

Be'chol Lashon Update January 2007

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UPCOMING EVENTS

SAN FRANCISCO AND THE BAY AREA

True Colors, Pact Workshop

January 20, 9am-4pm, Kaiser Medical Center, Oakland

"True Colors" is a day-long workshop for transracial, international and interracial families that focuses on the issues inherent to parenting across racial lines. We will present concrete suggestions for connecting your child to his or her racial heritage and information about how positive racial identity develops.

For more information, go to http://www.pactadopt.org/events/true_colors.html

Be'chol Lashon Special Event

Breaking Through the Myth of Jewish Whiteness

January 28, 9am-5pm, San Francisco



Be'chol Lashon presents a panel at *Finding Our Voice: The Conference for Progressives Constructively Addressing Anti-Semitism*

Panelists: Booker Holton, Ph.D., Nzinga Kone, Lori Rosenstein, and Dennis Ybarra.

This panel explores the anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism within the politics of race.

For more information, go to <http://www.jewishresearch.org/events.htm>.

A Sephardic Evening

January 31, 5:30pm, Commonwealth Club, San Francisco



Though they fled Spain in the 15th century, the Sephardic Jews have not forgotten their Castilian heritage. Through discussion and music, performed in Ladino, Rivka Amado and guitarist Joel Seigel explore a culture with roots in Spain and extending as far as India.

For more information, go to <http://commonwealthclub.org/mlf/>

Be'chol Lashon Special Event

Family Day at The Contemporary Jewish Museum

February 11, Noon-3pm, FREE, San Francisco



Be'chol Lashon & The Contemporary Jewish Museum co-sponsor

FAMILY DAY at The Contemporary Jewish Museum

Explore photos in *The Jewish Identity Project: New American Photography*, participate in gallery activities, and discover identity through storytelling, maskmaking, and more!

For more information, go to <http://www.jewishresearch.org/events.htm#familyday>

CURRENT NEWS

Ethiopian Israelis Provide Training for Rwandan Youth Village

By Stephanie Freid, Dec. 25, 2006, Israel21c



Jean-Pierre Nkuranga was twenty in 1994 when he hid in the bushes outside his home in Rwanda and watched helplessly as Hutu militiamen ruthlessly attacked his family members. He lost four siblings and both parents in the carnage that was later known as Rwanda's genocide. "Children heads of household were common - some as young as ten. The kids would put together households of other kids and live in the streets or build tent camps with leaves and mud." Nkuranga said.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide left over 800,000 Tutsis dead. One of the most devastating aftermaths of the tragedy was the approximately 1,200,000 children - almost 15% of the Rwandan population - who became instant orphans and lost their homes forever. Nkuranga became the parent to his four remaining siblings in the aftermath of the violence and he eventually took in six additional neighboring children.

Overcome by the enormity of loss, Nkuranga vowed to help build a future for the children orphaned in Rwanda. And today, he's beginning to achieve that goal with the help of Israel. Nkuranga was part of a ten-person delegation of Rwandan youth experts who recently spent a week at the Yemin Orde Youth Village south of Haifa in order to gain tools for opening the Agahozo-Shalom Village in Rwanda, which will be modeled after Yemin Orde.

A high percentage of Yemin Orde's children have been of Ethiopian origin, who suffered through similar stories of parent separation, trauma and displacement following Israel's airlifts - Operations Moses and Solomon in the 80s and 90s. Initiated to safeguard Ethiopia's Jews from famine and political persecution, the airlifts brought more than 22,000 Ethiopians out of Africa, and in the process, some children were orphaned and others faced various hardships.

Now, some of those children-turned-adults are helping the Rwandan counselors in establishing the program for the orphans of Rwanda. "A large percentage of Ethiopian children have had to straddle the social and cultural worlds of Israel versus Ethiopia and it has been difficult," explained Yissaschar Mekonen, Director of the Israeli-Ethiopian Advisory Team to the Rwandan Village. A graduate of Yemin Orde, Mekonen immigrated to Israel in the early 70's

"It has trickled down from the parents. When your parent can't help you with homework because he can't read or write... Yemin Orde offers a parenting alternative," he told ISRAEL21c.

The Rwanda Agahozo-Shalom Village goal will provide a comprehensive response to youth displacement by establishing a multi-faceted youth village like Yemin Orde, based on the concept of the 'Village' as home. Children are fostered by a holistic and protective environment to help them overcome trauma and abandonment issues.

"We are here to get professional, consistent modeling," Nkuranga told ISRAEL21c during a break in the week-long series of meetings, seminars and information gathering. "Back home, urgent needs are being met and we're putting out fires. Based on what we learn here, we'll be able to take our children all the way to autonomy and guarantee their future. We can organize their care so that they re-build themselves in an autonomous way."

Manhattan-based project initiator and director Anne Heyman explained that the idea for the village was sparked during a dinner conversation. "I asked Paul (i.e. Paul Rusesabinga, subject of the film Hotel Rwanda): 'What's the biggest problem you have in Rwanda?' and he told me that in a country where there are 1.2 million orphans out of a population of 8 million, there is no future for that country."

For Heyman, Rusesabinga's words were a calling. She began researching orphanages and phoning contacts which led her earlier this year to then-Yemin Orde director Chaim Peri. Since deciding to model the Rwandan village after the Yemin Orde model, her life has been a flurry of shuttles between the US, Rwanda and Israel where she is organizing teams, buying land and drumming up donors.

The Ethiopian-Israeli and Rwandan collaboration was a natural extension of Heyman's plan - The Ethiopian team has traveled once to Rwanda to consult locally and the Rwandan team has been in Israel twice. During their week in Israel, Rwandan committee members attended lectures and meetings to glean information on everything from channeling extra-curricular interests to fostering cultural practices to troubleshooting problem areas.

The delegation spent long hours on Yemin Orde's campus to gather in-depth information about the philosophies, functions and daily routines of Yemin Orde staff roles, from counselors to advisors to administrators to house mothers. They also took visual

notes on the layout for modeling learning areas, living quarters, dining room and recreation spaces in the Rwanda village.

Teams worked easily together, sharing ideas, laughter and cultural cues non-Africans might not intercept. "I do this 'O' sign with my thumb and index finger and the Rwandans know it means 'zero'. Other people think I mean 'okay'," Mekonen explained. "It's small, but it's part of the larger picture." The exchange will continue up to the projected 2008 launch of the Agahozo-Shalom Village. According to Heyman, during initial stages, a team of a dozen Ethiopian-Israelis will be on the ground in Rwanda for several weeks to oversee operations and troubleshoot when necessary.

"Initially I felt like: What do I have to offer them? We were a few people from Ethiopia who walked a few kilometers to Sudan and were airlifted out. What can I tell someone who saw his entire family murdered?' Mekonen poses. "But it turns out that our story of leaving our Ethiopian home and culture and succeeding in Israeli society is very big to them. We did it well, sometimes with parents still behind in Ethiopia. This success is what they want to model for the Rwandan youth left behind."

The Rwandan advisory committee includes a member of Rwanda's education ministry, an AIDS counselor, an expert on widow and children survivors of genocide, and a child-headed household specialist. "The communication and the sharing show us that the concept works and gives us the hope for doing something similar when we return home," Rwandan reconciliation advisor Albert Nzamukewereka told Israel21C. "We don't have to make a cultural transition - we're from the same place, really - and that makes it easier."

When Yemin Orde graduate Racheli Ugado traveled to Rwanda in July as part of the Ethiopian-Israeli Village consultancy, she described it as revisiting home. "I came [to Israel] on Operation Solomon when I was seven, so I remember a lot. Rwanda felt like being back in Ethiopia. I'm still very connected to it. Helping my brothers in Africa so that they can help themselves feels natural."

Uruguayan Jews Feud Following Controversial Community Election

By Larry Luxner, Dec. 13, 2006, JTA



Recent leadership elections have split the Jewish community of Uruguay, with the sides trading accusations of secret pacts and voting irregularities. The elections were to determine who would lead the largest and most powerful segment of Uruguay's Jewish community. However, a post-election merger between the No. 2 and No. 3 parties has shifted the balance of power and sparked controversy in the community.

On Oct. 22, some 1,460 members of the Israelite Community of Uruguay, or Kehila, elected a 33-deputy board to choose a president and other authorities for the next three years. The clear winner was Dor Chadash, a coalition of independent parties headed by Armando Poziomek, a 49-year-old accountant. His group won 47 percent of the vote, which garnered 16 deputies.

Next was a coalition of the Labor, Meretz and Bund parties led by Max Sapolinski, a 46-year-old accountant and Uruguay's former vice minister of economy and tourism. That list won 32 percent, or 11 deputies, followed by Alberto Buszkaniec's Likud, with 20 percent, or six deputies.

Historically, said Armando Litvan, the No. 2 official of Dor Chadash and president of both Hillel Uruguay and the local Israel Bonds chapter, the list that won the most votes formed the Kehila's government — and no group ever won as high a percentage as did Dor Chadash.

This time, however, "the other two lists got together because they had a previous secret agreement," Litvan claimed, "and with their 17 combined deputies they named a president" — Sapolinski.

"This may be legally correct, but from our point of view, morally it is not," Litvan said. "Today it's clear that there were not three options, only two, but the people didn't know that at the time."

Poziomek agrees. "I won 47 percent of the vote, which means nearly half the community understood that there were a lot of things that needed to change," he said. "And what happened is totally unjust."

Not true at all, retorts Sapolinski, who denies any pre-election deal. Under the power-sharing arrangement, he will serve as president until May 2008. Buszkaniec, the third-place candidate, will serve the remaining year and a half of the presidential term.

"This is not an injustice, simply a system to elect leaders," Sapolinski told JTA. "If nobody gets an absolute majority, you must

make agreements to elect leaders.” Dor Chadash, he said, “didn’t want to be a part of the coalition. If somebody thinks the system is unjust, then he should change the system.”

With membership estimated as high as 12,000, the Kehila is by far the largest and most powerful of the four groups that comprise Uruguay’s Jewish community. There’s also a Sephardi group with about 3,000 members; the New Israelite Congregation, formed by German immigrants, with some 2,000 members; and a Hungarian group with a few hundred members. Each group sets its own policy, but since the Kehila accounts for most of Uruguay’s Jewish community, its decisions have more impact.

At one time in the early 1970s, Uruguay had nearly 50,000 Jews. But the community strongly encouraged aliyah, and today at least 15,000 Jews of Uruguayan origin live in Israel. The Jewish population remaining in Uruguay has dropped to about 18,000, a consequence of economic chaos over the past five years. Those who didn’t go to Israel went to Brazil, Argentina and the United States. More than 90 percent of the country’s remaining Jews live in Montevideo, the capital.

Yet Jews still have influence in this country of 3 million people, and members of the community have achieved prominence in politics, including Montevideo Mayor Ricardo Ehrlich. There are eight functioning synagogues in Uruguay. Although Chabad-Lubavitch has a presence here, few Uruguayan Jews consider themselves Orthodox, and no more than 100 families keep kosher.

“Uruguay is a secular country, so secular that officially, there’s no Christmas on Dec. 25 but rather a Dia de la Familia,” or Family Day, Litvan said. “Because religion was never that important in either Uruguay or the Jewish community, we identify more with Zionism and political parties in Israel and Europe.”

Buszkaniec, 57, is an electronics importer who has been heavily involved with the Uruguayan Jewish community’s Likud Party for 15 years. He defends the power-sharing accord, noting that “it’s the same as in Israel. It’s not a direct election. You need 50 percent plus one, and the council chooses the president. “I personally offered Armando Poziomek three years, each year headed by a different president beginning with Sapolski, then me, then him. He didn’t want that.”

After the No. 2 and 3 lists received a combined 53 percent of the vote, “I offered to split the term of office half and half with Poziomek, but he refused that, too,” Buszkaniec added.

Poziomek counters, “How in any way could we share a presidency? That’s like Bush offering to split the four-year term of office with Gore, two years each, because the vote was so close. It wouldn’t be efficient for the Kehila, and it would be a very grave mistake. Either one is the president or the other, but not both.”

Both factions have taken out full-page advertisements in the local Jewish weekly, Semanario Hebreo, seeking support for their positions. If there’s any point on which the opposing sides agree, it’s that nobody is really happy about the outcome. “The campaign took on a bitter tone,” Sapolski acknowledged. “The people who participated directly in the list are angry, but on the rank-and-file level, this will pass rapidly. I don’t think this is a big deal. It was an unfortunate moment, but it’s not a crisis for our community’s future.”

Leading French Jew Comes Out Strong for Presidential Hopeful

By Brett Kline, Jan. 7, 2007, JTA



Sitting in a fashionable cafe on Boulevard Saint Germain, Nicole Guedj, perhaps the key point person between French government circles and the Jewish community in France, wonders aloud, “Is there a Jewish vote?” Her answer: “I don’t think so.”

But Guedj, a high-placed member of the campaign team for Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, was confident her candidate would fare well with French Jews even before Socialist Party hopeful Segolene Royal stumbled on her visit to the Middle East in early December.

Royal stood by idly as a Hezbollah deputy in Beirut compared the Israelis to the Nazis who occupied France, waiting until the next

day to condemn the remarks as “unacceptable, abominable and odious.”

“Many people in the community were already convinced that Nicolas Sarkozy is the right person to be president of France,” said Guedj, a former lawyer.

Guedj, 51, is a close associate not only of Sarkozy but also President Jacques Chirac, who are political adversaries despite belonging to the same right-of-center party, the Union for a Popular Movement, or UMP.

But Guedj's passions lie beyond French politics. Guedj, who has kosher meals delivered to staff in her office in the Elysee Palace, the presidential complex, is a steadfast defender of Israel. In 1996 she was one of the founders of UPFJ, the Union of Jewish Patrons of France, a group of Jewish heads of French companies who meet to discuss French-Jewish and Israel-related matters, but does not lobby in the American sense of the word. There are no political lobbying groups in France.

Guedj has been criticized by politicians and the French public for her commitments to the Jewish community in France and the security of Israel and her activity in French politics. Since Israel's war this summer with Hezbollah, she has been worried about Israel and how it's viewed. The July 2005 meeting in Paris between Chirac and then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon “was a real breakthrough in terms of Israel's image in France and in Europe,” she said, “but since the war with the Hezbollah, that image is once again that of an aggressor. Israeli politicians have had great difficulty convincing the world that the war was an act of self defense.”

Among French politicians, Sarkozy has the clearest position on Israel, Guedj says. “He has always been clear about needing to find solutions to the rise of radical Islam throughout the world, the violence of angry youths in the suburbs in France, and about Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah in Lebanon,” she said. “No Socialist Party official can come close to Sarkozy in terms of his support for Israel.”

Some French blamed Sarkozy for compounding, even provoking, violence in the French suburbs in November 2005, when thousands of young people, mostly of North African Arab and other African background, burned cars, businesses and schools, and fought with police, sometimes in neighborhoods with substantial Jewish populations. “Sarkozy promised a tough response,” Guedj said sternly, “but I believe he was also fair.”

Guedj explained that suburban youths face high unemployment, even when they have high-level diplomas, because their parents have no networks to help them and employers sometimes don't want to hire Arabs or blacks. “You know very well that in France, it is against the law to count people or group people according to their ethnic origins,” she said. “But Sarkozy is the only candidate who has come out and said he is in favor of some kind of affirmative action program, what we call positive discrimination in French.”

An Algerian native, Guedj came to France in 1961 with her parents during a mass exodus of Jews when the former French colony became independent.

Along with politics and Israel, another passion is humanitarian work. In 2004, as France's undersecretary for victims' rights, Guedj convinced Chirac to propose to the United Nations a satellite communications-based container called Emergesat to direct crises in the field. “For me, politics has always a tool to get things done,” she said. “The fact is that the United Nations has not been very present in crisis situations, be it in Bosnia, in Rwanda or now in Darfur. Putting U.N. blue-helmet troops on the ground is one thing, but identifying victims, managing food stocks, drinking water, medical supplies and coordinating communication requires a high-tech solution, and so far the U.N. has nothing like that.” Her proposal to employ high-tech teams, called “red helmets,” is still being examined by the United Nations.

Speaking about Royal's trip to the Middle East, Guedj was dubious about the candidate's excuse for not speaking out immediately against the Hezbollah deputy — a bad translation. “Honestly, I have my doubts, but at this point it doesn't even matter,” said Guedj, who is one of 200 members of the Council of State, a government body that provides counsel on French law. “The explanation by Socialist Party officials is unacceptable to the French public and especially to the Jewish community.”

At such a high level of international politics, there's no room for mistakes, she said. “Segolene Royal or anybody else cannot go to the Middle East without being fully prepared for every possible situation,” Guedj said. “She cannot hide behind a bad translation.”

IDENTITY

Museum Exhibit Shoots Down Jewish Stereotypes

By Dan Pine, Oct. 13, 2006, j. Weekly



Blue skies and safe streets, Sears lawn mowers and Schwinn bikes. A father and son fishing down by the old creek. A mother pushing a baby carriage. They are bucolic images of suburban America. Except the women wear long skirts and the men wear kippahs and tallits. These are a few of the images (by photographers Andrea Robbins and Max Bechar) from the "Jewish Identity Project," a new exhibition opening Sunday, Oct. 22 at San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum.

The exhibition, which premiered at New York's Jewish Museum in 2005 and ran at L.A.'s Skirball Museum earlier this year, features 13 artists, each focusing on the elusive subject of what, exactly, constitutes a Jew in America today. Using photography, multichannel video projections and multimedia installations, the exhibit is divided into three "questions": Who is a Jew? Where is home? What is community? The participating artists seem to respond with answers that aren't strictly black or white. They are black, white, and every other shade of the rainbow. "People will be surprised by some of the images," says museum Director Connie Wolf. "There is such a stereotypical image of what a Jew is. Some of that is in this show, but a lot is not. Identity is vital right now as a topic for thinking about oneself and the world."

Robbins' and Bechar's images of Chassids from sleepy Postville, Iowa, certainly defy stereotypes. So does the Korean-born Jewish bride in Nikki Lee's "The Wedding," a series of photos, not one of which depicts the groom. So do the unnervingly personal portraits of mixed-race Jews in Dawoud Bey's work.

And so do the multicultural personalities in "**Judaism and Race in America**," a documentary by Shari Rothfarb Mekonen and her Ethiopian-born husband, Avishai Mekonen. A segment from the film is part of the exhibit. "It's something my husband has been grappling with his whole life as an Ethiopian Jew," says Shari Rothfarb Mekonen. "When he came to America [from Israel] in 2001, he became aware that in general a black Jew was not something most people were familiar with. He wanted to address that."

The Mekonens' film includes interviews with Hispanic Jews, black Jews and Asian Jews. The filmmakers met many of them through the Institute for Jewish & Community Research in San Francisco, which co-produced the documentary with Pacific Street Films. "The word 'stereotype' always has a pejorative attached to it," adds Mekonen, of New York City. "[The film] is not so much about challenging a stereotype but about raising awareness."

Guatemala-born Jewish photographer Jaime Permuth tackles similar misconceptions in his work. For his contribution to the exhibit, the Brooklyn resident photographed the growing number of anusim, or Conversos, in his neighborhood. These are Latinos, most raised Catholic, who discover their long-lost Jewish roots and opt to convert back to Judaism. "For me, the anusim are a very interesting subject," he says. "I had done projects on the main subjects of my identity: Latin America and Judaism. But they had never overlapped. I was fascinated that I could finally bring these two worlds together."

In one series, "La Conversion de Carmen," Permuth chronicles the Orthodox conversion of a Latina woman, including her beit din, mikvah and follow-up celebration over a slice at a kosher pizzeria. "I wanted to make a continuum of images that take you on a journey," adds Permuth. "I used a wide-angle lens, and got close to faces. [The photos are] installed with that in mind: How to maximize the cinematic narrative."

The "Jewish Identity Project" is made possible through support from the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, Koret Foundation, the Alexander M. and June L. Maisin Foundation of the Jewish Community Federation's Endowment Fund, the Guzik Foundation, Altria Group, Inc., and the Lillian H. Floresheim Foundation for the Arts.

As always, the Contemporary Jewish Museum will use the exhibition as a springboard for ancillary community events. Wolf says she will partner with SF Camerawork, a nonprofit organization that promotes art photography, to launch educational opportunities. Several of the artists will be in town to meet with museum visitors, and, like last year, the museum will be open Christmas Day. "In a show like this, we want people to think about their own sense of identity," says Wolf. "Artists are great at enabling us to look deeper."

Be'chol Lashon & The Contemporary Jewish Museum co-sponsor

FAMILY DAY at The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco

February 11th, from Noon – 3pm, FREE and Open to the Public!

For more information, go to <http://www.jewishresearch.org/events.htm#familyday>

Our Braided Heritage

By Debbie Popiel White, Dec. 2006, Interfaithfamily.com



My daughter Gabriella is the light in her parents' eyes. A sister to her two big brothers. A joy to her grandparents. A kind friend. Bright, talkative, inquisitive. She is all these things and she is also black and Jewish.

The combination makes for an interesting heritage and for some interesting choices in hairstyles as well. So as I sat watching my daughter's hair get braided into cornrows the other day I couldn't help but think about how those braids, entwined together, represented some of her many attributes. I saw in them strands of my husband, myself and my daughter's Judaism.

Gabriella is a 4-year-old who reminds me to recite the Sh'ma nightly and teaches her Christian cousins about how the Torah has all the stories in it that God wrote. When I picture her as a grown-up I think of her as being a strong woman who knows who she is and is Jewish above all. Why? Simple. Her parents chose to send her to a Jewish preschool.

One thing I discussed with my husband when I met him eight years ago was my steadfast desire to raise my children Jewish. It was no secret that at the time I was a teacher at a Jewish preschool and had a young son who was clearly being raised Jewish. Being upfront about these things wasn't so much a preparation for our life together as much as it was a sharing an important part of who I was that anyone close to me needed to know about. Gregory noticed my faith immediately, and while he came from a strong Christian family he himself did not observe any faith. He knew that to be with me meant that our children would be Jewish.

A few years later I left teaching to earn more money in the corporate sector and Gregory and I began to merge our families together. We each had a son from a first marriage who was 5 at the time. Blending two existing children, two races and two religions was not an easy feat. When we learned we were pregnant, I became anxious about raising a mixed-race child to be Jewish.

Not only did we decide to raise our daughter Jewish, but based on my previous experience sending my son to a Jewish preschool, we decided that the best place for her to be while we were at work was in the care of a Jewish preschool with an infant room. Having a husband who neither understood Judaism nor wished to embrace religion of any sort was challenging, but we agreed that as a mixed-race woman our daughter would need to be strong in her identity.

While my husband was not overly enthusiastic about sending our child to a Jewish preschool, he liked the strong family values and commitment to education that he saw in my belief system, felt welcomed as an African-American man in the Jewish preschool environment, and recognized this was best for our child through my encouragement. Gradually my concerns about how our daughter would be accepted as a mixed-raced Jewish child diminished, and my husband's outlook helped turn my anxiety to confidence.

Although we had had the conversation that we would raise our children Jewish at the beginning of our relationship, explaining that choice to my mother-in-law, who sings in a church choir, brought more anxiety. Fortunately, although unsure about how we would do it, she was supportive and interested in learning more. So onward we forged!

Since that time, I am fortunate to have gone back to my own roots in education and taken on the role of early childhood director at my daughter's preschool. You might think that as an active member of the Jewish community, incorporating Judaism into my home life would have been simple. However, for a mixed-race, second-marriage, blended family, incorporating Jewish rituals is just as difficult as it is for any other interfaith family. Take, for instance, the year that the first night of Hanukkah fell on Christmas Day. What do you celebrate and more importantly, how? We had a tree in honor of my husband's son, Damien, who in his other home celebrates Christmas. On Christmas day, we awakened to gift giving and eggnog. That evening, we had latkes and menorah lighting. It was a long day filled with lots of food and gifts. Honoring each holiday in a meaningful way other than opening gifts is a challenge too, so we took time to clean out our closets and donate to those less fortunate.

Gabriella's comment on the celebration was "We get to do both!" "Yeah and we get to do this for eight days," added her brother Samuel. "Christmas is eight days too? Yippee!" she shouted in glee.

Learning to celebrate who we are and being respectful of and honoring our differences comes directly from the school Gabriella attends. Christmas is not a bad word at her school. There are many interfaith families and some non-Jewish teachers, so they are very inclusive in their approach, which helps my immediate family enormously. Gabriella was the first person to say during circle time last year, when the topic came up about who was Jewish in the class (since one of the teachers was not), "My daddy is special. He's not Jewish, but God made us all special."

B'tzelim Elokim, being created in the image of God, is a strong theme in the school. Gabriella's teacher in the threes class tells a beautiful story about creation that incorporates diversity into it. She begins with the sun that is yellow and the grass that is green, stopping along the way to ask, "What if the sun was yellow and the grass and the trees were yellow too?" To which the children answer loudly and excitedly "BORING!" She then continues, asking that same question all the way through the story and asks finally, "What if God created us all the same color?" Of course, the children reply, "Boring!" The lesson of being created in the image of God and being grateful for being different is reinforced. Gabriella recognizes the shade of her skin in comparison with her friends and family as they hold their arms against each other and in her sweet sing song voice always ends with, "But we all look like God." She can draw this conclusion because of the strong values she has learned in a Jewish preschool where her friends accept her with no distinctions made about her color, putting my anxiety to rest.

At home, our daughter explains to her father what holidays she is learning about, and he is learning from her. Last Purim, upon giving our non-Jewish neighbors the Mishloach Manot (gift) basket she made at school, she politely told them, "They're meesh lock baskets." Oblivious to their perplexed looks she happily skipped away singing, "meesh lock, meesh lock, meesh lock."

My mother-in-law visits often and spends time at the school learning how to bake challah and recite the blessings. We say motzi (prayer over bread) at the dinner table nightly and my husband is the one who prompts my daughter to lead the prayer. Her education has become our family's education.

We have figured out a way to make raising our daughter Jewish in an interfaith family work and our family has thrived. Our child has brought us together in our rituals. Her brother Damien relearns the prayers each time he visits and knows his sister is Hanukkah and he is Christmas, as he puts it. We are incorporating Judaism into our lives while teaching our family that our differences can bind us together. We may not have the same religions or holidays, but we share our love for family, good food, belief in one God and enjoyment of spending time together. Holidays can be celebrated together, and we have discovered that certain shared foods can help represent some of the rituals. One of our favorites is using sweet potatoes, a staple in African-American food, for our latkes on Hanukkah.

Next year, Gabriella will go to kindergarten in our local public school. I am confident she has the strong identity necessary to succeed in a non-Jewish world. If we had chosen another course for her early education I am not sure I would have been able to make as definitive a statement. I know that the self-esteem she has learned through B'tzelim Elokim will shine through and let her teach others about her beautifully braided heritage.

Finding My India

By Carmit Delman, Dec. 2006, Moment Magazine



When I was a child, I pictured India in wax shapes, still-life window displays. There was my auntie, her son on one hip, stirring lentils in Mumbai, locked in mid-motion. Or streets crowded with people, rickshaws weaving between papayas and lettuce laid out to sell across the pavement. Each new vision, I would file away; each scent of ginger or story of a scampering mongoose evoked a new still-life. Once formed, the pictures never changed and remained sealed in their wax frames. This was how I understood India.

What little else I learned about India came from E.M. Forster, Rudyard Kipling, V.S. Naipaul—all Victorian and colonial. I also knew the story of India's Jews: an ancient shipwreck that left seven men and seven women, Hebrews, stranded on its shores. Jews had lived for centuries in villages, and eventually made their way to Mumbai, then called Bombay. My mother and her family had been born there decades ago, but dispersed to Israel and then settled in America.

Certain I would go there someday, I started writing about India and Indian Jews, making a place for this missing piece of my identity. Going there, I felt, would be a homecoming, a validation of everything I had pictured. When I was 31, the opportunity finally came, as my new husband and I embarked on an extended honeymoon. The land and its ancient Jewish community that I had romanticized from afar would finally be before me, a much-awaited confirmation.

From the moment we landed in Mumbai, however, and emerged into its steamy lace of mosquitoes and masses of people, I could barely connect what unfolded before me with what I had pictured. I could not believe my life had been so narrow as to not know what it meant to be in a place like this, where it seemed no one person—Jew or otherwise—could make a mark or scratch, let alone surface with significance above the surrounding chaos.

Real-life poverty here looked like it had on television at home but was far vaster, more tangible, and smelly, too. The heat, urine and exhaust seemed to seep into my skin, turning the waters of my eyes a coughing black. Tranquility was rare, preserved in guarded spaces. Each time we left those areas for the rest of the city, I forgot anew what it was to feel safe, to have for myself a morsel of fresh air and quiet.

But as I adjusted, I began to take in more. I saw the glossy colors and music of Bollywood, the lushness of vine-draped trees, glistening orange pastries. There were women painted in green and red, rows of men sleeping on the streets, their bent knees looked jagged, linked in the night like architecture against the honking, noise and crowds of millions. I found that I could look upon just-butchered food smeared in flies, and could expect a simple drink of untreated water to be poison. I learned to wave with the right hand instead of the left, meant for toileting, and to shrug off the fact that laundry, beaten clean in a holy lake, came out smelling smoked from the tons of corpse ashes poured in each year. I made a point to stay modestly covered, even in the unbearable heat.

Despite this contrast to my pristine imaginings, despite how uncomfortable India felt in three dimensions, I soon sniffed out spices forgotten since childhood and recognized intonations I could not quite translate into American. I recalled from some deep, collective memory the dizzying sensuality of religions rubbing together, Buddhas and Ganeshes blowing smoke Os and tossing flowers at each other.

I had come to this vast, exotic subcontinent to make sense of its centuries-old society. Instead I felt all around me the growth spurts of a new one taking form. In this way, we wandered India's infinity. It came home to me one afternoon in Mumbai, as we sat in a rare quiet corner and drank milk-tea, watching fat cows saunter by, pilgrims to pasture. Suddenly a motorcycle howled near, spraying dust. A shaved Israeli backpacker dismounted. He put his name in queue for an Alef-Bet keyboard at the internet café across the street, perused Israeli advertisements on the shop window next door, then plopped down at a table. Scanning the menu, he pointed a tattooed finger at the waiter. "Let's have a plate of hummus. And Israeli salad."

"Sababa, achi." Not only did the Indian waiter speak Hebrew slang, but he paired it with such a backhand nonchalance, we could have been in Tel Aviv.

This was just one of the subcultures of Jews scattered across the continent. In Mumbai, we found the local Jews for whom I had come, the last of the ancient communities who might explain to me my heritage. Emptied through mass emigration, their remnant seemed feeble, toothless, dying. They spoke of how vibrant their community used to be, pointing to their own lives and practices as if they were museum exhibits.

We spent Shabbat at one of the few synagogues that still drew a minyan, a musty wooden building with balconies painted turquoise and lazy ceiling fans that seemed to chop at the air in random bursts of will. There was a sense of bitterness that turned the day's simple d'var Torah into a brimstone tirade, a complaint of no one to oversee it all. Resources were lacking; the leaders wore too many hats. For Kiddush, we gathered in the basement, women and men separately, and ate curry egg, rice and chicken with formality—a meal of mechanics and inertia.

We ate other meals in Mumbai with the recently planted kiruv or outreach groups trying to lure Jews abroad into greater religious practice. The few stale native Jews were not their priority; rather, they focused their zeal on the dynamic flood of tourists and wanderers. Their sense of purpose showed clearest in the rebbetzins, young, already big from babies. They had married into lives of good works in the familiarity of Flatbush or Haifa and then found themselves plodding through dirty Indian streets, stepping around corpses, haggling over cucumbers with the locals. Still, they never seemed bothered by it, in their single-minded mission to put kosher meatballs and fresh challah on the tables where their rabbis taught Torah to searching hippies.

Mumbai's remaining Jews were American businessmen leaping upon the country's growing economy, middle-aged tour groups, granola-stuffed high school girls come to volunteer at orphanages, and a few leathered old-timers from New Jersey, now fluent in Hindi and melded into the population. Among them all were Jews like me, connected in biology and imagination, trying to learn about where they came from, as if a glimpse could explain anything.

But most of Mumbai's Jewish visitors are Israelis, backpackers, many fresh from the army, who seemed to have an instantaneous chemical reaction to India. As soon as their bodies mix with airport smog, nose rings and thick dreadlocks sprout, skin withers inside dirty cotton garb, calluses crack open, pushing forth sandal straps and copper anklets. They were everywhere, playing chess and guitar on every corner, smoking in every cafe.

Something mysterious was drawing these Jewish masses to India and, though I could not yet understand what that was, I felt it resonating in my own muscles. I, too, was hoping to connect, to animate the wax figures of my imagination, to feel some sort of access I might be entitled to by blood.

In such a wild place, I may as well have been waiting for the crowded streets to sweep themselves open at my whisper, or the monsoons to rain saffron. The city of Mumbai left me awed, Indian Jews as a people left me tender—but there was no quick channel through them for a deep connection. I had to start from scratch. And so we moved onwards in India, past Mumbai, heading up north to the Himalayas.

What was the nature, the inspiration of this searching in India? Perhaps it was the juxtaposed poverty and grandeur, the amazing starkness that led the mind to wander. Perhaps it was that this stripping of anonymity—this being defined by others through differences of skin color, style, language and presence—prompted a desire for greater definition on one's own terms. Perhaps, for Israelis drained by their army service, it was an easy way to learn mind-expanding yoga and philosophy and get drugs cheap. Perhaps it was just that wisdom was sweeter if earned through sweat and crossing continents.

But maybe greater than all this was the rush of the uprooting itself, the ripping away of those wax figures that we all carry in our minds. The loss of established norms could somehow crystallize an identity, evoke a spiritual response.

Suddenly surrounded by peoples steeped in exotic religious life—Hindus meditating, Buddhists spinning prayer wheels, Sikhs garbed in symbols up and down their bodies—even the most stubbornly secular Jews were left to wonder what greater forces existed, what it could be that everyone else seemed to know. Numbness melted away under such vibrancy.

Whether for reasons simply social or achingly spiritual, Jews who would have waved off haredim close to home pushed through crowded streets and strange bazaars to come to eat cholent at the local Jewish House, to learn and pray and sing and own their religion in a new way. Being Jewish was suddenly more raw and relevant when defined in the way our ancients first set themselves apart—in contrast to millions of people around us worshipping idols.

After several weeks in Mumbai, we ascended into the Himalayas, where I experienced for myself something of this profound connection. There in the mountains was the happiest home we made for ourselves in India. Cool even in the summer, spare, the region felt remote from the rest of the country. Soldiers deemed it punishment to be stationed at bases out there and, in the winter months, each village had to fend for itself, living off the barley it had grown and a handful of lightbulbs. The capital, Leh, where we stayed, a small town at heart, was prosperous, clean and enchanting. The bowled green valley stretched into purple desert mountains with snow whipped high on top below a blue sky.

We were far from the only tourists up here. After Israelis discovered the Himalayas and made them one of their bases, the kiruv groups followed. We found a young rabbi—his wife and three children sprawled across the floor playing patty cake—in a Jewish House he had set up, thousands of meters above the rest of the world, with a library, Torah scrolls and kosher kitchen. Friday nights, they hosted Shabbat dinners for sometimes four hundred people guests, eating soup under tents from pots as large as tubs. Between the Torah discussions, dotted lovingly with stories of Rav Nachman of Breslov and booming Carlebach melodies, one of the most striking moments was seeing an Indian tourist who happened to be wandering by pop his head into the tent area at the sound of the commotion. He watched with interest for a while, then reached for his camera and snapped a picture to show people at home.

It delighted us to learn that this Jewish House in the middle of the Himalayas also had a mikvah we could use. We would not have to descend our beautiful mountains and crisscross the subcontinent in search of one when it was time for me to immerse, so my husband and I could be intimately together again.

The first mikvah I had entered was in Queens. The walls were plastered in pale green tiles, the waters syrupy from chlorine. The woman who assisted me was competent, experienced, a firm help in my fumbling. It was the month before our wedding, and I learned from her that every future mikvah visit would conjure the joy of our wedding. I could picture, as if in wax again, what that would mean, but I had no idea how much this blessing would deepen in India's embrace.

Up in the Himalayas, the mikvah lay outdoors in a sukkah-like booth under the black night and star swarms. The mikvah's water was so mountain-cold that my husband carried massive potfuls of it back and forth to heat on the stove flames, each weighed-down, waddling step a shared ceremony.

Finally the mikvah was ready for me. The rebbetzin hugged me, led me out to it, and spoke a few words of Torah. "Follow me," she whispered, and the hush of her words accompanied me down the path. "These waters are connected to the waters in the Garden of Eden." I knew without doubt this was true.

There was no polish or marble along this path, no Queens convenience. But fat wax candles had been lit along its way, creating an enchanting sheen over the fence, behind which I heard Indian life closing down for the day. Soon all that remained was a pool of pure water before me. I descended into the cold, letting it sink within me, welcome, again and again, till the rebbetzin said simply for me and my husband, "Now you are together."

In that moment, though I could not name it, I understood what drew so many of Israel's Jews to India. Looking with new eyes at the ritual of old pictures, I paused, dripping, and let the spirit of it all catch up to me.

COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

Chile's Jews Part of the Larger Community in Santiago

By Peter Rotholz, Jan. 5, 2007, JewishJournal.com



When a fire alarm sounds in the south-central section of Santiago, it's answered by a unique company of firefighters -- Bomba Israel. In keeping with the Chilean custom, this is an all-volunteer bomba (fire brigade), and each of the company's firefighters is Jewish. Their emblem is the Star of David and their trucks proudly fly the flag of Israel alongside that of Chile.

Established in 1954 in what was once a largely Jewish section of Santiago, Bomba Israel was created by the Jewish community "to thank the country that welcomed them," said firefighter Robert Segal, 23, the son of a German-born Jewish mother and a Jewish Chilean father.

Despite the country's very large and vocal Palestinian community and a history of dictatorships on the left, as well as on the right, Chile has been quite hospitable to Jewish immigrants. The Chilean Jewish community consists of more than 20,000 people, with the majority living in Santiago, the country's capital.

Today's Chilean Jewish community is well integrated and relatively prosperous. Many Jews are prominent professionals, academics and civil servants, including an ambassador to Russia and three Cabinet members. And the backgrounds of the diverse Bomba Israel crew include everything from businessmen and lawyers to manual workers.

Segal, a student, is among the diverse crew at the station located in what is now a blue-collar neighborhood. "The role we play in the image of the Jewish community is very important," he said. "Many people can't believe that Jews do this kind of work; they think we're all rich and powerful and don't want to dirty our hands."

Segal said that except for the fact that all of its members are Jewish, Bomba Israel is a regular fire company. It owns two pieces of equipment, one of which is a state-of-the-art rescue truck that is used for automobile accidents more often than fires.

In addition to its regular members, Bomba Israel also supports a youth brigade of 20 cadets ages 12 to 17. Like the senior members, they receive extensive training in firefighting, rescue operations, first aid and CPR. When they reach age 18 they can qualify for full membership in the company.

While many visitors to Chile are attracted to its spectacular scenery rather than its cities, Jewish travelers can add a stimulating dimension to a visit by connecting with Santiago's welcoming Jewish community.

Santiago has about a dozen synagogues, including a palatial Chabad House in the fashionable La Dehesa section, an Aish HaTorah shul and Beit Emunah, a relatively new chavurah in the upscale Las Condes neighborhood. There is a sizeable Sephardic community with its own synagogue, as well as a Progressive (Reform) temple, Or Shalom, and two conservative congregations, Maguen David and B'nei Israel.

B'nei Israel is often referred to as "the German synagogue" because it was founded by refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria, and its membership is still made up largely of their descendants. Services are conducted in Hebrew and Spanish and there is a great emphasis on music and communal singing.

The new Chabad House is a remarkable Jewish development in Santiago. Located in an upscale suburb, the building's façade is a vastly expanded replica of 770 Eastern Parkway, the world headquarters of Chabad Lubavitch in Brooklyn. The interior of the building is not complete, but Rabbi Menashe Perman is proud to show off the luxurious mikvah and the enormous social hall. While the sanctuary is still not finished, the rabbi reported that some 400 worshippers attended High Holiday services.

Construction for the Chabad House began in 2002. The building was designed by Jorge Haichelis, a local Jewish architect and Chabad member, and the project was largely underwritten by David and Sarah Feuerstein. David Feuerstein, 81, is a Warsaw Ghetto and Auschwitz survivor, and serves as president of the Chabad of Chile and director of the International Committee of Yad Vashem.

The Chabad compound also includes a separate building that is used for the daily minyan, as well as the preschool play group and women's group, both organized by rebbetzin Chaya Perman. The extensive youth activities are under the direction of Rabbi Yishai Libersohn, a Mexico City native and the Permans' son-in-law.

Although the vast majority of Chilean Jews are secular, they have developed a rich network of educational and social organizations. Among them are B'nai B'rith, Maccabi sports clubs, as well as two Jewish day schools. The Chilean Jewish community has close ties with Israel and many of its young people visit Israel during their last year of high school.

Ghetto: A Contribution of Italian Jewry to Everyday Discourse

By Benjamin Ravid, Sept. 2002, Notes from Zamir



The history of the Jews of the Italian peninsula is significant for many reasons. Rome is the only city in the West where Jews resided continuously from late classical antiquity to the Nazi round-up of 1943. Also, Rome has been the seat of the Head of the Catholic Church, whose policies have played a major role in determining attitudes toward the Jews until the present. Another significant reason for the study of Italian Jews is that after the Spanish expulsion of 1492, they constituted the only native non-Ashkenazi Jewish ethnic group in Europe, and accordingly their language, religious customs, and cultural patterns all serve as a reminder that the so-called "World of Our Fathers" of Eastern and Central Europe, which is so often considered to constitute the "real" or "authentic" Jewish lifestyle, actually represents only one strand in the many-faceted Jewish experience. Additionally, among the many experiences of Italian Jewry is a word that has now entered into everyday parlance: "ghetto."

From their earliest days in the Diaspora, Jews chose voluntarily to live close together, reflecting a practice commonly adopted by groups dwelling in foreign lands. Initially, their quarters, often referred to as the Jewish quarter or street, were almost never compulsory or segregated, and Jews continued to have contacts on all levels with their Christian neighbors. However, the Catholic Church looked askance at such relationships, and in 1179 the Third Lateran Council stipulated that Christians should not dwell together with Jews. This vague policy statement had to be translated into legislation by the secular authorities, and only infrequently in the Middle Ages were laws enacted confining Jews to compulsory segregated and enclosed quarters, and even then, those laws were not always implemented. The few such Jewish quarters then established, such as that of Frankfurt, were never called ghettos, since the term originated in Venice and became associated with the Jews only in the 16th century.

In 1516, as a compromise between allowing Jews to live freely throughout Venice and expelling them from the city, the Venetian government required them to dwell on the island known as the Ghetto Nuovo (the new ghetto), which was walled up with only two gates that were locked from sunset to sunrise. Then, when in 1541, visiting Ottoman Jewish merchants complained that they did not have enough room in the ghetto, the government ordered twenty adjacent dwellings located across a small canal walled up, joined by a footbridge to the Ghetto Nuovo, and assigned to the merchants. This area was already known as the Ghetto Vecchio (the old ghetto), thereby strengthening the association between Jews and the word "ghetto."

Clearly, the word "ghetto" is of Venetian rather than of Jewish origin, as sometimes conjectured. The Ghetto Vecchio had been the original site of the municipal copper foundry, "ghetto" from the Italian verb *gettare* (to pour or to cast), while the island across from it, on which waste products had been dumped, became known as "il terreno del ghetto," and eventually the Ghetto Nuovo.

The word "ghetto" in its new usage did not remain for long confined to the city of Venice. The hostile Counter-Reformation bull of Pope Paul IV, *Cum Nimis Absurdum*, issued in 1555, provided that the Jews of the papal states were to live together on a single

street or, should it not suffice, then on as many adjacent ones as necessary, with only one entrance and exit. Accordingly, the Jews of Rome were moved into a new compulsory, segregated enclosed quarter which apparently was first called a ghetto seven years later.

Influenced by the papal example, local Italian authorities gradually established special compulsory, segregated and enclosed quarters for the Jews in most places where Jews were allowed to live on the Counter-Reformation Italian peninsula. Following the Venetian nomenclature, these new residential areas were already called "ghetto" in the legislation that established them.

In later years, the Venetian origin of the word "ghetto" came to be forgotten, as it was used exclusively in its secondary meaning as referring to compulsory, segregated and enclosed Jewish quarters, and then in a looser sense to refer to any area densely populated by Jews, even if they had freedom of residence and lived in the same districts and houses as Christians. Eventually, "ghetto" became the general designation for areas densely inhabited by members of minority groups, almost always for socioeconomic reasons, rather than for legal ones as had been the case with the initial Jewish ghetto.

It must be noted that the varied usages of the word "ghetto" has created a blurring of the Jewish historical experience, especially when employed loosely in phrases such as "the age of the ghetto," "out of the ghetto," and "ghetto mentality." Actually, the word can be used in its original sense of a compulsory, segregated and enclosed Jewish quarter only in connection with the Jewish experience in a few places in the Germanic lands, and not at all with that in Poland-Russia. If it is to be used in its original sense in connection with Eastern Europe, then it must be asserted that the age of the ghetto arrived there only after the Nazi invasions of World War II. However, there was a basic difference: unlike ghettos of earlier days, which were designed to provide Jews with clearly defined permanent space in Christian society, 20th-century ghettos constituted merely temporary stages on the planned road to total liquidation.

Finally, to a great extent because of the negative connotations of the word "ghetto," the nature of Jewish life in the ghetto is often misunderstood. The establishment of ghettos did not lead, as for example shown strikingly in the autobiography of the Venetian rabbi Leone of Modena, to the breaking off of Jewish contacts with the outside world on any level, from the highest to the lowest. Additionally, apart from the question of whether the ghetto succeeded in fulfilling the expectations of those who desired its establishment, from the internal Jewish perspective many evaluations of its alleged impact upon the life of the Jews and their mentality require substantial revision. In general, the decisive element determining the nature of Jewish life was not so much whether or not Jews were required to live in a ghetto, but rather the nature of the surrounding environment and whether it constituted an attractive stimulus to Jewish thought and offered a desirable supplement to traditional Jewish genres of intellectual activity. In all places, Jewish life must be examined in the context of the external environment, and developments---especially those subjectively evaluated as undesirable---not merely attributed to the alleged impact of the ghetto.

Roman Jewish Cuisine

By Ethel G. Hoffman, March 2006, Jewish World Review



Rome is a city of stark contrasts. Dine on a sun-dappled, roof top terrace overlooking Barberini Piazza where Smart cars (2-seater autos that don't guzzle up gas) and Vespas drive around Renaissance bathtub fountains at breakneck speed. At night, stroll around Testaccio to dance in trendy nightclubs with off-beat DJ's.

And then there's a part of Rome that for Jews, is serious and somber; the old Jewish ghetto where until the late 19th century more than 5,000 people were confined. Overlooking the ghetto, the square aluminum dome of the Great Synagogue, built in 1904, rises triumphantly as though in tribute to one of the oldest continuous Jewish settlements in the world. In 161 B.C.E. Jews arrived from Jerusalem as envoys of Judah Maccabee. After the Romans invaded Judea in 63 BCE, Jewish prisoners of war were brought to Rome as slaves. Later, Jewish merchants who came to Rome on business stayed and the Jewish population began to grow. Before World War II, there was a thriving community of 50,000. Today, there are about 12,000 Jews in Rome.

The ancient Roman ghetto is situated on the banks of the river Tiber. In 1555, it's documented that 1750 Jews were forced to live in this area by order of Pope Paul IV. This was the beginning of three centuries of physical confinement and repression for Roman Jews. Living conditions were grim. Stagnant waters from the river flooded the area, disease was rampant and the homes practically uninhabitable. Ironically, 21st century ghetto property is some of the most expensive in Rome.

I came to Rome to explore the ghetto. Wandering through the winding alleys and centuries old monuments, I was thrilled to discover an ancient culinary tradition that is very much alive. Outside shop doorways, brilliant hot red peppers spill over from clay pots and purple-tipped artichokes are heaped high in baskets. Chefs lug crates of zucchini and warm crusty loaves into restaurant

kitchens preparing for mid-day and evening meals when every seat will be taken.

Although Roman-Jewish cuisine has evolved over centuries, the most significant time was between 1500's and 1800's when the Jews were confined within the four gates of the ghetto from dawn to dusk. Isolated from the outside world, Jewish housewives were forced to be creative, cooking with limited amounts of humble ingredients while keeping the recipes kosher. Artichokes, cheeses, salt cod were cheap and available inside the ghetto and spices and seasonings added 'tam.' Vegetables and fish were fried in olive oil. Fish dishes are prominent in ancient Roman Jewish cooking probably due to the fact that there was a fish market in the center of the ghetto — red mullet, bream and sea bass cooked in a sweet and sour sauce with pine nuts and raisins is a popular dish for all Romans, Jewish or not. Beef was salted, peppered and dried, an ingredient which Roman Jews still prepare for the Holidays. The influence of different cultures and time periods is most obvious in dessert recipes. Bollo, a soft spongy cake studded with raisins and candied fruits, is known to have been brought to Rome by Jews expelled from Spain. A sweet pizza of almonds, raisins and pine nuts can be traced to the influence of Imperial Rome.

You can't leave Rome without dining at La Taverna del Ghetto, a superb kosher restaurant in the heart of the ghetto, where locals and dignitaries meet to eat and drink. We chatted with a Jewish delegation from California seated at the next table. The next day they were going to the Vatican where they had been granted an audience with Pope Benedict XVI.

La Taverna del Ghetto's extensive menu offers authentic, mouthwatering dishes. Whole artichokes, stems and all, are fried in olive oil so that when served they resemble crisp, golden chrysanthemums. Dried cod, vegetables and pine nuts are baked together to make an aromatic fish stew and zucchini is marinated in herbed vinegar, both recipes said to have originated in the old Jewish ghetto. Dishes with home made pasta abound — stuffed with porcini mushrooms, tossed with chick peas and roasted red peppers, and as ravioli drenched in a zesty meat sauce. Desserts prepared in-house such as Prune and Pistachio Torte and Grandmother's cake (a rich pound cake) are irresistible.

Recipes have been handed down through generations helping to preserve a Roman Jewish culture. Many of the dishes have been absorbed into Roman cuisine and you'll find some served in restaurants outside the ghetto. But the dishes remain unique — very Roman, very Jewish and especially steeped in precious tradition.

TOMATO BROTH WITH CHICKEN MATZA BALLS (MEAT)

The recipe for Chicken Matza Balls is from *The Classic Cuisine of the Italian Jews* by Edda Servi Machlin, published by Dodd, Mead and Company, 1981. In testing, I found it may be necessary to add a little more matzo meal. Chicken may be purchased already ground.

Serves 6-8

Chicken matza balls:

- * 3/4 pound chicken breast, boned and skinned
- * 3 eggs
- * 1/4 cup chicken broth
- * 3 tablespoons olive oil
- * 1 teaspoon salt
- * Large pinch each of white pepper and nutmeg
- * 3/4 cup unsalted matza meal

Tomato broth

- * 8 cups chicken broth
- * 1 cup tomato sauce
- * 2 cups tiny broccoli florets

Cut the chicken into chunks and grind in the food processor. Set aside. In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, broth, olive oil, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Add the ground chicken and matzo meal. Mix well. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

In a large pot, mix the chicken broth and tomato sauce. Bring to a boil over medium high heat. Shape the chicken mixture into 12 balls and drop into the boiling broth. Return to a boil, reduce heat to simmer. Cover and cook for 15 minutes. Add the broccoli. Cover and return to a boil. Cook for 5 minutes longer.

Approx. nutrients per serving: calories - 236 protein - 16g carbohydrates - 14g fat - 13g cholesterol - 111mg sodium - 637mg

BAKED COD WITH RAISINS, PINE NUTS AND CHERRY TOMATOES (PAREVE)

Serves 4-6

Before use, salt cod must be soaked for 12 - 24 hours in several changes of cold water. Rinse thoroughly and pat dry with paper towels.

- * 1 1/2 pounds salt cod, soaked and cut in 2-inch pieces
- * 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- * 1/2 cup good olive oil
- * 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- * 2 teaspoons chopped garlic
- * 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- * 1/2 cup dry white wine (preferably Italian)
- * 3 tablespoons water
- * 2 tablespoons vinegar
- * 1 tablespoon sugar
- * 1/3 cup raisins
- * 2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
- * 1/8th teaspoon red pepper flakes
- * 2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted

In a shallow dish, dredge the cod in the flour. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a large, deep skillet over medium high heat. (350F on a deep fry thermometer or a bread cube tossed in should brown in 60 seconds). Add the cod and fry until golden brown on both sides, 3-4 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Set aside.

Reduce heat to medium. Add the onion, garlic and parsley. Saute until onion is translucent, 2-3 minutes. Stir in the wine, water, vinegar and sugar. Reduce heat to low and bring to simmer. Continue cooking for 5 minutes to reduce liquids slightly. Add the raisins, tomatoes, red pepper flakes and cod. Partially cover. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring often. If sauce is too thick, add a little vegetable broth. Sprinkle pine nuts over before serving.

Approx nutrients per serving: calories - 419 protein - 32g carbohydrates - 23g fat - 21g cholesterol - 87mg sodium - 873mg

MARINATED ZUCCHINI (CONCIA) (PAREVE)

Serves 4-6

- * 4 -6 small zucchini
- * 1/2 cup good olive oil
- * 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- * 1/2 cup shredded fresh basil leaves
- * Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
- * About 1/2 cup wine vinegar

Trim off the ends of each zucchini. Cut each in half and slice thinly lengthwise. Place on several thicknesses of paper towel. Let dry 4-6 hours or overnight.

Heat olive oil in a heavy skillet over medium heat to 350F Oil should not be smoking hot. Add the zucchini. Fry until golden brown on both sides, 3-4 minutes. Arrange in layers in a glass dish. Season each layer with a sprinkling of garlic, basil leaves, salt and pepper, and vinegar. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours before serving.

Approx. nutrients per serving: calories - 183 protein - 2g carbohydrates - 5g fat - 18g cholesterol - 0mg sodium - 7mg

SPINACH WITH LEMON SAUCE (PAREVE)

Serves 4-6

- * 2 (10 ounce) packages baby spinach
- * 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- * 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- * 1/4 cup vegetable broth or water
- * Pinch of nutmeg
- * 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- * Fresh ground pepper to taste
- * 3 tablespoons toasted pine nuts or toasted walnut halves

Rinse spinach leaves in a colander. Set aside to drain. Do not spin dry. In a small bowl, mix the cornstarch with lemon juice, broth or water, nutmeg and sugar.

Place the spinach leaves in a large pot (4-5 quarts). Pour the cornstarch mixture over. Cook over high heat, stirring often, for 3-4 minutes or until spinach is beginning to wilt and liquid is boiling. Remove from heat. Season with pepper to taste. Spoon into a serving dish. Garnish with pine nuts or walnuts.

Approx. nutrients per serving: calories - 56 protein - 4g carbohydrates - 6g fat - 3g cholesterol - 0mg sodium - 79mg

PRUNE AND PISTACHIO TORTE (DAIRY)

Any other dessert filling such as almond , poppy seed or strawberry may be used instead of almond for this no-roll rich pastry dessert. Note: Do not use pie filling — dessert filling such as Bakers comes in a jar and is firmer in texture.

- * 3/4 cup prune plum dessert filling
- * 3 tablespoons coarsely chopped pistachios
- * 1 stick (4 ounces) butter, melted
- * 1 tablespoon white vinegar
- * 2 tablespoons sugar
- * 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- * Confectioners sugar

Preheat oven to 375F Spray a 9-inch pie pan with non-stick vegetable spray.

In a small bowl, mix the prune plum filling and pistachios. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, stir together the butter, vinegar, sugar and flour. Mixture should form a ball. Press about three-quarters of the mixture into the bottom of prepared pie pan. Prick all over with a fork. Bake in preheated oven 10 minutes.

Spread prune plum mixture over. Crumble remaining dough and scatter on top.

Return to oven and bake for 20 minutes or until pastry is golden brown at edges.

Cool. Dust with confectioners sugar before cutting into wedges.

Note: To make pareve, substitute vegetable margarine for the butter.

GRANDMOTHER'S CAKE (DAIRY)

Serves 12-15

- * 1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, softened
- * 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- * 1 1/2 cups sugar
- * 4 eggs
- * 2 cups cake flour
- * 2 teaspoons baking powder
- * 2 teaspoons almond extract
- * 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- * Powdered sugar to sprinkle (optional)

Preheat oven to 350F Spray a 10-inch bundt pan or large loaf pan, (16x5x4-inches) with non-stick vegetable spray.

In a large mixing bowl, beat the butter, cream cheese and sugar until pale and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, with 1 tablespoon flour to prevent curdling. Beat well after each addition. Add the baking powder, almond extract, cinnamon and remaining flour, about 1/2 cup at a time, beating well to mix. Spoon batter into the prepared pan.

Bake in preheated oven for 1 hour or until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 5 minutes before loosening edges with a round-bladed knife. Cool on a wire rack. Dust with powdered sugar before serving.

Approx. nutrients per serving: calories - 271 protein - 4g carbohydrates - 35g fat - 13g cholesterol - 90mg sodium - 128mg

Internet Allows Iranian Jews to Mourn

By Shaya Tayefe Mohajer, Dec. 24, 2006, Associated Press



As a young woman in Tehran during the 1970s, Susan Manavi never visited a cemetery, even after her grandparents were laid to rest a couple of years before Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Although they were buried in a Jewish cemetery near the city, Manavi's parents adhered to an Iranian cultural taboo that death and youth should be kept apart, so as not to tempt fate.

The 52-year-old Los Angeles woman first laid eyes on her grandparents' headstones two months ago on the Web site Beheshtieh.com. The site has photographs of thousands of graves from Beheshtieh Cemetery. "Looking at those graves took me back to our homeland and all the memories, sweet and bitter," Manavi said. "The

sweetness of everybody living side by side, rather harmoniously, and the bitterness of leaving and not knowing if you will ever be back."

The site was developed by L.A. resident Shahram Avraham Farzan. He has cataloged the final resting place for generations of Tehran's Jewish people. Indexed alphabetically, the site provides an opportunity for e-mourning at a time when many Jews

throughout the world feel antagonized by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The hardline conservative has repeatedly called for the annihilation of Israel, and most recently sponsored a conference denying the existence of the Holocaust.

Sam Kermanian, secretary general of the Los Angeles-based Iranian American Jewish Federation, said the Web site has stirred a lot of excitement because, "there are many in our community who, for various reasons, feel limited when it comes to going back to Iran. "They fear hostility but they still feel a closeness to that land and that people and their shared history," he said.

For a community in exile, seeing the graveyard is a rare, meaningful way of connecting with the past, said Roya Hakakian, author of "Journey to the Land of No," a memoir of growing up as an Iranian Jew. "I think in an ironic way this Web site makes you feel like you have not left your dead behind," Hakakian said. When "you are able to reach back to your dead, then there's a sense of being alive and not having entirely vanished."

The admittedly morbid undertaking was somewhat accidental for Farzan, who returned to Iran in 2002 to place a marker on his father's grave. Nearby, he saw the grave of a family friend and decided to snap a photo for the friend's relatives. In other parts of the cemetery, he saw poorly maintained graves, and others being moved for construction.

Farzan continued to take photos for the next 10 weeks, covering about 70 percent of the graveyard and spending thousands of dollars before returning to the United States. Farzan would often haul buckets of water in the wintry cold of Tehran to wash the graves before snapping shots of them. "I thought it would be a good gift for the families of these people," Farzan, 51, said. "A mitzvah."

Like many Iranian Jews, Farzan often refers to the rule of Cyrus the Great when explaining how deep his ties are with Iran. In 539 B.C., the emperor invited Jews and all others to become citizens of what was then the Persian Empire and issued what is believed to be the first-known declaration of human rights. "There are 2,500 years of Jewish Persians," he said. That history "cannot be eradicated completely."

Farzan now hopes to find the financial support and time to go back to other Jewish cemeteries in Iran to add to his Web site. He's received many letters of support from Jewish Iranians of different generations. A rabbi wrote to Farzan to thank him because his Web site offered him his first opportunity to say the Kaddish over his father's grave. The mourning prayer requires 12 Jewish men to pray at a grave, and the rabbi was able to do so, via Internet.

Others have written letters asking Farzan to help locate their family's graves, including many from California, where more than 160,000 Iranians live. Iranian Jewish communities dot the globe, with the highest concentrations in Los Angeles, Great Neck, N. Y., and Israel.

For Manavi and many of the estimated 80,000 Iranian Jews who emigrated to the Los Angeles area - about 20,000 remain in Iran - the idea of going back, if only for a visit, is never far from their minds. "I think, before I die, I have to go back. I want to see those places again," Manavi said. "I'm just waiting, hoping."

ARTS & CULTURE

A Young Actor's Exodus Across Time and Space

By Teresa Wiltz, Dec. 16, 2006, WashingtonPost.com



As Sirak Sabahat sees it, he's a time traveler, a man who's traversed many centuries, setting out by foot from his mountainous Ethiopian village where people still live as though in biblical times, trekking with his family through endless desert, hiding from wild animals and humans who wished them harm. They walked and walked, until they boarded what they thought was a giant bird, but what was really a time machine taking them, quite literally, to the Promised Land.

Israel. Circa 1991.

There, the travelers encountered not a land of milk and honey but a place of telephones and TV sets, of porcelain contraptions called toilets and white people who claimed to be Jews, too.

What a weird new world it was! But in time it became the world of Sirak Sabahat, too. The biblical time traveler grew into a man and even became famous in his adopted land. Famous, 21st century-style: He won a reality TV show talent contest and later snared a starring role in a movie, "Live and Become," which tells the story of Ethiopian Jews, the Beta Israel, also known as the Falashas. This year, he became the first Ethiopian to be nominated for an Israeli Oscar.

And now, in later 2006, he's sitting at an Ethiopian restaurant in Adams Morgan, curly coils puffed out in a postmodern 'fro, funky rose-tinted glasses sliding down his nose, laughing and shaking his head at the incongruity of it all. "I've had many, many lives," Sabahat, 25, says. "I came from the Bible. Now I'm in subway times. I had the privilege to be on a time machine."

Sabahat has come to Washington to promote "Live and Become," an independent film that opened yesterday at the Avalon Theatre. He's settled in Manhattan, determined to widen his horizons as an actor. His fame in Israel, he says, didn't translate into

anything other than "Miss Scarlett roles." When he decided, after graduating from the University of Haifa, that acting is what he wanted most to do, people told him, "You chose the profession that will bring you starvation in a new way."

His family didn't leave Ethiopia because they were starving, though theirs was a land often riven by famine and civil war. They left, Sabahat says, to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy: To return to Jerusalem. (Ninety thousand of them resettled.) Back at home, his people lived in strict observance of the Old Testament; they were farmers who tilled the land as their ancestors had hundreds of years before. As the oldest son, Sabahat was also destined to farm, to tend to the sheep and the cows, to look after his younger brothers and sister. School wasn't an option. There were no schools. "I don't know what it is to be a child," he says.

In Ethiopia there were regular pogroms against the Beta Israel, who trace their lineage to King Menelik, the son of Solomon and Makeda, the queen of Sheba. Some say the Falashas are descended from the lost Israelite tribe of Dan; others say they are Ethiopian Christians and pagans who converted to Judaism centuries ago; still others insist they are descended from Jews who fled into Africa around 586 B.C. As far back as the 16th century, Jewish officials declared that the Beta Israel were Jewish; in 1975, the Israeli government did the same thing.

In Ethiopia, a country that is both Christian and Muslim, the Beta Israel were a persecuted minority, particularly under the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Dubbed "the Butcher of Addis Ababa," Mengistu, who fled to Zimbabwe 12 years ago, this week was found guilty in absentia of genocide.

In 1984, a coalition of Israeli and U.S. forces secretly airlifted thousands of Falashas from refugee camps in Sudan in Operation Moses. In 1991, Sabahat's family was airlifted from Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, in Operation Solomon. He was around 10 when he left his village of Awassa in the country's south, and it took his family nearly a year to make it to the capital, walking barefoot and hiding in abandoned houses along the way.

By the time they settled in Israel, he was nearly 12. He couldn't read or write in his own language, let alone in Hebrew. He recalls that for the first eight months, his family holed up in their hotel, too afraid to venture out much.

Like many children of immigrants, Sabahat says he had to help his parents navigate a culture. A new century. There were so many things to get used to: "The first time I saw a white person, I thought something was wrong with his skin," he says. "The first time my mother saw the TV on in our room, she sent me out for coffee because she thought we had guests."

Another thing to get used to: The notion of race. And racism. "In Ethiopia, we were called Jews," says Sabahat, who graduated from a boarding school for gifted children. "In Israel, we were Ethiopians." And sometimes, much less polite words.

He leans forward, over his platter of grilled lamb and injera, elbows resting on thighs. "Who am I?"

It is this process of assimilation and alienation that prompted French-Romanian director Radhu Mihaileanu ("Train of Life") to write "Live and Become," a French-Israeli collaboration that tells the tale of an Ethiopian Christian boy whose mother passes him off as Jewish and shoves him into the arms of a Jewish woman who'd lost her son. Once they land in Israel, the boy, who is named Schlomo by Israeli officials, is admonished by his adoptive mother never to tell anyone his secret. She dies shortly afterward, and Schlomo is left alone to carry his secret, constantly fearful that he'd be found out and kicked out of his new country.

It was a role that Sabahat was determined to play after learning about auditions for the role of the grown-up Schlomo through his mother, who'd heard about them on Ethiopian radio. He didn't exactly nail his first audition. "The first test, it was very bad," Mihaileanu recalls by telephone from Romania. "He was moving his hands all the time and overacting in a very strange way. I told him, 'Okay, be cool.'"

He made Sabahat put his hands behind his back. Told him not to use his face. And then had him recite a monologue from the script, where Schlomo confesses to his rabbi that he is not a Jew. "He did that scene and it was incredible, because I saw all his soul," Mihaileanu says. Sabahat made the first cut, but his trials weren't over. Because the movie follows Schlomo's journey from childhood to manhood, three actors were needed to play the character: a boy, a teenager and an adult. Moreover, the three needed to look alike and speak Amharic, Hebrew and French.

Mihaileanu selected three groups of actors out of 2,500 hopefuls and set them up in separate living quarters. For a month, Sabahat lived with two younger doppelgangers, Moshe Agazai and Mosche Abebe, studying and memorizing lines until they were virtually indistinguishable from each other. That group made the final cut and the film was shot in Israel and France, picking up European film festival awards in 2005.

For the past few months, Sabahat has traveled the U.S. festival circuit to promote the film, speaking to Jewish and African American groups wherever he goes, the actor as activist. He has also written a one-man play, "From the Bible to the Subway," a humorous take on his experiences, and he's hoping to see it produced in New York. And amid his dreams of success there is a goal of giving back to his countrymen, returning to the biblical times, bringing with him a caravan of doctors and teachers, hopping from village to village building schools and hospitals.

"This is my obligation," Sabahat says. "I appreciate that I am breathing. This will be payment in some way for staying alive."

Persian Gates

By Karmel Melamed, July 28, 2006, Forward.com



Krista Nassi, an Iranian Jewish artist in her 30s, made it through Tehran's Institute of Graphic Design and Architecture and earned a master's degree in art from Tehran's University of Art. But when the installation artist tried to have her work displayed in one of the state-funded archives in 2000, she was turned away. She tried to enroll in a doctoral art program at Tehran University but was denied — four times.

"When I asked them why they would not allow me to register, they gave me different absurd reasons and I slowly realized it was because I was Jewish," Nassi said in a recent interview with the Forward. "Finally one of the assistants at the college told me flat out, 'Miss, you are from the worst of the minority groups, so don't waste your time trying to register.'"

Perhaps she shouldn't have been surprised. After all, Nassi has spent more than 10 years making a name for herself in the art world by focusing on some controversial themes — women's rights, marriage and other touchy societal issues. She won a number of international art competitions, including a Gold Medal at the prestigious 10th Asian Art Biennial competition in 2002. And yet, because of this acclaim, she continued to encounter antisemitism from her colleagues in Iran, and was even slandered at one point after being called "Joohood," a derogatory Persian word for a Jew.

"In one instance, after I won one of my awards a number of people came up to me and said, 'You are a Joohood girl who thinks she can be something, but we'll stop you from going any further,'" Nassi said.

In 2004, Nassi left Iran and settled in the large Persian community of Los Angeles, where she has literally started with a fresh canvas. She has been creating more of her installation pieces, with themes of Judaism and the Holocaust, which she had never been able to explore in the past, closest to her heart.

Mizrahi Pop with a Religious Twist, Barak Cohen

By Ben Jacobson, Jan. 2007, Jerusalem Post



Since his days as a young teenager, Barak Cohen has made a career for himself adding religious lyrics to hits by Eyal Golan, Ethnix and other leaders in Mizrahi pop. Bagan Hashoshanim (In the Garden of Roses) is Cohen's sixth disc, but it's only his second collection of mostly original material.

Like much of today's Mizrahi pop, Bagan Hashoshanim takes its cues primarily from Latin dance club music, contemporary Greek balladry and the bubblegum sing-alongs of the Arab world. The title track is reminiscent of the 2002 Sarit Hadad mega-hit "Light a Candle," while "Simha Menatzahat" (Joy Overcomes), "Eizeh Min Olam" (What a World) and "Yesh Boreh Olam" (There's a Creator) all sport fancy tranced-out rhythm-synth interludes, the latter two including rap verses.

The album's centerpiece, "Rak Alekha," would be pure Eyal Golan fodder if it hadn't been built on lyrics that ponder faith in God and Jews' obligation to crown their King.

Music consumers who love Mediterranean-flavored bubblegum pop but are uncomfortable with the genre's love song lyrics will enjoy Bagan Hashoshanim; the rest of us probably won't.

Brazilian Rhythms, Elisete

By Viva Sarah Press, Jan. 2007, Jerusalem Post



Keeping the boogie going is Israeli-Brazilian musician Elisete Retter. After two successful albums (Luar e Cafe and Gaagua), Elisete has returned with a new album of remixes. World Electro includes old and new songs in Portuguese and Hebrew, the tracks a mix of electronic music and Bossa Nova, samba, forro, baião and other Brazilian rhythms.



The addition of the electronic rhythms is a good one, giving the tracks an even more energetic groove.

Elisete worked with a variety of music producers and deejays on this remix album, and her signature optimism continues to filter through, bringing the average Israeli listener

the cheerful spirit of Brazil.

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