

Indian Jewish Congregation of USA Newsletter

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jewsofindia.org

The official website of the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA. Here you will find useful information about our organization, our heritage, future plans, and more.

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President's Message (by Romiel Daniel)

On August 14th/15th 2007, we will be entering the month of Elul, which is a time of repentance in preparation for the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This mood of repentance builds through the month of Elul to the period of Selichot, to Rosh Hashanah, and finally to Yom Kippur.

The name of the month (spelled Alef-Lamed-Vav-Lamed) is said to be an acronym of "Ani l'dodi v'dodi li," translated as "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine." This is a quote from Song of Songs 6:3, where the Beloved is G-d and the "I" is the Jewish people. In Aramaic, "Elul" means "search," which is appropriate, because this is a time of year when we search our hearts.

According to tradition, the month of Elul is the time that Moses spent on Mount Sinai preparing the second set of tablets after the incident of the golden calf (Ex. 32; 34:27-28). He ascended on Rosh Chodesh Elul and descended on the 10th of Tishri, at the end of Yom Kippur, when repentance was complete. Other sources say that Elul is the beginning of a period of forty days that Moses prayed for G-d to forgive the people after the golden calf incident, after which the commandment to prepare the second set of tablets was given.

In the Indian Jewish tradition, special prayers of forgiveness, called "Selichot," are recited starting from the second day of Elul right through the morning of the eve of Yom Kippur, when the people fast from sunrise to sunset. However, there are occasions when fasting is inappropriate (the two days of Rosh Hashanah, the Sabbaths and the eve of Yom Kippur). Traditionally, the Shamash would go from house to house with a lantern, waking up the people at 4 a.m. for Selichot. The Selichot, a tremendously spiritually uplifting ritual, would start at 5 a.m. in the synagogue. This time in terms of Jewish mysticism is considered a specially favorable time in terms of the "presence" and "closeness" of G-d. The shofar is blown after the morning services every weekday. It is not blown on the day before Rosh Hashanah. This is a wakeup call to sleepers, designed to rouse us from our complacency. It is a call to repentance. Elul is a time to begin the process of asking for forgiveness for wrongs done to other people and to G-d.

In the Ashkenazi tradition, Selichot always begins on Motzai Shabbat on the Saturday before Rosh Hashanah.

A fundamental part of the Selichot service is the repeated recitation of the "Thirteen Attributes," a list of G-d's thirteen attributes of mercy that were revealed to Moses after the sin of the golden calf. G-d appeared to him in the form of a chazzan, a prayer leader, wrapped in a tallit, a prayer shawl, and taught Moses the Thirteen Attributes, saying, "Whenever Israel sins let them recite this in its proper order and I will forgive them."

This appeal to G-d's mercy reassures us both that repentance is always

possible and that G-d always awaits our return to Him.

Let us therefore prepare ourselves spiritually by asking forgiveness from our fellow human beings and G-d; turn a new leaf and start the New Year with a clean slate devoid of envy, jealousy and hatred. Let us embark on a journey of doing the right thing and making the world a better place for all of us.

Amen.

Romiel Daniel

Personality of the Month – Noah Massil, Prominent Leader of the Indian Jewish Community in Israel



Noah Massil with his wife Sebia

Noah Massil (Mhashilkar) was born in 1946 in Tala, Raigad district, in the state of Maharashtra. He was an active social worker right from his schooldays.

After coming to Mumbai, he was one of the founding members of the Jewish Youth Association in 1966, the editor of the bulletin published by the Youth Association and a member of the Bombay Zionist Organization.

Mr. Massil has published many articles in several magazines in Marathi. His first book of poems, titled "Kawya Nad," was published in 1969. His second book of poems, "Mazhi Mai Marathi," was published in 2002.

Mr. Massil migrated to Israel in 1970, for religious Zionist reasons, and now lives in Jerusalem. He founded "The Central Organization of Indian Jews in Israel" in 1987 and is the President of the organization. Today, the organization has 29 branches all over Israel. Mr. Massil is also the founding member of the Indo-Israel Friendship Association.

Mr. Massil is the organizer of Hoduyada (grand get-together) of Indians who assemble in Eilat every year for a long cultural weekend. Hoduyada is the festival of Indian dance and song by Israeli-born Indian Jewish children, and is celebrated to keep Indian culture alive in Israel.

Mr. Massil was awarded the Best Social Worker of the Community award (Lokmanya Samaj Sevak) in 2000. The Indian Jewish Community honored him by giving him the International Distinguished Award during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Judah Hyam Synagogue in New Delhi in January 2007.

He has established a quarterly Marathi magazine, called "Maiboli," which was first published in 1985. He is the editor and president of the publishing committee. "Maiboili" is regularly published in Europe and the Middle East. Of the approximately 50,000 Indian Jews in Israel, almost 50% speak Marathi. The International Conference of Marathi speakers was held in Jerusalem in 1996. The Marathi speakers in Israel proudly celebrate Maharashtra Day on the May 1st every year.

Noah Massil is a respected, honorable and popular personality. A good speaker and loved by the community, he has an in-depth knowledge of Indian Jewish history, culture and heritage. He is the loving husband of Sebia, a father and grandfather.

Upcoming Events

High Holy Day services and Simchat Torah celebrations:

Rosh Hashanah eve: September 12th at 7 p.m.

Rosh Hashanah day: September 13th from 8 a.m. onwards

Yom Kippur Eve (Kol Nidre): September 21st at 6:15 p.m.

Yom Kippur Day: September 22nd from 7:30 a.m. onwards

Simchat Torah: October 7th from 4 p.m. onwards

The holiday events will be held at the Village Temple at 33 East 12th Street, New York, NY 10003

Samson and Benzi Kehimkar Pass Away



Samson Kehimkar

Samson Kehimkar, the violinist in the band HaBrera HaTiveet ("The Gathering"), passed away this past July following a difficult illness. He retired from the band few years ago due to his illness. Kehimkar, who was born in India, had been a member of the band HaBrera HaTiveet since its inception in the late 1970s. Before becoming part of the band, Kehimkar had played classical music in India. He contributed his talent to many movies, theater plays, the circus and various pop ensembles.

Following Kehimkar's retirement, the band held a tribute concert dedicated to him at Hanger 11 in Tel Aviv. Among the participants in the tribute were Ehud Banai, Meir Banai and David D'or. One of the albums of HaBrera HaTiveet, a concert album which came out in 1980, was named "Waiting for Samson" after Kehimkar.

You can listen to his performance with the band HaBrera HaTiveet by clicking on the below link (Children Are Happiness—Yeladim Ze Simcha):

<http://www.shlomobar.com/music/yeladim.wma>

In a very sad coincident, Kehimkar's son, Benzi Kehimkar, passed away shortly after his father's passing at the age of 46 from a cardiac arrest.

Benzi was born in Mumbai and came to Israel in 1976. He lived in Ashdod. Benzi was one of the prominent cricket players in Israel. Initially, he played in the Ashdod cricket club, then in the Elevenstars team, and later in the Neve Yonatan team until his passing. From 1989 until 2004, Benzi played on the Israeli Team and represented Israel in two Maccabee Games (1989 and 1997), four European championships (Denmark 1996, Holland, 1998, Scotland 2000 and Belgium 2004), and three ICC Cup competitions, which are the precursors to the world cup (1990 in Holland, 1997 in Malaysia, and 2001 in Canada).

Benzi could serve slow balls, was good batter and an excellent defense player. He was recently appointed as an international referee and was supposed to leave the following week for the European Championship for ages up to 15 in Spain.

Benzi leaves behind his wife Regina, and his four children, Liat (20), Sivan (19), Itamar (15) and Tomer (6). Itamar plays in the Israeli youth team and in his father's team, Neve Yonatan.

Article translated from Haaretz and sports.walla.co.il.

Photo of Samson Kehimkar from Haaretz.

Photo of Benzi Kehimkar from ashdodnews.co.il.



Benzi Kehimkar

India's Independence Day Celebrated at the Manhattan Jewish Center



Thomas Cherian, Vice Consul of India, giving a speech at the JCC event

The IJC celebrated India's 61st Independence Day at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan. The event was sold out, with about 150 people in attendance. The introductory speech made by Romiel Daniel, President of the IJC, related an excerpt of the first speech made by India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on August 15th, 1947 when India became independent from the British rule. The "Tryst with Destiny" speech is among the best masterpieces made by political heads of state.

India's independence movement was led by Mahatma Gandhi along a new path of ahimsa (non-violence), which was contrary to conventional lines. Whilst Winston Churchill asked his citizens for blood, tears, toil and sweat, Gandhi asked for toil, tears and sweat,

but not blood. He said that the soul and the spirit with the help of G-d and righteousness would bring victory. India became victorious and independent from the British Empire.

Today, 60 years later, India is the largest democracy in the world, a country with 1.12 billion people, the country with the third largest purchasing power after the USA and China, outpacing Japan. It has been home to the Indian Jews for more than 2180 years and the only country in the world to have never let a Jew experience anti-Semitism, discrimination or annihilation. Every Jew was a citizen of India, just like every other Indian. We as Indian Jews have a lot to be proud of our motherland India.

Mr. Thomas Cherian, the Vice Consul of India, spoke of the Jews in his home state of Kerala. He also mentioned the closeness between the history of the Christians in South India and the history of the Jews of Cochin, the city that still has one of the most beautiful Indian synagogues built in 1568.



Zev Nagel of the Israeli Consulate speaks of Israeli-Indian relations



Shir dance troupe's Hora performance

Speech writer Zev Nagel of the Israeli Consulate spoke of the close relationship between India and Israel in agriculture, defense, security, information technology and software systems and the diamond industry. India is the second largest trading partner of Israel in Asia after Japan. India and Israel have cooperated in the field of space research for peaceful purposes. The Israeli astronomical scientific telescope (TAUVEX) was installed as a payload on an Indian satellite in 2006.

The speeches were followed by a performance by the members of the

Shir dance troupe, who performed modern and artistic Israeli contemporary dances. Indian classical dancer Parul Shah gave a beautiful Kathak performance, which was appreciated by all those present.

The evening concluded with the singing of the Indian, Israeli and American national anthems and the mouth watering Indian finger foods such as samosas, khaman dhokla, gulab jamun, and fruits.

The event turned out to be an educational and entertaining afternoon for everyone present. Thank you Lael, Aylon, Evelina and Ellen of the IJC for all the help and Susan and Steffi of the JCC for the tremendous support you have given to the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA.



Parul Shah performing Kathak

Israeli Scholar Honored for Popularizing Hindi

An Israeli scholar was honored at the 8th World Hindi Conference in New York for his contribution in popularizing Hindi in Israel.

Genady Shlomper has been teaching Hindi at the Hebrew and Tel Aviv University for several years, during which more than 260 students have graduated with Hindi as one of their main subjects.

"It is a matter of great pride. I feel honored," Shlomper told PTI. "India is our old love, a friendly country with a glorious history and we hope with a glorious future." Shlomper did his doctorate on modality in Hindi at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem after immigrating from Russia, a work that was later published by Germany's Lincom-Europa Publishing House.

In view of the marked enthusiasm for the language, Tel Aviv University started a third year advanced course for Hindi enthusiasts last year. Not to be left behind, the newly instituted Indian Studies department at Haifa University has also launched a Hindi course.

"The honor bestowed on Genady will give a boost to India-related studies in the country. It is a matter of great pride for all of us," Professor Zvika Serper, Head of Asian Studies Department at Tel Aviv

University, told PTI. The philologist has also published several Hindi textbooks and easy learning guide books with CDs for Israeli tourists, which have been a major success.

Shlomper has also been instrumental in organizing Hindi Diwas in Israel for the past several years, which has attracted hundreds of India enthusiasts. The central theme of the conference is "Hindi at the World Stage." Several exhibitions were at display during the conference to highlight the traditional and modern face of Hindi, covering its global reach and use of technology in popularizing it.

Article adapted from PTI

Israel Offers Expertise to Assam Farmers



David Danieli, Israeli Ambassador in India

Israeli Ambassador in India David Danieli has offered Assam farmers his country's expertise in agriculture and water management to boost crop productivity.

During a meeting with Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Monday, the envoy said the farmers were also welcome to undertake technical courses in Israel.

Earlier, Mr. Danieli told *The Hindu* that Israel had mastered the art of using its scarce water resources effectively for both domestic and farming purposes. He said that although the availability of water was much more in Assam, proper utilization, particularly of the waters of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, would help increase agricultural productivity.

On his three-day visit to Assam, Mr. Danieli added that sharing of expertise could also help in developing novel ideas in agriculture and water management.

Tourism could be another sector for cooperation, according to Mr. Danieli. The beautiful rivers, diverse population, wildlife sanctuaries, and the natural beauty of Assam and other northeastern states could be of great attraction for Israeli tourists. "The Northeast definitely has its own fascination. The landscape, the historical and archaeological sites and the rich culture and heritage of its ethnic populace have truly made the region a unique tourist destination. The huge flowing rivers are really fascinating for the Israelis," he said.

The flow of tourists would increase once word about the tourism potential of the Northeast spread in Israel. Road shows in Israel by the Assam Government might be of great help.

Article adapted from The Hindu. Photo of David Danieli from Tribune India.

Religion, Not Economics, Behind Gujarati Jews' Exodus

"L'shana habah b'Yerushlayim" (Next year in Jerusalem)—that is how Benson Agarwarkar, head of the department of English, H.K. Arts College, greets community elder Solomon Enoch Samuel at the only synagogue in Ahmedabad.

"The aspiration to make it back to the Promised Land Israel is so deeply entrenched in our social psyche that it has become our traditional greeting," explains Benson.

With a population of little over 200, the Jews in Gujarat (Bene Israel group) are a microscopic but very closely knit community. "We have about 55 Jewish families in Ahmedabad and two each in Vadodara, Surendranagar and Rajkot. We have only one synagogue for the entire community in Ahmedabad," Benson says. More and more youth are now looking forward to making the Aliyah, or the journey back to Israel," he says.

However, Benson comments that in Israel, "it gets difficult to get a white collar job for the educated, unless one has good command over Hebrew language," adding that some people who had shifted at an advanced age to Israel had found it difficult to adjust there culturally and had come back to India.

"There is a sense of cultural alienation among the Indian diaspora that make it back to Israel," he adds.

For Ellana Shimshon and her sister Adina David Pezarkar, who had made the Aliyah seven years back, the journey was not a quest of a better life, but religious gratification. Today, both sisters are proud of their Indian origin and also of the decision to go back to Israel. However, Pezarkar echoes sentiments similar to Benson's. In an email to *The Indian Express*, she confesses that in spite of making the Aliyah

seven years back, she still considers herself as an Indian and is proud of her cultural heritage. She also writes that "Ahmedabadi Jews are more settled in Ahmedabad than in Israel."

Article adapted from The Indian Express

Israel's Curry Queen



Reena Pushkarna, Israel's Curry Queen

Her dreams of college education never materialized, but that didn't deter Reena Pushkarna from making it big. Today, she runs seven Indian restaurants in Israel and is the face of India in that country.

Her husband Vinod was a captain at the Merchant Navy.

In September 2003, Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited India. Among his entourage, there was a 42-year-old sprightly lady—the only woman in the delegation. She is popularly known as the "Curry Queen."

Reena was born to a Sikh father and a Jewish mother. She later converted to Judaism when she immigrated to Israel in 1983.

In 1983, the Pushkarnas opened a small Indian food joint named "Ichakdana" in Tel Aviv. At that time, Israelis knew little or nothing about Indian cuisine. As a result, "Ichakdana" did not do well and Vinod was ready to go back to the sea.

But Reena persuaded him to give it another chance. So they opened a restaurant called "Tandoori," where they offered authentic North Indian food. She hit the jackpot when she started Israel's only Kosher Indian restaurant. She became the first in the world to start a Kosher Indian Restaurant.

Her "Tandoori" in Tel Aviv was the first location of choice for the peace talks between the Israelis, Palestinians and Norwegians. In 1992, when BBC has telecasted the first handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Robin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on the lawns of White House, they suddenly showed "Tandoori" and divulged that the peace talks did not commence in Jerusalem or in Oslo, but in "Tandoori"-Tel Aviv.

In August 2001, Pushkarnas brought the concept of branded ethnic foods and forged a joint venture with Israel's largest supermarket Super Sol. Her food is also served in the Israeli army and on board International airlines such as El Al, Air India, Air Korea, and others.

Prime Ministers, Presidents and diplomats are frequent visitors of "Tandoori."

Even though Reena is settled in Israel from the past 24 years, she has very high respect and love for India and also for Indian traditions. She now dreams of opening an Israeli restaurant in India and to introduce Israeli culture among Indians.

Article adapted from Deccan Herald. Photo of Reena Pushkarna from Tribune India.

Legacies

This section has been reserved for real life stories concerning faith, trials, courage, support, miracles, traditions and brotherhood which you might have experienced or heard from your family members that you would like to share with others and also pass on to the next generation.

My Visit to India (by Elizabeth Naidu)

In December 2007, I went to India with my niece. I had heard there were many changes in India, so I was prepared for any surprises. Our first stop was the new Chattrapati Shivaji Airport, now much larger and spotlessly clean. An airport employee, seeing how tired I was, took my passport and did all the paper work. I was skeptical, but he assured me he was no thief wanting to spend time in prison. He did what he promised. Women in white uniforms were working at 4 a.m. in a cheerful manner. Orderly lines, clear directions, no smells or odors—a wonderful welcome. At the exit, there was a row of palm trees, reminiscent of an island in the Caribbean. This was India.

From Mumbai, we traveled to Raipur via an equally clean Domestic Santa Cruz Airport and then by car to Gondia in Maharashtra. What astounded me were the beautiful broad roads, bordered by trees, some with white circles indicating the number miles traversed. Apparently, our road went through the jungle, but the roads were nevertheless crowded with trucks, buses and cars. The writing on the trucks announced "Honk Please," there were penalties for honking. The roadside restaurants were neat and clean, and the food spicy, hot and delicious. The restrooms were equipped with hot and cold water, a pleasant surprise.

Next stop was Poona, now called Pune, on the local Kingfisher Airlines, a superb experience of courtesy and efficiency. Cold Lassi, hot snacks, all served with a smile in the plane's interior with the beautiful colors of the Kingfisher bird.



Gates of the Shaar Hashamayim Synagogue

I informed my cousin of my wish to visit the places of my childhood. First on my list was the Succoth Shalom Synagogue in Rasta Peth. I followed the roads I had cycled in my childhood, but they had since changed. Cars, scooters and auto rickshaws had taken over the roads. The auto rickshaws zig-zagged at tremendous speed. Staying alive was a feat in itself. Sabbath evening at the synagogue of my childhood brought back nostalgia. The building itself had aged and lonely in the crowded street. A few people had assembled to make a minyan. The synagogue that was once busy with adults and children, young mothers feeding their children Puris at Yom Kippur, was now devoid of activity. The carpets were worn out. The Bene Israel families surrounding the synagogue in days past were not there

anymore. On this quiet street of old I could hear my father's footsteps coming to visit us from the army. I remember the Shamash with a lantern knocking on Bene Israel doors announcing the start of the Selichot service during the month of Elul. So often, during those times, I felt like running to the synagogue. This beautiful synagogue needs help to restore it to its past glory. There are still about 200 Bene Israel living in and around Pune.

I saw the building where I had lived and could hardly recognize it. The same with my school, lost in the crowded street. Wadia College, where I got my Teacher's degree, which used to be a quiet college nestled by trees, was now surrounded by commercial traffic. Now, there is not a single tree to sit under and discuss the topic of the day.



Lal Deol, the Baghdadi Synagogue in Pune

The small town where I could see the stars at night and hills by day had gone forever. Pune had sold its soul to commercialism.

We went to the Baghdadi synagogue, called Lal Deol or the Red Synagogue. Here, there was also a problem getting a minyan. But it was still a very impressive synagogue with a Spanish flavor, several arches, a tall tower with a clock, a terrace with intricate lattice work. It was still beautiful inside.



Mikveh in the Shaar Hashamayim Synagogue

On my way back to New York via Mumbai, I visited a cousin of mine in Thane near Mumbai. We visited the Shaar Hashamayim or Gates of Heaven Synagogue, a small but beautiful synagogue. The gates of the synagogue had the menorah and the Magen David. The prayer times were displayed prominently, the Ner Tamid burning in front of the Ark; the Mikveh was beautifully constructed, holding sparkling blue waters, the tree of life adorning it. It was a real pleasure visiting this synagogue.

I will visit India again, see the places so dear to my heart and once again feel the incomparable love and affection I received.

Recipes from Noreen's Kitchen

The Bene Israel has lived in the land of palm trees for more than twenty centuries. Coconut is considered to be a fruit of fertility among the Bene Israel. When a newly married couple goes to visit their close friends and relatives, it is customary to feed the bridegroom and the bride some sugar with a teaspoon and to give each of them a coconut and some money. In this way, friends and relatives wish the couple a happy, fruitful and prosperous life. When a woman bears a child, a coconut, some almonds and dried dates are given to her. These are used to make sweet dishes, which are enjoyed by the new mother, her husband and shared by others in the family.

Coconut Barfi (Naralachya Vadya)

Ingredients:

1 big coconut, grated (white kernel only)
2 cups sugar
½ teaspoon saffron colored water
½ teaspoon rose essence
5-6 cardamoms, finely ground



Preparation:

Mix sugar and milk in the grated coconut in a non-stick pot. Put over a medium flame and stir often. When the mixture starts becoming solid, add cardamom powder, rose essence and saffron colored water and mix well. Grease a serving dish with butter or ghee. Pour the hot mixture in the dish. Spread the mixture evenly in the dish with a flat rice spoon and pat it evenly with the back of the spoon. When the mixture cools, cut it into diamond shaped pieces. Share the coconut barfi with your family and enjoy.

Ravyache Ladoos

These ladoos were a common member of a housewife's stock of snacks in many Maharashtrian homes. They were nicknamed Bhook Ladoo meaning ladoos that satisfied one's hunger instantly. When we returned home after a long day at work or school, we were given one ladoo and a cup of warm milk by our mother or grandmother, and we felt rejuvenated. If anyone would like to relive those times, here is a simple recipe for Ravyachye Ladoos.

Ingredients:

2 cups fine semolina (fine cracked wheat)
1 ½ cups fine grain sugar
1 finely grated coconut
7-8 cardamoms, finely ground
25 grams raisins, washed and dried
25 grams small pieces of cashew nuts
¼ cup cold milk



Preparation:

Roast the grated coconut slightly in a non stick pan. Remove it on to a big plate and leave it for some time. Heat the non stick pan again on a medium flame. Add some butter or ghee when it is hot. Add semolina, and stir often until the semolina is golden. Pour this into the big plate and mix it well with sugar, coconut, cardamom powder, raisins and cashew nut pieces. Add the milk and mix again thoroughly. Roll the ladoos with wet hands about the size of a golf ball while the mixture is still hot. The mouth-watering ladoos are now ready to be eaten by young and old for that extra energy.

For more recipes please visit our online forum at: <http://www.jewsofindia.org/forums>

Click on the "Recipes" category.

Happenings



Mordechai
Levy-Eichel

Mordechai Levy-Eichel to Pursue Graduate Study in Israel

Mordechai Levy-Eichel, son of Ellen Eichel and Stephen Levy, graduated with honors this past June from the University of Chicago.

He has received a graduate fellowship from the Shalem Center, and will be spending next year in Israel doing research on the history of Jewish political thought.

New Arrivals in the Community

Congratulations to Aviva and Nelse Kyllö on the birth of a beautiful daughter Nina Cali. Mazal Tov to grandparents Elsie and Mordechai Shallom of Minneapolis G-d's gift of a beautiful granddaughter.

Congratulations to Tika and James on the birth of a son Mason. Mazal Tov to Joan and Alan Roland for G-d's gift of their first grandson.

Congratulations to Jonathan and Deidre Erulkar on the birth of a son Benjamin, a brother to Samuel. Mazal Tov to Ruth and Solomon Erulkar of Columbus, OH for G-d's gift of a second grandson.

Submissions to the Newsletter

We would like all our members to send us articles of interest, birthdates or birth months, wedding anniversaries and any other information of interest to the community. Submissions are subject to editing for clarity and style.

Please send newsletter submissions to Evelina or Aylon latest by August 20th 2007.

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aylon@jewsofindia.org

To be included in our electronic mailing list, please send us a request to: comments@jewsofindia.org

Special thanks to all contributors.