30 and I am off to work again.

Working in the ED (Emergency Department) is very gratifying. There is something new to learn and see every day. Its very rewarding when I get a very sick person and we are able to turn it all around and get them better, all just within a few hours.

7) Do you find that you have any major lifestyle differences when comparing yourself to other Mashadi mothers your age?

My lifestyle is only as different as I make it or want it to be. My day starts out very hectic and busy and ends the same way as any other mother's.

8) How do you find the right balance between work life and home life?

I am very lucky. I am blessed with a wonderful family. Although at times it may get challenging, but at the end of the

day, I have a very supportive family. My children and husband are very helpful and understanding.

9) Are there people who do not approve of the career path you have chosen? Do you ever regret it?

There will always be those people who will disagree with your choices and decisions in life. I did what I thought was best for me and I have absolutely no regrets.

10) Had you ever considered any other career choices?

I did consider other career choices but no matter what I started to do, I was never truly gratified. I would lose interest and there was no passion to it.

11) Are you passionate about your career because it is lucrative or because it is exactly what you want to do?

I am passionate because it is exactly what I always wanted to do. There is always something new that challenges my mind.

12) What advice do you have for Mashadi youth, specifically young women, who are looking for a career today?

My only advice is to chase your dreams and your desires. You are never too young or old to learn something new. Choose a career path that allows you to expand your mind.

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drahmanan@penakahn.com

Megillah Is Expanding Its Team

We are looking for volunteers and interns from the community who have experience and interest in the following positions:

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For more information Please contact:

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Jericho City 1994: A Close Call in a Time of Tension

Farrokh Hakim

In January 1994, my family and I went on a trip to Israel, to visit our relatives there and to introduce some of our young ones to the Holy Land for the first time. We were having a wonderful vacation, visiting such places as Eilat, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. Toward the end of our trip, we decided to visit the Dead Sea, but despite our best efforts, we were having difficulty finding a cab big enough to accommodate our large group. The hotel's concierge eventually connected us with an Arab cab driver with a larger van, and off we went to the Dead Sea. Little did we know that we would be taking a detour through Jericho City along the way.

Our Arab cab driver, an unassuming and bespectacled man, was supposed to take us straight to the Dead Sea, but he drove us into Jericho City first, and suggested that we walk around and look through the local shops and markets. Jericho City, a part of the West Bank, and a central area for Palestinian activity, was months away from being handed over from Israeli to Palestinian possession. As such, there was a palpable sense of tension there, with photos of Yasser Arafat adorning the walls of many of the small shops, and the locals giving us some very strange looks. I served in the Israel Army myself in my youth, and my army training and experience told me to be extra cautious in this potentially hostile environment.

My son and I stepped into a small shop to look at some of the dishes and things on display, and the shop owner began conversing with us in English. Within a few moments, the shop owner seemed to grow very excited, and wanted us to tell him where we were from. At the same time, a few young Palestinian men walked in the front door of the shop, essentially blocking off the entrance. They were all admiring one of the ubiquitous Arafat posters while the shop owner waited for my response. I replied that we are from America, but that we are originally from Iran. The shop owner and the Palestinian men looked at us strangely, almost menacingly. I thought for a moment, and added that in Iran, we were Jadiid-Al-Islam. The Palestinians suddenly grew very happy, and the tension disappeared from



what might have been a dangerous moment. The men then pointed at the photo of Arafat, urging me to admire it with them. I equivocated by saying that Arafat was the smartest of the Palestinians, much to their delight. Little did they know what I truly meant, which was that Arafat was taking advantage of the Palestinians, using the money meant to help them to serve his own greed and build his opulent palaces.

My son and I exited the shop and gathered the rest of the family, returning to the van and having the Arab driver take us to the Dead Sea, despite his suggestions of showing us more of Jericho City. The Dead Sea was calming and well worth the trip, and we left Israel with many wonderful memories. In regard to our detour through Jericho City, only Hashem knows if we were truly in danger or not that day, but my army instincts kicked in, advising me that any way to avoid tension between Jews and Arabs in a hotly contested piece of land would be advisable. Who knew that invoking the name Jadiid-Al-Islam, a signifier of the forced conversion from Judaism to Islam, and one of the darkest periods in Persian Jewish history, would be the most helpful tool in alleviating the seemingly tense situation with the Palestinians in Jericho City that day. Our thanks to Hashem for keeping us safe and healthy, and hopefully, for peace and safe travels for all our Jewish brethren in Israel in the future.

Thirty Years

Parham Zar (*Dedicated to my son, Mateen*)

On July 13, 1979, two days before my 13th birthday, my family and I left Iran. For my parents, the decision to leave was a struggle. As Jews, our fate and our future in Iran was uncertain. I remember one dark, ominous night, when the stench of burnt rubber and the ugly sight of sandbags and makeshift trenches were beginning to overtake Tehran and the decision to leave was winning the argument, I witnessed my father, with tear-filled eyes, telling my mother that it was not easy for him to leave the grave of his mother forever. I can still close my eyes and see the look of utter defeat and helplessness in his tired face. To this day, I cannot fathom how our parents gathered the strength to plow their deep and matted roots from the land of their parents, of their grandparents, and of 2,000 years of ancestors. At the end, they decided to leave. My mom would leave with the kids to West Covina, near Los Angeles, where my older brother had been studying for about a year. The plan was for my dad to join us in a few months, which eventually, turned out to be nearly six years. There was so much that they had to plan and finagle in a very short time to arrange our emigration. They worked tirelessly for months to arrange for passports, visas, school applications, money, and much more. But with all the planning, the arrangements, and the finagling, they simply forgot one thing: I was becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

My two older brothers had Bar Mitzvahs worthy of any young Jewish boy. They had their early morning synagogue readings, with dozens of family members cheering, "yelping" and throwing hard candy. My brothers, in their time, had taken their rightful place among the Jewish people, with prayer, pride and celebration, surrounded with family, friends, and love. They had their party with even more friends, family, celebration and dancing. It was only logical that I would have the same. I had studied hard for two summers. I was ready. I could picture myself standing in the presence of my parents and family, and with the loudest and clearest voice declare, "Blessed are You, LORD, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season." But destiny, as it turned out, had other plans.

It's amazing how many stories and how many plans were swept away by the broom of a revolution, but mine did not really hit me...until recently.

We moved to West Covina, and soon to Los Angeles. The profound effect of the move for me, my siblings, and for thousands of teenage Iranian immigrants, was that we had to simply grow up quickly. Our days were long and full of plans, but not plans that should occupy the summer of a thirteen-year-old. I had become the eyes, ears and tongue for my mother. We would spend our days walking the streets of Los Angeles, first in



search of an apartment, then for all the basics that make a home, then for schools. Later, we would hit the empty pavements in a city where no one walked, in search of a lawyer to help us secure a Green Card.

Almost a month into our exile, on a hot August day, my mom woke me up and told me to get ready. I asked her what she had planned for the day. She replied, "Your Bar Mitzvah." I had almost completely forgotten about that. Initially, I thought to myself, how can we celebrate my Bar Mitzvah when my dad is not even here? Next, the panic set in. I had not practiced in a while, and I was not sure if I remembered. I said nothing. So, on that hot August day, like all other days of that month, my mother and I left our apartment, hit the empty pavements, grabbed a bus, and ended up on Fairfax Avenue. We walked a few blocks up Fairfax until we reached a store front, which appeared to me from the outside to be a bookstore.

As we entered, we were greeted by a black-suited Orthodox man. He asked us why we were there. My mom asked me to explain to him in English that I was there to be "Bar-Mitzvahed." I am not sure the man completely understood. After a long, puzzled look at the two of us, he led me to the back of the store, pulled out a Talit and Teffilin set, handed them to me, and stood beside me in silence. I honestly cannot remember the rest. I simply do not know what I did or how long it took. All I remember is the profound feeling of embarrassment I had for imposing on that nice man.

Many years later, a wise Rabbi told me that having a Bar Mitzvah is not the same as becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Indeed, whether or not I had a Bar Mitzvah, I had already become one by virtue of being who I was, who my parents were, and on whose shoulders my skinny legs stood. Nevertheless, what the thirteen-year-old boy perceived was no hoopla, no fanfare, no yelping, no family and friends, and no dancing. That was his Bar Mitzvah.

In November 2009, almost thirty years after that hot August day, I honored my son - my first-born - as he became a Bar Mitzvah. He fulfilled this privilege, in the presence of G-d, his parents, grandparents, family, friends and 2,000 years of ancestry. Unlike me, but definitely with me, he did wrap the Teffilin around his long and slender arm, place the headpiece upon his precious head, and walk onto the Altar. He did recite the holy prayers, read from the Torah, and he did proudly accept his responsibilities as a Son of the Commandment. He did all of this surrounded with his family, friends and love. Later, he did have his celebration.

As for me, I stood beside him, overwhelmed with my thoughts, humbled beyond belief, with eyes full of tears, and thankful beyond measure. Above all, I celebrated.

Burglary Prevention Home Invasion Safety Tips

On a recent Shabbat morning, a representative of the Nassau County Security/Police Information Network (SPIN) came to speak at the Young Mashadi Jewish Center to address the recent spate of burglaries and home invasions that have rattled Great Neck. The officer discussed the burglars' tendencies. He stressed the quickness with which the crooks work, breaking through front doors and running up into bedrooms in search of money and valuables, aiming for maximum efficiency by getting in and out within two minutes, while police response triggered by alarm systems takes about five minutes. The officer also referenced the brazenness of the recent invasions, and the burglars' unfortunate willingness to become violent if confronted. The officer advised against keeping large amounts of money and jewelry at home, offering the following suggestions to protect the residents of Great Neck from being victimized:

1. Check your home for all possible entry points and any weaknesses that they may have.
2. Check for overgrown shrubbery and trees; maintain clear lines of sight for your entrances and driveway. Trim shrubs to a height of three feet, and tree canopies should be trimmed up to eight feet. Eliminate hiding areas around entrances.
3. Check exterior lighting; this includes the back and sides of the home. Try to maintain uniform lighting, and eliminate dark spots and shadows.
4. Check windows and door locks; make sure they are in working order. Install a wide-angle door viewer that permits you to look outside before opening the door.
5. Lock all doors, windows and garage whenever possible, prior to leaving your residence, going to bed, or leaving on vacation.
6. Move and secure items that could be used to facilitate entry through ground floor windows; make sure that basement windows cannot be pulled open to allow entry.
7. At night, close your drapes, blinds and window treatments as a deterrent. If the subjects cannot see into your home, they may be reluctant to enter.
8. Set your alarm before going to bed. You may consider



having a panic button installed near the bed, or using a wireless remote alarm keychain or pendant. Have a telephone near the bed.

9. Leave an interior light on, or use a timer to turn the light on and off. Leave a radio or television on when out of the house.
10. Discontinue any deliveries while away on business or vacation. Arrange for family or friends to visit your home while you're away.
11. Take time to inventory, photograph and have an appraisal conducted on valuable items. Prepare a videotape of your home's contents and store it in a safe place. Keep valuables out of the master bedroom. Store them in a safe or a safety deposit box.
12. Mark your property using an engraving tool for identification.
13. When approaching or leaving your home, look for suspicious persons or vehicles.
14. As a deterrent, vary your routine.
15. Start a neighborhood watch.
16. If you discover that your home has been burglarized, DO NOT ENTER! Immediately call the police by dialing 911.

Irena Sendler

The woman who saved 2,500 babies during the Holocaust



Irena Sendler, was a Roman Catholic who created a network of rescuers in Poland who smuggled about 2,500 Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto in World War II, some of them in coffins. She died last year (May 2008 in Warsaw). She was 98.

Mrs. Sendler was head of the children's bureau of Zegota, an underground organization set up to save Jews after the Nazis invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. Soon after the invasion, approximately 450,000 Jews, about 30 percent of Warsaw's population, were crammed into a tiny section of the city and barricaded behind seven-foot-high walls.

On April 19, 1943, the Nazis began what they expected would be a rapid liquidation of the ghetto. It took them more than a month to quell the Warsaw ghetto uprising. By then, only about 55,000 Jews were still alive; most of them were sent to death camps. Also by then, however, Mrs. Sendler's group of about 30 volunteers, mostly women, had managed to slip hundreds of infants, young children and teenagers to safety.

"She was the inspiration and the prime mover for the whole network that saved those 2,500 Jewish children," Deborah Dwork, the Rose professor of Holocaust history at Clark University in Massachusetts, said. Professor Dwork, the author of "Children With a Star" (Yale University Press, 1991), said about 400 children had been directly smuggled out by Mrs. Sendler.

Elzbieta Ficowska, a baby in 1942, was one of them. "Mrs. Sendler saved not only us, but also our children and grandchildren and the generations to come," Ms. Ficowska told The Associated Press last year.

There were several ruses by which the children were saved. Mrs. Sendler was a social worker for the city, with a pass that

allowed her to enter the ghetto. "The Jews were all disease carriers, as far as the Nazis were concerned," Professor Dwork said. "They put up quarantine signs throughout the ghetto." Forgeries of the government pass allowed other members of Zegota to enter the ghetto as well. They went in day after day to persuade Jewish parents to let them rescue children.

The most common escape route, Professor Dwork said, was through the Warsaw Municipal Law Courts, which abutted the ghetto.

"There were underground corridors that had entrances on the ghetto side," she said. "The Polish police were bribed to allow the traffic. Parents were told to dress the children as well as possible, certainly without wearing a star."

For a time, the ghetto's boundaries extended to the Jewish cemetery. "Some children were placed in coffins, their mouths taped, or they were sedated so they wouldn't cry," said Ms. Stahl, of the Jewish foundation. "Other children were smuggled out in potato sacks."

Sometimes an ambulance wagon, with a driver accompanied by a dog, took children through the gates. "Children were under the floorboard," Ms. Stahl said. "The barking dog would drown out a child's cries."

A church straddled the ghetto border. "Children would be taken into the church, go into the confessional, and come out with papers as a little Catholic," Ms. Stahl said. They would be taken to a Christian home, a convent or an orphanage.

In a letter last year to the Polish Senate after her country finally honored her efforts, Mrs. Sendler wrote, "Every child saved with my help and the help of all the wonderful secret messengers, who today are no longer living, is the justification of my existence on this earth, and not a title to glory."

In 1965, Mrs. Sendler became one of the first of the so-called righteous gentiles honored by the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Poland's Communist leaders did not allow her to travel to Israel; she was presented the award in 1983.

Irena Krzyzanowska was born in Otwock, in what is now Poland, on Feb. 15, 1910. Her father was a physician. Her marriage to Mieczyslaw Sendler ended in divorce after World War II. Her second husband, Stefan Zgrzembski, died before her. She is survived by her daughter, Janka, and a granddaughter.

Mrs. Sendler once told Ms. Stahl that she wanted to write a book about the bravery of Jewish mothers.

"She said," Ms. Stahl recalled, "'Here I am, a stranger, asking them to place their child in my care. They ask if I can guarantee their safety. I have to answer no. Sometimes they would give me their child. Other times they would say come back. I would come back a few days later and the family had already been deported.'"

Dennis Hevesi for The New York Times

In 2007, Irena Sendler was a contender for the Nobel Peace Prize for her extensive "wartime achievements."

Coming To America, Addiction And Trusts

Robert Bichoupan, Esq.

Money Matters

I want to share with you a little more of my background. In a prior article concerning materialism, I mentioned that approximately 40 years ago I moved from Iran to America with my mother and brother. My father had come two years earlier to set things up. My sister was born here. Growing up was hard because I did not have a clear identity. My parents spoke Farsi while I spoke English. I had no close Mashadi friends here. I was not encouraged to have American friends. Although there were a handful of Mashadi families, at that time there was no Mashadi community to speak of in New York.

Around ten years later, in the 1980s, two significant events occurred. First, a large group of Jewish Iranians relocated to other parts of the world, and in large numbers to New York. The second is that a large number of Americans were held hostage in Iran for over a year. I was in High School at the time, and spoke English without an accent. I dressed like an American, and thought like an American. However, friends and strangers who learned that I was Persian used words like Arab, terrorist or worse, both behind my back and to my face. Although some said these things jokingly, I did not think it was funny. Some part of me was embarrassed to be associated with these Iranians who were not well-liked by America.

The Mashadi newcomers to New York in the 1980's were strange to me. They were F.O.B. with customs and culture that was different. They dressed differently, spoke differently or did not speak English at all. They valued different things. These were not my ways. Although both my parents are Mashadi, I still did not feel like part of a larger community. This new Mashadi community, despite my parents' best efforts, held no place for me. My parents embraced these new people like the long separated friends and family they were. I was happy for my parents. I eventually went off to college at Cornell University and law school at Boston University. It was only after I returned home from Law School many years later and was married, that I began to understand and appreciate the culture and the positives of this community - the closeness, the rich heritage, and the unquestioning assistance offered to one another. Essentially, I came to respect the community and belong.

However, as with all communities that come to America, we seem to adopt American ways – for good and for bad. The opportunity to develop new addictions through a number of channels was one negative aspect - addictions for which this community was not prepared. That is not to say that no one in Iran had any addictions. However, it appears that there are many more ways to get into trouble here. Addictions ranging from drugs to alcohol to prescription medicine, gambling to pornography, shopping, sports, to ... you name it. Rather than admit a problem, some friends and family may have chosen to ignore it, pretend it didn't exist or even help hide it for fear of

bringing shame on the family. Perhaps some know of a situation where a person's need for help may have been placed second to the reputation of the family and community. In the case of an addiction, however, that can be a lifelong sacrifice. I believe the person's need for help with a problem of this magnitude outweighs the perceived need to protect a reputation. There is more than one way to help or, at least, not make the situation worse.

A question that may come up in connection with a person who has an addictive habit has to do with estate planning. Is it prudent and rational to leave a large sum of money or portion of one's estate to a child who, in all likelihood, will merely feed his habit and squander it? The good news, if it can be called that, is that this larger culture in which we find ourselves has dealt with this myriad of problems for a longer period of time, and has come up with some solutions. In addition to attempting to treat the cause, there are ways to prevent feeding the illness. The best of those, in my opinion, is the use of a Trust. Please bear in mind that it is not the purpose of this article to give legal advice, but rather to help explain some possible alternatives.

If a loved one, who stands to inherit, has a compromised ability to handle large sums, a Trust may be utilized so that another person can administer those assets, and provide for the necessities of the person with the addiction. That person who is entrusted with the assets of the addict is called the Trustee. The Trustee is charged with the responsibility of managing those assets prudently for the needs of the loved one, while not allowing the loved one to be even more self-destructive. The Trust can provide for a termination, if desired, upon successful treatment and remediation of the illness, as determined by the Trustee, doctors, or other third parties designated by the person making the gift. This will not only assure that the recipient of the gift has their needs met, but will provide the maker of the gift with peace of mind, knowing that they have met their responsibilities to their loved one in a well thought-out manner.

The present administration has made it clear that they are interested in shifting taxes to the wealthy (that means you) and reducing many types of estate planning opportunities. As I have explained to my clients, one advantage of the financial calamity in which we find ourselves is the tremendous estate planning opportunities. Assets may currently have a very low value and can be gifted at reduced or even no estate and gift tax consequences. Now is a good time to do the estate planning you have been putting off. We may not see this combination of low values and high gift limits for a long time to come.

Your Healthiest Self

Adapted from the Equinox Fitness Club Website

In these changing times, make a renewed commitment to yourself to lead a healthy life. Here are some tips to help you find balance, stay focused and gain perspective. **IT'S THE MIND OF THE TIMES!**

EXERCISE When you exercise you are present in the moment and not focused on worries and concerns. Studies show that cardiovascular and resistance training can help reduce stress and boost endorphins. Try a minimum of thirty minutes of vigorous exercise most days of the week.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP Insufficient sleep can make it more difficult to cope with the normal challenges of daily life. Most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep to function optimally.

3. EAT WELL A balanced diet high in fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins can help reduce stress by stabilizing blood sugar levels. Combine carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats at each meal to fuel and energize your body.

4. PAY IT FORWARD Studies show that people who approach life with a positive attitude are less stressed. Begin and end every day by making a mental list of the things for which you are grateful.

5. LIVE IN THE MOMENT Accept that some things are out of your control. Rather than worrying about what will happen next week, next month, or next year, focus on making decisions that will lead you in the direction of your goals.

6. GET ORGANIZED Being disorganized can add to your stress level. Knowing where things are and reducing clutter lets you focus on the important things.

7. MEDITATE Studies show that people who meditate regularly have more activity in their left frontal cortex and less activity in the amygdala – both of which are associated with calmer emotional states. There are many ways to meditate. Practice yoga, take a walk in nature, sit quietly, spend time with your pet or take a bubble bath.

8. SAY NO WHEN NECESSARY Avoid taking on more than you can accomplish. Do not feel guilty saying “no” to unnecessary obligations and responsibilities.

9. HYDRATE Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Water regulates body temperature, aids in the absorption of vitamins and nutrients, and detoxifies the liver and kidneys.

10. LEAN ON YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM People who have a strong social network of family and friends typically report less stress and a better ability to cope. Don’t be afraid to ask for support from close friends and family during these times.

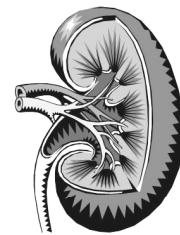
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Keeping it Reel: The Year in Cinema

Yossi Abrahimi
Eric Djemshidoff

It is said that in times of economic trouble, the arts tend to thrive. If we look back at the past year of film, this theory can definitely apply to 2009. In a span of 12 months, the man already sitting atop of the world solidified his crown by once again making the highest grossing movie of all time, a legendary director brought us a tale of Jewish revenge, and several films made on relatively minuscule budgets took the box office by storm. The main objective of a good movie is to allow the viewer to escape, if only for a couple of hours. In a time of economic turbulence, multiple wars and overall lack of optimism, here's to a 2010 that continues the trend. Presenting the Finest of 2009



YOSSI

1. **Inglorious Basterds**
2. District 9
3. (500) Days of Summer
4. Avatar
5. Up in the Air
6. The Hangover
7. A Serious Man
8. Moon
9. Adventureland
10. Star Trek

ERIC

1. UP
2. District 9
3. Inglorious Basterds
4. Avatar
5. (500) Days of Summer
6. A Serious Man
7. Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince
8. Star Trek
9. I Love You, Man
10. The Road

Our Honorable Mentions: An Education, Precious, Where the Wild Things Are, Zombieland

Yossi's Three to See

Inglorious Basterds

Conventional? Definitely not. Historically accurate? Not quite. Boring? *Nein*. The seventh feature film from legendary director Quentin Tarantino allows Jews everywhere to dream, if only for a few hours, that they can unleash some mayhem. Usually portrayed in cinema as crooks, money lenders, whiners and nuisances in general, the Jewish image is given an extreme makeover in this Nazi revenge epic. Brad Pitt (Colonel Aldo Raine) leads a group simply known as "The Basterds" on a mission through Nazi-occupied France, to strike fear into the

heart of every last one of Hitler's men. My top movie of the year features the best acting performance of 2009 (and easily the new decade's best so far) by Christoph Waltz as Colonel Hans Landa, better known as "The Jew Hunter." Basterds barely contains any English dialogue, or action for that matter, yet appealed to a wide variety of movie-goers, including females (much to my surprise and delight). The majority of this movie deals with conversations lasting up to twenty minutes, mostly in a single room, or table. Mundane as this may sound, it is Tarantino at his best, building suspense to a fever-pitch, and hammering the audience with a brilliant finish.

District 9

Oh, the “alien flick.” Humans are living in peace, when all of a sudden a spaceship emerges and wreaks havoc on the population. Who will stop them? Most of the time, Will Smith. For once, with District 9, this old story is not the case. First-time director Neil Blomkamp brought us the story of Wikus van der Merwe (don’t bother trying to pronounce it), a lowly office worker at a multinational company, who is tasked with relocating a population of aliens who landed in South Africa. Unlike the usual aliens in Hollywood, the “prawn” landed in Johannesburg through no wish of their own. They are desperate to go back home, but the South African government, in conjunction with a weapons firm hell-bent on learning the secret of the alien weapons, which humans cannot operate, put the prawn in refugee camps (an apartheid, essentially). Wikus transforms from an ultra-nerd to an unlikely hero, as his mission coincides with that of the prawn. This time around, the audience finds itself rooting for the aliens, who fight against the oppressive humans to gain their freedom. District 9 was produced on budget of \$30 million (yes, around 5% of Avatar’s price tag), by avoiding well-known actors, using documentary-style cinematography, and focusing on the story above cheesy special effects.

(500) Days of Summer

The romantic comedy was inching its way towards becoming the most tired and repetitive of the movie genres, until 2009 brought us the clever and refreshing (500) Days of Summer. As we are told in the introduction, this is not a love story. Branded a “guy flick” by its audience, (500) Days tells the story of Tom, a twentysomething from LA who is sure he has found “the one” in Summer, the new office assistant. The movie takes us, in random order, through the ups and downs of their relationship, beginning at the end. Tom believes he and Summer are meant to be before they exchange a single word, which sets him up for periods of confusion, denial and anger, as he realizes his dream scenario, is only that. Most movies of this genre are predictable to the point that an entire film can be summed up by its trailer; boy meets girl, girl is hesitant, girl falls for boy, boy acts stupid, girl forgives boy, boy marries girl, the end. Thanks to the portrayal of Tom’s trials and tribulations, audiences tired of the latest Ashton Kutcher excuse-for-a-movie were given a more realistic look at what the average guy goes through before finding what was meant for him.

Eric's Three to See

UP

Pixar Animation has done it again. Judging by their track record of films (Wall-E, The Incredibles, Finding Nemo, Toy Story, Ratatouille), this studio simply doesn’t know how to make a bad movie. UP tells the story of a 78-year-old man named Carl who wants to fulfill his lifelong dream of sailing to the wilds of South America with his wife Ellie. The film’s introduction alone is a work of cinematic wonder. It shows Ellie and Carl as they grow up, have a courtship, marry, buy a ramshackle house and turn it into their dream home, live happy together and grow old. This process is silent; except for a musical background. It’s shown in a spectacular sequence, without dialogue, that deals

with the life experience in a way that is almost never found in family animation. They save their loose change in a gallon jug intended to finance their trip to the legendary Paradise Falls, but real life gets in the way: flat tires, home repairs, medical bills. Then they make a heartbreakingly discovery. This interlude lasts about four and a half minutes. Simply put, the best four minutes of cinema I have ever seen.

Avatar

A dozen years later, we see James Cameron is still the king of Hollywood. His last effort, Titanic, broke all kinds of records and was the highest-grossing film of all time. No movie came close to beating Titanic’s record. That is of course until Cameron came back with Avatar (as of 2/14/10 it holds both the worldwide and domestic box office records). Avatar is not simply a “sensational” piece of entertainment, it’s a technical breakthrough. Throughout the extraordinary action sequences, a profound “anti-war” message can be felt; Cameron’s sentiments regarding the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are clear. The amount of visual detail in nearly every second of Avatar demands repeated viewings (which I can assure will not be a disappointment). The story, set in the year 2154, involves a mission by U.S. Armed Forces to a new world called Pandora, which has a rich source of a mineral Earth desperately needs. Pandora represents not even a remote threat to Earth, but we nevertheless send in ex-military mercenaries to attack and “relocate” (in effect, conquer) the N’avi population. Without getting into too much detail, the use of stop-motion and 3-D technology in Avatar is like nothing I have ever seen. In 1977, Star Wars brought a sense of excitement, wonder and revolution to cinema. More than three decades later, Cameron’s masterpiece has given this feeling to a new generation of movie-goers. The question now before us; how will Cameron top himself this time?

A Serious Man

Are you familiar with The Book of Job? The Coen Brothers apparently are, and crafted a film dealing with its issues, in their own unique (some would say psychotic) way. The film tells us the tale of Larry Gopnik, a Jewish college professor living in the Midwestern U.S. during the 1960’s. A series of bad events happen upon him throughout the film. As much as he maps out complex equations and algorithms on his blackboard, in search of a clear answer, he cannot seem to figure out why is life is falling apart. Why do his children dismiss him? Why does his wife, without warning, leave him for his best friend? Why is his no-account brother-in-law such a freeloading and trouble-making leech? Why can no rabbi provide him with encouragement or useful advice? Why would his student clearly fail an exam, leave bribe money on his desk and then act to destroy him? *Why, why, why?* We all ask this question every day to ourselves and to G-d. *A Serious Man* tells us the answer: there is no answer. We don’t know why G-d does what He does, but we must trust and accept His decisions, no matter how unfair they appear to be. The story of Job symbolizes the perseverance of suffering. No matter how bad things get, one should understand that above all things physical, faith is the core of all religion.

The Eccentric Corner: Why we Love Acronyms?

Michael M. Mardkha

The pure purpose of the articles in this corner is an attempt to make you chuckle, grin, or raise your eyebrow. They have no bearing on politics, religion, or finance and have no philosophical value whatsoever. Here is merely a five minute escape into the pure world of Eccentric facts. Enjoy!

As a nation, Americans are obsessed with acronyms more than is any other in the civilized world. The other day, I made a flight reservation online using my notebook PC (Personal Computer). In order to get online I had to turn on the built-in WiFi (Wireless Fidelity) adapter which connects to the WLAN (Wireless Local Area Network) and ultimately to the office DSL (Digital Subscriber Line). So after a few minutes of searching I made a reservation to go from JFK (John F. Kennedy) to MIA (Miami) on AA (American Airlines). I then walked to MSG (Madison Square Garden) and took the LIRR (Long Island Rail Road) to JAM (Jamaica) station and boarded the Air Train. Once I checked in, I had to go thru the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) security to finally arrive at the gate. See what I mean? All this happened in a span of two hours.

Now, I don't really know who started all this acronym business but I strongly suspect the military as the primary source of infection. They use acronyms like LT (Lieutenant), CAP (Captain), MAJ (Major), COL (Colonel), and LTC (Lieutenant Colonel). The different organizations also have their own acronyms like DOD (Department of Defense), DA (Department of the Army) and AF (Air Force). Don't forget the weapon systems: SAM (Surface to Air Missile), HARM (High-speed Anti Radiation Missile), AAA (Anti Aircraft Artillery), and AEGIS (Advanced Electronic Guidance and Instrumentation System) radar, and more. The list is way too long but my favorites include SNAFU (Situation Norma, All Fouled Up) and FUBAR (Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition). The funny thing, however, is that when they want to communicate these acronyms, they have to use common first letter matching words to make sure the recipient understands. For example, to make sure the other side does not mistake HARM missiles for SAM missiles they would say - Hotel Alpha Romeo Mike – which makes it nearly the same or sometime longer than the original phrase. That's equivalent to having someone dig a hole and another fill it back up. Efficiency is disguise!

Beginning in early 1969, SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) which lead to START (Strategic Arms reduction treaty) gained household usage. In the recent past we have been blessed with TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) which has done wonders for our economy too. By using these terms, the complexity and scope of intended actions is diminished and that's really done by design. In the early nineties, the federal government decided that it could really use these acronyms to reduce exposure of their activities to general scrutiny. So, in their infinite wisdom, they created an obscure clause in the

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 which managed to hide the increase, scope, and complexity of government programs considerably.

Since the size of the government is the only thing that is increasing these days, it would not be surprised if a new federal agency was created; I'll call it DOA (Department of Acronyms) for now. This will be a funded agency with its own annual budget and staff. Its major responsibility would be to clear up any misconceptions prior to release of any new acronyms to be used by federal employees. No self respecting agency of the federal government can operate without committees. Among new committees being proposed are; TURD (Task-Force Undertaking Responsible Deficits), CRAP (Congressional Revenue Action Plan) and FART (Financial Assistance and Response Team). I suspect TURD will oversee the creation of CRAP, which in turn, will produce a number of FARTs. The collective work of these committees will create a new set of regulations which will create more confusion by regulating acronyms and link it to the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) tax code which will then send IRS Marshalls after those who dare to use these acronyms improperly. I suspect these regulations will take no less than two to three thousand pages and will never be actually read by anyone including those who wrote it.

To make matters even more interesting, the popularity of text and chatting systems has created a new armada of acronyms that take cryptology to new heights. Try this one "4U 6Y, WYGAM CMB PLS," which, in human language, translates to "Question for You Sexy, When You Get A Minute, Call Me Back Please." Now, this would keep most cryptanalysts at NSA (National Security Agency) busy for days to decipher. By the way, FYI (For Your Information) NSA is no longer part of NRO (National Reconnaissance Organization) and now operates under the guidelines of CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) which has different set of priorities than the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigations). Confused yet?

Not to be outdone, I will challenge your intellectual curiosity with this encrypted phrase which you can easily decipher by placing the appropriate punctuation marks in correct locations: "That That Is Is That That Is Not Is Not Is That It Is."

Good luck!

Viewpoints

Clique It

Jasmine Dilmanian

Ahh...to be young and innocent. To be plopped by our mothers at a Saturday afternoon play-group with other children whose mothers our mothers found it convenient enough to carpool with.

During a large chunk of the 1990s, my group, as it was affectionately called, would gather in a basement (checking our collective sanity at the door), shut off all the lights, plug in a strobe light, and blast Spice Girls CDs from an obnoxiously yellow boom box. The fun would eventually lead to madness as a catfight involving Barbie dolls, lip-gloss, or a Macarena contest would surely ensue. Secrets were told, feelings were hurt, tears were shed. Having been invited to multiple gatherings with other sets of girls, the infamous “combination *doreh*,” I can vouch for the fact that bullying was rampant and cliques within cliques emerged, leaving the hormonally normal few marginalized, quietly playing rounds of Spit in the corner.

Of course, the fond memories of these super-sized play dates are something to be revered. During the course of the many years I spent my week-end with the same bunch of girls, I had the time of my life and developed close, and in many cases, long-lasting bonds. Despite the occasional hissy fit, we all usually went home laughing. To this day, such is the blissful case for many young boys and girls on Saturday afternoons.

Then one day, puberty rears its ugly head and Pandora’s box is jammed wide open. Kids are left to roam the streets of town without parental supervision. Youngsters give each other the eye in the corner of La Pizzeria (probably not, but that’s the image I have in my head, so let’s work with it).

Personalities develop; some delightfully, others dreadfully. The opposite sex comes into the picture—and suddenly, with the snap of a finger, the dynamics change. There’s only so much estrogen a young girl can handle before she says to herself, “I’ve had enough of this. I’m going to Memorial Field and watching boys play Football and wrestle each other to the ground.”

At some point, likely in high school, a reconfiguration of friends occurs, during which time two people realize that the only thing they have in common is that their mothers gave birth

around the same time and happened to live in Great Neck. “I don’t particularly care for you, nor you for me—let’s go our separate ways and catch up in ten years—or not. See you later!”

College is usually the transition period. Once in a while, people who had lost touch years prior come to reunite and/or reconcile (this has occurred in my life on several occasions). Some groups maintain a firm grip on their bonds while others completely fall apart. Most *dastehs*, though, remain somewhere in the middle, holding onto a few weak links, if you will, for the sake of drawing clear lines of who they would like, or at least wouldn’t mind, to be seated with at the next wedding. At this point, “She’s my friend,” becomes, “I tolerate her.” It is assumed that person A likes person B, simply by virtue of their mutual company.

Thinking of all the politics involved in the formation, eventual disbanding, and occasional (at least partial) reunion of a group, one’s head spins. Questions of status, convenience, and forced relationships are at the forefront of this great debate. Some mothers have chosen to withdraw their children entirely from the realm of the weekly playgroup, while others are eager to start engaging their children in this social ritual as young as age three (in such cases, the children are divided according to the parents’ preferences mainly of each other, not necessarily on the compatibility of the children). The former mother sees this arrangement as constricting, unnatural, and detrimental to the child’s self esteem, while the latter sees it as an easier way for the child to gain and keep friendships and a guaranteed social outlet for the child, as well as a few hours off from being mommy every weekend. Although the moments I shared at playgroups are the pinnacles of my childhood, I can’t decide whether I was better off finding friends the conventional way.

One major drawback of the group mentality is the prevalence of the psychological phenomenon, *groupthink*. Here, the opinions, actions, and influences of some members pervade the thought processes of the rest, creating a consensus where there wouldn’t otherwise be one. If six out of ten are hell-bent on going to a certain party, the others will usually tag along. If three

out of five rarely attend synagogue, the other two will be hard pressed to maintain their routines. The same goes for spending money in a restaurant, getting a haircut at a certain salon, and the formation of political opinions, all of which are manifestations of peer pressure. In groupthink, the opinions of many become the opinions of all. It is not hard to see, then, how this could pose a threat to any adolescent's well being. Although some benefits could surely emerge from this pattern, especially if most group members happen to be a positive force, the reality is that if the people who are doing the influencing are up to no good, the playgroup psyche could easily be unfavorable.

Placing limits on something that is potentially limitless, friendship, may also pose negative repercussions. It becomes harder to accept new people into your crowd when you already have a set bunch. Certain groups are even labeled, literally given a name, dubbed either by themselves by others, long before anyone can recall. As a person's identity and associations naturally shift over time, the name sticks, and the person might have to work that much harder to dissociate him or herself from a past life that is now quite irrelevant.

And as if jealousy knows any bounds in this community apart from the dasteh structure, the dasteh is yet another factor in our endless envy. Dare I admit, this is much more of an issue in adult groups than in childrens'. What car do you drive? Do you rent or have you bought? Is that retail or sample? City Thursday night? Can you afford to come to Miami with us for the twelfth time this year? Having to answer these questions adds unnecessary stress to already hectic lives of couples whose main priorities should be themselves and their families, not their dorehs.

I have even been privy to a story about a couple who is not part of any group and faced outright rejection by the head honcho

of a group of young couples who apparently feels that their company is highly valued. One Saturday night, one of the wives invited her friend and her husband, certainly no strangers, for dinner at a restaurant with their group. Upon hearing about this unwarranted invitation, one of the husbands expressed his dissatisfaction. The inviter was then forced to call back the invitees and regretfully inform them that their presence was no longer wanted. Some might deem this behavior picky; others would say it's downright snobby and immature. Cliques have gone far beyond the lunch table in middle school.

Cliques also lend themselves to perceptions of exclusivity and massive superiority complexes, or worse, inferiority complexes. Individuality may be stifled. Teasing and taunting, although natural behaviors in children, may be exacerbated if the same group of children is consistently forced to interact. Certain children may naturally take leadership roles while a quieter child may become a follower. This isn't necessarily such a problem in the younger years, however, if these roles are maintained through high school, issues like drugs and sex come into play – by that time, things could get ugly.

Now, of course, this is the worst-case scenario. I'd like to think I have grown up to be just fine in the face of a childhood group, and that I have even benefited from it. Then again, there are people who have grown up to be just fine by making friends at school, soccer practice, ballet recitals, summer camp, parties, and other social venues. So, at the end of the day, one is left with a personal choice to make about whether or not to include oneself and one's children in defined circles, or to loosen our grips and let friendships naturally develop. As with any major decision, perhaps the best way to go about it is to look back at our own experiences and decide if cliquing is the choice for you.

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In the Face of Tragedy

Anna Ben Yehuda

In the face of tragedy, humans cope in different ways. Some refuse to speak while others need to talk about it incessantly. Some feel the need to express their emotions physically while others might need to write about their pains. In any case, humans follow a familiar specter of emotions; emotions that are similar among all but that are displayed in dissimilar ways.

First comes the confusion. How can something like this happen? How can the world be so cruel? We try to rationalize the irrational, to give sense to something that so clearly doesn't make sense just so we can accept it.

But we cannot accept it. After that, the confusion becomes anger. We simply want to destroy the cause of the tragedy. Be it a person, an animal, fire, or even G-d - we are angry at that entity. We want to relinquish our pain by inflicting it upon whatever or whoever caused it in the first place.

Next is the understanding that we, as mere humans, are unable to practice the justice that we seek in the world. We are not the ones who can vindicate our own anger. And then, we panic. What if something like that happens to *me*? What if *my* family is next? And we inevitably feel guilty; instead of feeling bad for the person that tragedy was bestowed upon, we can only think of ourselves. So we shut it out, we close our eyes, we refuse to listen...we don't want to be scared.

Finally, the pain settles in. The pain that won't let you get out of the house, the pain that won't let you smile and enjoy something funny, the pain that causes heartache, the pain that you so blatantly want to suppress because you can't afford to put your life on hold. This is the pain to which each person reacts to in so many different ways.

I cannot tell you how to deal with tragedy or how to cope with your feelings. I cannot tell you the right thing to do. I do not know what the right thing to do is. However, I can tell you two things.

The first important point to realize is that we have a bigger family than the rest of the world has. In addition to our parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents, we have our childhood friends, *their* parents, *their* siblings, *their* aunts and uncles, *their* cousins, *their* grandparents. We are not alone; we have people who are going through what we are going through. Yes, they might have not experienced the tragedy first hand, but they do feel a portion of what we are feeling, and they are willing to help. So let's stop bashing this community, despite its various flaws. Let's try to fix those flaws, and, yes, let's discuss those flaws. But let's not forget that when we are going through confusion, anger, panic, and pain, these are the people who will attempt to assuage the feelings, to give you a reason to get out of the house, to smile again, to fight the heartache, and make sure that something bad won't happen to you again.

Because of the security blanket that our community provides us, we are able to fight. We can use these emotions to make something grand. A cliché, yet truly appropriate saying comes to mind: life is too short. Let's feel what we cannot control and use

it to do things that we thought we had an infinite amount of time to do, because clearly, we don't.

You want to write a book? No, you can't afford to finish school to do it. Fine, work on it now. You want to ask a girl for her number, but are waiting for the right moment, the one that never seems to happen, to do it? Go up to her. Ask her for it now. Send her a Facebook message. Ask your friend to give it to you. Go to her house with flowers...*do something*. You want to get married? Your financial situation might not get better, so why wait? If you found the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, trust me, you're in much better shape than the rest of us...so don't wait. Act on it. You want to become a lawyer? Yes, it is worth it if you set your mind to it. Remember, there's no better time than the present.

If we have learned anything in these past few months, it's that time is limited. No one is immune to tragedy; we aren't the exclusion to the norm. We can be angry at it, we can panic, and we can refuse to listen to ourselves, but that doesn't change the fact that no one is omnipotent, that even if you are a good person, there is a great chance that your benevolence won't be rewarded and that you'll have to cope with grief. However, it would be a waste to let this stop you. You want to *do* something? DO IT. Do not wait for a better time and do not wait for the situation to improve...because you never know what will happen next.

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The Uniting Factor

Roxanne Davoodzadeh

I would be the first to shy away from admitting my obsession with the Megillah. When topic of Megillah would come up in discussion with my friends, I would always brush it off as if it hasn't been sitting next to my nightstand since the day our house received it and I haven't been reviewing the articles, studying every word. But of course, when the opportunity came up, I jumped on a chance to write an article.

I spent weeks behind my computer anxious about what to write. There was just so much! This community is so complex and there is just so much to say; when I discuss our community with my non-Mashadi friends they often try to convince me to right a memoir. I suddenly began to think back to my college days, which were some of the best but also painfully humbling years of my life. I was exposed to different people, all of different backgrounds and ideologies that I had never been used to before. I was challenged on every level to think outside the box and not solely consider my own life in a world so vast and broad. In the same vein, I think our community has been shaken to challenge its strict beliefs and principles that have found difficulty finding a place with today's youth.

...Which leads me back to an experience that I had in my first college class, "Performance and Identity." The course revolved around each of our characters and how we develop them both internally and externally. The decision to take the class was not my own, but simply one of a list of the freshman year seminars that each student was required to take. I had no idea what to expect walking into a classroom where I knew no one, and more importantly, where no one knew me. Little did I know of the challenges that awaited me that semester.

Most people in this community can easily acknowledge that we live in a sheltered world that shields us from much of what is going on outside the realm of ourselves; but is not until you are over 100 miles away from your friends and family in a town that you've never heard of that this harsh reality begins to actually sink in. Before me were fifteen bright women, all of different backgrounds and ethnicities.

There was the girl next to me whose parents were both rocket

scientists and were persuading her in the same direction, while she held secret dreams of becoming an opera singer; the girl who was a ballerina since the day she was born but had taken a few years off to get a liberal arts education; the girl who moved out of her house when she was fifteen years old and was somehow made it on her own since then; and a girl whose life revolved around *anime*. (Today, I'm still not sure what *anime* is, but I think it has something to do with Asian cartoon characters.)

In a matter of weeks, my life was changed, my viewpoints were challenged, and my core values were slowly being molded by my classmates. My eyes were finally open to the wide universe before us that I, having lived the sheltered life that I had, was completely blind to. More importantly, I was exposed to a group of strong and opinionated women, each of whom was eager to express her outlook on life. We all contested each other's principles and also, on many levels, came to embrace them. We discussed each other's lifestyles. We exposed our characters from the inside out. It was ironic that this class revolving around identity actually came to form my own.

What I realized was a lesson that would be invaluable. The human fabric is one that is complex and beyond our comprehension. Our community is no exception to this. While as Mashadis, our core values may be similar, as a result of our lives and experiences, we are all inevitably a heterogeneous society. For the first time, many of our own community members are realizing the broad spectrum of thoughts, beliefs, and lifestyles that do exist. I feel that in order to move ahead with our community and to better it for generations to come, we must put our disparities aside.

What I learned while I was away at school, in a world so different than ours, is how special our community is. We are truly a force to be reckoned with. Right now more than ever before, we need to concentrate more on what unites us rather than what divides us. Time will tell how long we will actually last as a unity, but the strength from within will come from putting aside our differences and accepting a common bond.



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The Power of Speech

Eric Djemshidoff and Simon Hakimian

Please pray for Sarah Miriam Bat Tamar.

I am sure many of you have heard this name before. I remember one day at work, I received a text message asking me to please pray for a young girl in the hospital who is very sick, Sarah Miriam Bat Tamar. After I received this text, I said a chapter of Tehilim and prayed she should have a refuah shelema (speedy recovery). I continued on with my day and about a minute later, I received another text message stating the same request. As the day progressed, I continued to receive messages, totaling to sixteen, asking for prayers for this young girl. At first, I had no idea who this girl was; I am sure many people didn't know either. I found out later that it was Oren and Tamar Bazalely's young daughter.

Upon hearing the identity of the child I had been praying for, I was shocked. I had known Oren since I was a kid and I have always spoken with him in shul and often attended weekly shiurs at his home. Let me tell you, I have never seen a more G-d fearing family than theirs.

Now, back to what I'm trying to say. Many people had no idea who Sarah Miriam was when they got the news that she was sick. They just started praying for her recovery and they spread the news as well. What is amazing about this community is the power of speech and what good it can bring. It's incredible that people can send each other messages asking them to pray for someone they might not have met or even know. The power of speech can bring this about.

We, as Klal Israel, and as a community, have the ability to save someone's life. When we first heard of her condition, she was not doing well. But, B'H, from what I hear as of now, she is doing much better than she was doing originally (but she still needs our prayers). This is the power of B'nei Israel when we come together. This is the power of our community when we pray for someone who we may or may not know. This is the power of speech. Our prayers and our speech have such an enormous impact that no one can really comprehend. The things we say can either have a positive impact on someone, or it can have a negative impact. Our community has been blessed in many ways B'H. We should use our blessings and use the power of speech in a positive way.

I would like to thank Mr. Oren Bezalely and his family for giving me permission to write about their daughter. May Hashem grant Sarah Miriam Bat Tamar and the rest of the Klal Israel a full and speedy recovery, Amen.

"Did you hear about ____?" "I can't believe she was wearing that last night!" "Can you believe they're getting married soon?" I am sure each and every one of you has heard something like this before; frankly, in our community I'm sure we've all heard it on a daily basis. Lashon Hara, in English, literally translates to "the tongue of the evil [person]" and is clearly a problem in our community today. As my good friend Eric eloquently put it, "We as a community have the ability to

save someone's life." And I couldn't agree more. One of the best parts about our community is the ability to come together at any point and support each other. We have seen it time and time again and without fail, the people in our community are behind one another 100%. Conversely, one of the most saddening parts about our community is its knack for gossip and Lashon Hara.

How many times have you been at a wedding, party, or even synagogue and heard a group of people talking about someone else? I bet the number in your head is immeasurable. Although you may not notice it, talking about someone behind their back can have countless repercussions. An example: imagine a group of girls talking, and during the conversation, the topic of a certain male community member comes up and one of the girls says something like, "I don't think he's good looking at all." Now, because of that one comment, each girl in that conversation now has a different point of view towards that male. Maybe one of the girls was semi-interested in him, and now that a peer has expressed her dislike for him, it changes the way she looks at him.

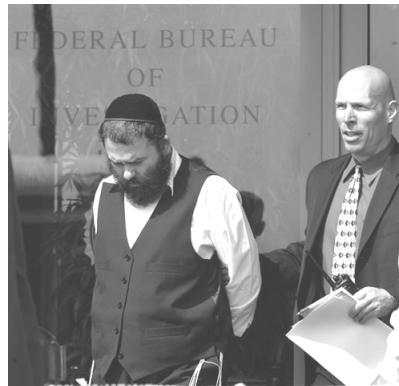
In a community where reputation is everything (even though this shouldn't be the case), talking slanderously about someone else is the equivalent of spitting in their face. The abundance of gossip that goes around in our community has dual effects: one being that of slander and ruining reputations, the other is one that I've come to realize more and more as I've grown older. There is no privacy in this community; the velocity in which rumors or secrets travel is mind boggling. From the time a rumor is created, I'd say it's known to fifty percent of the community within twenty-four hours. That's roughly 2,500 people in less than a day; simply astonishing.

It has gotten to the point where it's difficult for young people to enjoy themselves at a party or wedding without thinking twice about what people will say or think. It's a shame to think the youth in this community can't be true to themselves for fear of hurting their reputation. At the same time, I am not condoning going out and drinking yourself unconscious, but constantly looking behind your back to make sure nobody is watching what you do is no way to go through life; and this community is certainly going down that road.

The mark of a real community is its ability to be honest and sustain itself no matter what, but when you have people constantly talking behind their fellow community members backs, it is impossible to progress. Our community will continue to be in this regressive mode until the Lashon Hara problem is solved. So the next time you find yourself in a circle of friends talking gossip, just walk away and realize if you don't you can indirectly be contributing to the harm of that person. Eric and I wrote this article in an attempt to raise awareness on what's going on in our community. I am not perfect and change is among one of the most difficult things a person can achieve. At the same time, after writing this article, I plan on making a sincere effort in limiting the amount of gossip I speak or listen to, and I hope, after reading this article, that you will too.

Who are the Extremists?

Michel Nematnejad



Several signs indicate that anti-observant Jewish secularists are the new extremists taking over from ultra-Orthodox Jews. They engage in criticism and, at times, ridicule people who interpret religious laws but are unwilling to listen, let alone to genuinely question and learn about why these seemingly obscure laws in their religion exist. Often times, they take fragmented quotes from the Torah out of context to defend their points. Ironically, this passionate disdain is sometimes similar to the one-dimensional view that they are comfortable accusing observant people of. Other times, they demonstrate a degree of hypocrisy when they are adamant against showing up at a religious events but ignore the perils of over-watching shows like "Jersey Shore" and "Date My Mom".

Now, one cannot hide the fact that Judaism and observant people do get their fair share of bad press, (think crooked Syrian Rabbis, Rabbi Leib Tropper, and delinquent Shomer Shabbat consignees on 47th street - the list can go on) but this is in huge regard to the sensationalism of bad news. The good deeds that Judaism encourages and describes in the Torah have led Jews to be the most charitable communities in the world, the most innovative thinkers, and the best doctors; even our secular common law is derived significantly from the Talmud. Whether you accept or deny the validity of kosher cheese or the loophole that enables an *eruv*, at the core of Jewish survival and even the thriving of it is the Torah. It is meant not just as a philosophical but a practical guide to a world riddled with unanswered questions. On the surface this path may appear to be illogical and absurd, especially when trying to explain your customs to your colleagues at the water-cooler ("Why lead an inhibited life and place all these restrictions on yourself?"). The Torah tries to substantiate almost everything it teaches with rigorous debate and what may appear illogical is actually a product of a series of clear logical ideas. If one is open-minded

enough, they will rigorously question these ideas and stay the course to argue the answers they receive.

Cable TV, internet, and cheap flight travel have changed the world at a pace society and parents can have difficulty preparing or keeping up with. The advent of instant messenger, BBM, blogs, and viral TV has made good parenting extremely difficult and trust is placed on their children at a much younger age. In inhibiting the balance of learning Torah and Jewish philosophy, there is the risk of steering towards the short term allure of popular culture and the influences that accompany it. Should Brangelina's view on same-sex marriage or Noam Chomsky's views (leading Jewish MIT professor and critic of America and Israel) on the Palestinian conflict have an overwhelming impact on our social views? I find it dangerous to underestimate the exposure and consequent impact their iconic images have on our daily lives.

The same way I assume most people do not want members of their family and friends engulfed in a world of popular culture and extreme secular ideology, they are also concerned about the day they cannot sit at the same dinner table because one member observes a different level of kosher observance or the technical hurdles in accommodating observant people on Shabbat. These situations are inevitable. How to handle these situations? Fighting any extreme usually has a polarizing effect and usually pushes people apart and in the opposite side of the ideological spectrum. Instead, rather than waiting for differences in lifestyle and personal path to exacerbate until they reach boiling point, it is vital that parents, teachers, relatives, and children remain engaged with each other and keep the lines of communication open. Continuously understanding each other's life choices prevents surprises and makes us all a lot more respectful of each other's lifestyles.

Who's Really the Crazy One?

Mosheh Aziz

It's a beautiful Shabbat morning and a good friend and I are walking to *kanisa* together. The *kanisa* parking lot is full of cars and so are all the streets around the area. As we make our way toward the door, we see a lady locking her car and putting the key into her pocket before walking into *kanisa*. My friend gives her a look, and after she passes, whispers to me, "I don't believe it! Driving to *Kanisa* on Shabbat? Are they out of their minds? How could someone ever drive on Shabbat and just think nothing of it? Who do they think they are?" I shrugged and we continued our conversation.

Fifteen minutes later, smack in the middle of the *kanisa* social scene, I happen to be standing near the girl whom we saw coming out of her car and happen to overhear her speaking to her friends: "What is up with all these religious people? I don't get them! How could you possibly walk to *kanisa* in this freezing weather? Who in their right mind would walk all the way to *kanisa* for half an hour in this kind of weather? They're crazy!"

Now this really intrigued me. Let's take a look; who's the crazy one? The Shomer Shabbat who walks to *kanisa* or the non-Shomer Shabbat who drives? I doubt that it's fully possible to look at this from an objective point of view – everyone is biased in some way. From one standpoint, we can say that to those who aren't Shomer Shabbat, driving to *kanisa* is the obvious choice. It's cold outside! Who would ever want to walk in that weather? Besides, isn't it obvious that a car gets you from point A to point B much faster than your legs can? On the other hand, though, to those who are Shomer Shabbat, driving on Shabbat means making the greatest sacrifice possible – eternal life! In that sense to a Shomer Shabbat, walking to *kanisa* is way beyond what we

would call "worth it." So back to our question, who's normal and who's crazy?

We cannot escape the fact that we all have our differences. No two people were ever created the same nor will two people ever be created the same. Because of that, you can't really call anybody crazy. How do you even define crazy? And while you're at it, tell me also, what do you define as "normal?" No two people are the same. So why is it that just because someone is "different" you start calling him "crazy?" Have you been in his shoes? Have you grown up with him and seen every single experience he's been through to the extent that you can for sure know you would be making "better" decisions had you been in his situation? Obviously not, so who are you to start pointing fingers at anyone?

When Freud spoke of human psychological defense mechanisms, he described a defense mechanism that modern psychologists call projection. Projection means that many times, a person will naturally, usually even subconsciously, project his own faults on other people in order to protect himself from feeling guilty about his own actions (our Rabbis pre-dated him by a millennium and a half when they said"**כל הפה של במומו פועל**" but that's beside the point). With that said, there is only one type of crazy person in the world – the person who thinks other people crazy. And there is only one type of person in this world who is really out of his mind – the one who thinks that other people are out of their minds. A word of advice: next time, think before you start bashing people. You may be surprised to find out whom you are really talking about.

World Jewish Population (According to Jewish Virtual Library) (1882-2008)

Year	Population
1882	7,800,000
1900	10,600,000
1914	13,500,000
1922	14,400,000
1925	14,800,000
1939	16,728,000
1948	11,500,000
1955	11,800,000
1970	12,630,000
1980	12,840,000
1990	12,870,000
2000	13,191,500
2008	13,300,000

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