

Indian Jewish Congregation of USA Newsletter

Friday, March 02, 2007

Volume 1, Number 2

In This Issue

- A message from Romiel Daniel, Indian Jewish Congregation of USA, President
- Personalities of the Month—Raymond and Zimra Israel
- Manipur Jews Migrate to Israel
- *One Night with the King* Movie Review
- Holocaust Speech at the NCPA
- Holocaust Survivor Visits Ahmedabad School
- Bunny Reuben Passes Away
- Hindu-Jewish Summit Held in New Delhi
- Legacies
- Recipes from Selena Modak's Kitchen
- Upcoming Events

Useful Links

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.

jewsofindia.org/photos

Our continuously expanding photo gallery. You may also contribute photos to the community's albums

jewsofindia.org/forum

This is the community's discussion forum. Exchange information, ask questions and meet new people.

Contact Us

www.jewsofindia.org
comments@jewsofindia.org

President's Message

Purim is celebrated by the reading of the Scroll of Esther, known in Hebrew as the Megillat Esther, which relates the basic story of Purim. Under the rule of King Ahashuerus, Haman, who is the king's Prime Minister, plots to exterminate all of the Jews of Persia. His plan is foiled by Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai, who ultimately save the Jews of the land from destruction. The reading of the Megillah is typically a rowdy affair, which is punctuated by shouting and noise-making when Haman's name is read aloud.

Purim is an unusual holiday in many respects. First, Esther is the only Book of the Bible in which G-d is not mentioned. Purim, like Hanukkah, is viewed by tradition as a minor festival. The elevation of Purim to a major holiday was a result of the Jewish historical experience. Over the centuries, Haman became the embodiment of every anti-Semite in every land where Jews were oppressed. The significance in Purim lies not so much in how it began, but in what it has become – a thankful and joyous affirmation of Jewish survival against all odds.

Purim is observed on the 14th of Adar (this year March 4th 2007) outside the walled cities and is called "Purim of the open cities." When Purim is observed in the walled cities on the 15th of Adar (now only in Shushan and Jerusalem) it is called "Purim of the walled cities."

Our sages teach us that when the Messiah arrives, all the festivals will cease to be observed, but Purim will continue to be observed. They discovered the mystical association and parallels between Purim and Yom Kippurim. The initial kaf in Kippurim indicates that Yom Kippurim is a "day like Purim." Both of the days emerge out of a sense of spiritual anxiety and the desperate need for reconciliation with G-d. Both ask for Divine compassion and intercession. Both Purim and Yom Kippurim "involve the casting of lots (goral)" characteristic of games of chance. As for the Purim goral, it determined the day chosen by Haman for the destruction of the Jews. For the Yom Kippur Temple service, two male goats, identical in appearance, size and value were brought, one marked "unto the Lord," and the other was hurled to its destruction.

What does this pur, goral, lot indicate? It points to man's basic condition of vulnerability, insecurity and fickleness. The whole Purim story is filled with unreasonable, absurd, and irrational events. One day Jews are secure in Persia; the next day they face destruction. One day Mordechai faces execution; the next day he is Prime Minister. Haman's conspiracy against the Jews emanates from nowhere. Thus, he needs to draw lots when to kill them. There is no rational reason or event leading to the execution. This is the destiny of the Jews. It alerts the Jew to the sudden turns of fortune, lurking dangers, the fickleness of life, even as the pur itself seems to operate through blind chance.



In a sense, every day is Purim; tumult, confusion, uncertainty, lurking dangers and temptations. Every night is Yom Kippur; regret, sorrow, insecurity, a need for understanding, sensitivity, compassion and forgiveness. Purim is the realization of Yom Kippurim. Purim is the flesh on the soul of Yom Kippur.

There are Jews who live a Yom Kippur existence, removed from worldly affairs. They learn, pray, fast, observe, eat minimally, and drink little. They enjoy little of G-d's world.

On the other hand there are the all-year round Purim Jews. Their life is one continuous joke. They eat, drink and are merry. They constantly drown out the soul's demands and expectations with their handmade groggers. They refuse to remove their masks, so they would be able to find out what the spirit wants. They are too drunk to think rationally.

Normal Judaism seeks a sense of balance between physical pleasure and spiritual eternity.

On this holiday of Purim, we show our faith in G-d that the bigger our enemies, the harder they fall. Make your plans; they will be nullified. Hold your conference of hate against us and all your plans will not succeed, for G-d is with us.

Happy Purim.

Romiel Daniel

February 24th, 2007

Personalities of the Month—Raymond and Zimra Israel



We would like to introduce Raymond and Zimra Israel, members of the Bene Israel Congregation in New York, who came to the US from Pune, India in 1989. After spending few years in Fort Collins, Colorado and then in Alamogordo, New Mexico, they now live in New York City. In Fort Collins, Raymond and Zimra were active at the local synagogue where Zimra taught at Hebrew school. They also participated in programs where they introduced synagogue members to Bene Israel history, culture, and food. In Alamogordo, a small town which houses the Holoman Air Force Base, the Israels were able to bring together local Jews and those from neighboring towns for Shabbat services at their home. Over the years, Raymond and Zimra have been extremely supportive of the High Holy Day Services being held in Manhattan.

Raymond, who schooled at Bombay Scottish, Mumbai and Spicer School, Pune is a graduate of Wadia College, Pune. Prior to coming to the US, he held a senior position at the Union Bank of India.

In the US, he continues to work at a financial institution in Manhattan. Raymond is the son of Josephine Israel and Late Major Joseph Hyam Israel of Khadki, Pune. His grandfather, Late Hyam Shalom Israel, a graduate of Wilson College, was the Diwan of Akalot in 1917, the Assistant Revenue Commissioner, Pune in 1931 and was decorated with an MBE (Member of the British Empire) in London in 1938. His great-grandfather Shalom Babuji Israel was the Diwan of Janjira and Deputy Collector of Khandesh. Raymond's grandmother, Late Sarah Hyam Israel, was the daughter of Late Dr. Judah Hyam, after whom the Delhi Synagogue is named. Raymond has a sister Naomi who lives with their mother in Pune.

Dr. Zimra Israel, a scientist in the HIV/AIDS field, obtained a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai in 1976. She then joined the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, and with encouragement and support from her husband and his family, she acquired her Master's and Doctorate degrees in Microbiology from Mumbai University. In 1985, Dr. Israel was awarded a fellowship to Japan and became the first woman, non-Japanese scientist to receive this award.

In 1989, Zimra came to the US with her husband to pursue her research career and obtained a post-doctoral fellowship at the Colorado State University. After completing her fellowship, she worked at a primate facility in New Mexico. She then went on to further enhance her scientific experience at the New York University School of Medicine. In 1996, Dr. Israel joined a pharmaceutical company where she is currently Associate Director, Clinical Research. She has several scientific publications and has presented

her work at national and international conferences. Recently, Dr. Israel was an invited speaker at a conference celebrating the sesqui-centennial (150-year) celebration of Mumbai University and 75-year celebration of the Microbiology Dept at St. Xavier's College Mumbai.

Zimra is the daughter of Late David Samuel (Pugavkar), fondly known as 'Diamond' within the Bene Israel community and Mrs. Diana Samuel who lives in Mumbai. She is the granddaughter of Late Miriam and Simon Abraham Reuben (Kamarlekar) of Karachi. Her great-grandfather, Abraham Reuben Kamarlekar, was the leader of the Bene Israel community in Karachi. Zimra has two brothers, Joseph and Judah Samuel who live in Mumbai.



Manipur Jews Migrate to Israel

Guwahati, India – Two hundred and eight Indian Jews have emigrated to Israel after they were officially recognized as Jews, religious leaders said.

Rabbinical leaders announced last March that some 6,000 members of the Bnei Menashe tribe in India's northeast were descendants of ancient Israelites or one of the Biblical 10 lost tribes. A total of 208 people traveled from India's northeastern Mizoram state to Israel.

The recognition from Israel came after tribe members sent scores of applications seeking to migrate to Israel, or the "Promised Land," saying it was their right to do so. According to Israeli law, every Jew enjoys the "right of return"— or the right of abode in the country.

Some 800 people from Mizoram and the neighboring Manipur state have migrated to Israel since 1994 when a private body, the Amishav Association, took up their case. The last batch of 71 left the northeast for Jerusalem in May 2003.

"I have no regrets at all to leave my birth place because Israel is our Promised Land," Zimra Hnamte, a 50-year-old widow, said. The 208 Mizo Jews would be settled in the cities of Nazareth, Eilat and Karmiel in northern Israel.

One Night with the King Movie Review



One Night with the King is an epic adventure that follows a young Jewish orphan who rises from peasant to Queen of Persia only to face the annihilation of her people.

Gener8xion Entertainment Inc.'s spectacular movie stars Peter O'Toole and Omar Sharif along with Luke Goss, John Noble, John Rhys-Davies, James Callies, and Tiffany DuPont. This impressive motion picture chronicles the amazing life of Esther, one of the Bible's most beloved and courageous heroes.

Based on the bestselling novel *Hadassah: One Night with The King* by Tommy Tenney and Mark Andrew Olsen, this dramatic big-screen adaptation chronicles Esther's journey from peasant to princess, her courageous role in the redemption of her people from destruction and death, and her winning of the love and the most powerful man in the kingdom – by seeking his heart rather than the riches of his kingdom.

Shot entirely in Rajasthan, India's very own land of the kings, *One Night with the King* exudes exotic splendor. "The lush color and vigorous landscapes seen throughout the movie can only be captured in a classic old world setting, ripe with millennia of history," noted Matthew Crouch, Chairman and CEO of Gener8xion Entertainment. *One Night with the King* is a story of divine destiny. It is an unforgettable love story set in a world of adventure, and it appeals to everyone.

Holocaust Speech at the National Council of Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai

Given by Jonathan Solomon at the inauguration of the art exhibition of works by Sara Atzmon

Even for us Indians, who do not have the Holocaust on our conscience, either as perpetrators or as victims or as bystanders, the trauma of this event is unbearable.

The enormity of this crime against humanity, that this could happen in a modern state, without the rest of the world knowing or caring for the helpless millions, who were condemned to death and worse for the crime of belonging to a race or religion, is beyond comprehension.

How much more terrible it must be for those who lived through and survived these terrible times. And yet it is necessary to remember. It is necessary not to forget.

Down the centuries, European Jewry had to face many persecutions. But in spite of all the difficulties and handicaps, they prospered and established a Yiddish Nation and achieved a degree of success which was far beyond their numbers. According to some, the first three decades of the 20th Century was the golden age of Jews in Europe, particularly in Germany. Between 1900 and 1930, number of European Jews became Nobel Laureates. In those decades, no one, not even Jews in Germany realized that they were sliding into a catastrophe.

Even after Nazis came to power, many Jews did not think of leaving their homes. Even after the atrocities against Jews became the order of the day, the rest of the world stood by, either out of ignorance or out of self interest and left the Jews to their terrible fate.

The lesson of the Holocaust is that progress is not unidirectional. Gold does not always turn into platinum, and then into diamond. Unless we care, progress can turn into regression. One fundamentalist, one rabble rouser, one maniac can mislead a nation, a generation into the valley of death and destruction. However, as unpleasant and hurtful as it may be, during times of peace, we need to look back into times of war and learn to care. This is as important for our India as for any other country. Or should I say, it is more important for India as the only thing what can rob our country of success, is communal violence and hatred.

Sara Atzmon was born in Hungary in 1933, and she spent the most impressive years of her life between the age of 10 and 12 in the concentration camps in Austria and in Berger-Belsen. She lost her father, brothers, grandmother and many others to the horrors of the concentration camps. Her father died in her presence of hunger and deprivation.

In April of 1945, she was liberated by the American Army. She was given the choice of settling down in the U.S. or in Palestine. She opted for the Holy Land, where she arrived in 1945. She worked, studied and married in Israel and was blessed with six children. The Holocaust was never mentioned during all those years.

In about 1982, when she was almost 50 years of age, she began painting.

In 1987, she visited her country of birth, Hungary, and this visit opened in her floodgates of memories and feelings about the Holocaust, which she started expressing in her paintings. Her paintings became her medium, her means of conveying to the world the anguish and hurt and hope and despair which she must have felt more than 50 years ago in the Nazi camps.

Since then, her paintings have been exhibited in Israel and around the world. Her paintings are exhibited in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and in the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem. Her paintings have been exhibited in Hungary, at the Stockholm Historical Museum at the International Conference of the Holocaust, in U.S., in the Parliament, in Madrid and in Germany at the site of the concentration camp of Berger-Belsen.

We are grateful to you, Madam Sara Atzmon, for conquering so bravely the trauma of the Holocaust and conveying to us its horrors and its lessons, so vividly, so humanely. We are honored to have you amongst our midst.

We are grateful to the Israeli Consulate for making it possible for us to witness this exhibition.

Holocaust Survivor Visits Ahmedabad School



On February 10th, 2007, Holocaust survivor Ms. Sara Atzmon gave a video-talk at the Jewish-run Nelson's International School at Uttamnagar, Ahmedabad to a large gathering of educators. This program was arranged by the Consul General of Israel Mr. Daniel Zonshine and the Management of Nelson's School. Ms. Atzmon emphasized that her aim was that the Holocaust is never forgotten and such atrocities should never happen again to anyone.

Contributed by Austin S. Haeems

Nelson's International School

Ahmedabad, India

School web site: www.nelsonschool.com / .org / .net

Bunny Reuben Passes Away



Film historian and senior journalist Bunny Reuben has passed away in Powai, Mumbai. Bunny Reuben complained of breathlessness and was rushed to hospital, where he suffered two massive heart attacks in the evening and passed away at 8:45 p.m. He was 81 years old. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Bunny Reuben was the first film journalist that crossed over and turned a publicist in the early seventies, handling work for Raj Kapoor, Mehboob Khan, Dev Anand, and Dilip Kumar. Actor Radhir Kapoor said that "it is great loss to the RK family and the film industry. He was not only a good journalist and publicist, he was also a great historian."

Bunny Reuben has many books to his credit, which include biographies on actors such as Pran, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, and Mehboob Khan. He took to film journalism in the late 1940s and wrote many articles for the Indian Express, Film Fare, and Star & Style. He was the founding editor of Cine-Blitz in 1975.

The funeral for Bunny Reuben was held at the Jewish Cemetery.

Hindu-Jewish Summit Held in New Delhi



Israeli Chief Rabbi Metzger with Hindu religious leader

Hindu and Jewish religious leaders met for the first time for a two day dialogue on a range of religious issues. Among the subjects discussed were the relevance of tradition in everyday life, similarities and dissimilarities between the two religions, and education. The purpose behind this unusual interfaith dialogue was the promotion of understanding, tolerance, peace and conflict resolution through religion.

The summit was organized by the World Council for Religious Leadership and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Jewish participants included the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, the former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, David Rosen, the Chief Rabbi of Belgium, President of the Committee for Relations between Judaism and

Other Religions, and additional rabbis from Europe, the United States of America and India. Also present were Israeli ambassador to India David Danieli, Consul General to Mumbai, Daniel Zonshine, and director-general of the Chief Rabbinate, Oded Wiener. Hindu participants included some thirty prominent priests from all over India. The summit began with the singing of a traditional religious song of each religion. On the first day representatives of each side – Chief Rabbi Metzger and Swami Dayanand Saraswati – signed a declaration recognizing the values common to the "two most ancient religions in the world," condemning all religion-based violence, and announcing the formation of a permanent Jewish-Hindu committee.

Rabbi Metzger called for the formation of a religious organization under the auspices of the United Nations for the promotion of peace and understanding. He added that, in Hebrew, only one letter differentiates between "Jew" and "Indian," thus emphasizing the proximity of the two nations and their religions.

Legacies (by Noreen Daniel)

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.

The Python

This incident took place in the life of Dr. Elijah Moses Rajpurkar, my maternal grandfather, the first Bene Israel Mayor of Bombay in 1938 and 1939.

Plague was an epidemic in the early 1900's in India. Thousands were dying daily. My grandfather, a doctor in Bombay, voluntarily went to the town of Ahmednagar in Maharashtra to attend to patients at that time. He was living in a tent outside the town attending to patients. One Gurkha was his guard and servant. Just a short while after he was asleep, he heard a rustling sound under his bed. By the light of the kerosene lamp he saw a big python coiled. He shouted for the Gurkha who saw the snake also but could not do anything.

Grandpa being religious started reciting every prayer he knew. This continued the whole night. The python did not leave his position under the bed. The next morning the Gurkha brought a snake charmer/catcher who lured the snake into a basket.

Grandpa always said that the prayers saved his life and stopped the python from harming him.

Gold Bangles

This incident took place in the life of Mr. Solomon Moses Vakrulkar, my paternal grandfather and a well known solicitor in Bombay. He started his firm in 1908, and it is now run successfully by his grandson Jonathan and his great-grandson Aaron.

He was born in a small village Sakhar near Alibag, and he had to cross a creek to go to school. Since he was a clever student, his principal suggested he appear for the Vernacular final scholarship exam. The registration fee was seven rupees, money which he did not have. The night before the last date of registration, his elder brother's wife, who was known as Baay, asked him whether he had submitted the form. He said "No, I do not have the money." She immediately took out her gold bangles, asked him to pawn them the next morning and pay the fees. He did as she said, got the scholarship and repaid the amount. This is just an incident to show how women in the family would treat other family members' children as their own.

Recipes from Selena Modak's Kitchen

Purim always coincides with the Hindu Festival of Holi. Bene Israel have learned many dishes from their Hindu neighbors in Maharashtra. Each festival has been celebrated with special dishes over generations. This is a stuffed Sweet Poli which everyone used to look forward to when the festival of Purim approached. Our mothers took pride in making well stuffed and thin Polis. At one time girls of marriageable age were expected to know how to make Puran Polis, but not any more.

Special Puran Poli for Purim

Ingredients (for about 10 Puran Polis):

- 2 cups dal of gram (brown chickpeas flour)
- 2 cups grated jaggery or 1 cup jaggery + 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup wheat flour
- 1 cup refined flour (all purpose flour)
- 5-6 cardamom pods, crushed
- 1 pinch of nutmeg powder
- ½ cup plus 1 teaspoon oil

¼ cup melted ghee

¼ cup rice flour

¾ teaspoon salt

Procedure to make Puran (filling):

Boil a liter of water in a non-stick utensil. Add dal to it and let it boil for 5 minutes. Pour out the surface water into another utensil. Let the dal cook on a medium flame. Add one teaspoon of oil to the dal so that it does not overflow. After the dal is well-cooked, strain out the remaining water in the utensil. This can be used for making Amti (Curry) to go with the Puran Polis. Grind the cooked dal to a paste with a ladle. Add jaggery powder (or sugar and jaggery) to it and mix well. Let the mixture cook on a slow flame, stirring often until the dal and jaggery become thick. Let the mixture cool. Add ½ teaspoon of the salt, as well cardamom and nutmeg powder. Grind the mixture in a grinder and remove in a bowl.



To make the dough:

Make the dough while the dal is getting cooked to allow the dough to get softer before making the Polis. Mix the wheat flour and refined flour well while passing through a fine sieve. Add ¼ teaspoon salt, ½ cup of cold oil and knead into a slightly loose dough. Before rolling into polis, add a little water and knead the dough well with a little oil on your hands. Continue kneading, adding water with a table spoon until the dough can be pulled long like a rope. Grease a bowl with oil and keep the dough in it. The dough should not be left for a long time, otherwise the filling comes out while rolling.

To make the Poli:

Take a portion of dough as big as a lime. Roll it into a circle 2 inches in diameter. Holding it in the left hand, fill it with a fistful of Puran and close it into a ball. Spread a bit of rice flour on a clean flat surface and roll this ball into a Poli with a very light hand taking care that Puran does not come out. Heat a non-stick flat pan over a medium flame. Remove the poli to a thick paper and then transfer it onto the pan. With a teaspoon put a little ghee on both sides of the Puran Poli. It will get a golden color when roasted. The aroma from the kitchen while making the Puran Poli can make anyone's mouth water.

This following recipe is from Selina Modak's swayampakghar and has been handed down from friend to friend. (It was probably created before Shaheen or Raj Bhog started in New York.)

Doodh Malai

Ingredients:

8 ounces ricotta cheese

½ cup plus 1 teaspoon sugar (or Splenda)

5 almonds, blanched and peeled

5 pistachios, blanched and peeled

2 cardamom pods, peeled and ground

One quart whole milk

One 9" x 9" aluminum pan

Preparation:

Heat oven to 300° F. Cut the almonds and pistachios into small pieces or roughly grind them.

Mix the ricotta cheese with 1 teaspoon of sugar and spread it evenly in the 9" x 9" pan. Place the in the heated oven for one hour or until done (a toothpick should come out clean, check often since oven

temperatures vary). Let cool, then cut into 2-inch squares.

Boil the whole milk, add the rest of the sugar (or Splenda) and stir continuously until the milk becomes somewhat thick (aek taar). Add the ground cardamom to the milk, remove from heat, and let it cool.

Pour the sweetened and cooled milk onto the cooked and cut ricotta. Sprinkle with the roughly ground nuts.

I hope you will enjoy this desert.

For more recipes please visit our online forum at:

<http://www.jewsofindia.org/forums>

Click on the "Recipes" category.

Upcoming Events:

Purim Celebration March 4th 2007, 4p.m. to 8p.m.

Location: The Village Temple

33 East 12th Street

New York, NY 10023

Israel Day Parade May 6th 2007

Catskills Jewish Learning Weekend. Dates to be announced.

Indian Independence Day Celebration August 12th

And lots more.

We would like all our members to send us articles of interest, birthdates or birth month, wedding anniversaries and any other information of interest to the community. Please send the information to Aylon or Evelina latest by March 20th 2007.

aylon@jewsofindia.org

tapluna@jewsofindia.org

To be included in our electronic mailing list, please send us a request to the below address:

comments@jewsofindia.org

Special thanks to all contributors.