

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)

For all of us Jews, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur frame an annual period of introspection, a summons to reach for the ideals of Judaism. Judaism itself is a lifelong repetition of sacred acts that have the power to imbue our mundane lives with touches of eternity. It really doesn't work unless we practice it daily. Yet the mitzvot that we favor are precisely those which occur but once a year, a kindling of Hanukkah candles or the holding of a Passover Seder.

Observance of mitzvot which call for regularity and persistence, like Shabbat, Kashrut, study or prayer registers much lower on every survey. Paradoxically, the High Holydays in modern times have given rise to the three-day-a-year Jew, who personifies the polar opposite of the discipline it takes to turn Judaism into a source of holiness, a work of art and a medium for expressing our joy. For the rest of us, our High Holyday resolutions soon fall like trees in the gust of emotional tempests.

By way of preparation, there are three personal insights garnered from a lifetime of trying. First, in Judaism, prayer is a discipline that must be practiced regularly. If we turn to G-d only in moments of dire need, we will find to our dismay that we lack the facility to connect. No worthwhile human endeavor yields an iota of satisfaction without constant effort.

Second, Jewish prayer is a profoundly communal ritual. The ideal is to cultivate our individual relationship with G-d within a minyan of praying Jews. We gather to pray not just for ourselves but for the welfare of others.

Thirdly, the core component of Jewish prayer is contemplation. Beyond the prayers of praise and petition, in reverence and silence, we await a flash of light from G-d to ease our burden, to enhance our understanding or to show us the way.

Rabbi Shmuel ben Yitzhak established that our liturgy for Rosh Hashanah should incorporate the phrase "this day is the beginning of Your deeds, the commemoration of the very first day". And, indeed, each time we hear the blast of the shofar during the repetition of the Mussaf Amidah (silent devotion), we respond heartily with the declaration that "on this day was the world created." This motif of creation is inextricably linked to that of judgment. We continue in the same passage: "Today G-d places all human beings in the dock, whether as children or slaves."

Creation is the key to the deep meaning of Rosh Hashanah, the triumph of order versus chaos. With a touch of defiance, Judaism chose to fix its new year in the fall, when daylight diminishes, temperatures drop and nature sheds her festive garb. These signs of disorder evoke

in us feelings of unease and melancholy.

Facing this pessimism, Rosh Hashanah helps us to sustain our faith in orderliness, permanence and meaningfulness of G-d's creation. Rosh Hashanah calls us to account each year in a vain effort to impede our destructive urges. The testimony of our deeds bears witness against us. Only genuine confession and contrition can soften the severity of our sentence.

This is the profound yet realistic goal of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Teshuva is a redirection of our lives which does not spring from divine grace but human effort. The liturgy is an exercise in shrinking our ego. Repeatedly, we intone the majesty and supremacy of G-d to whom we are subservient and accountable. As sovereign, G-d is awesome; as judge, stern; but as parent, full of compassion.

We have squandered another year. The blast of the shofar summons us to live as G-d's partner and not adversary. The choice is ours. It resides neither in our genes nor in our parents, more in our circumstances.

Atonement and not forgiveness is what we seek. "Penitence, prayer and good deeds can annul the severity of the decree," but no more than that. G-d awaits our return, but we must take the initiative to heal the rupture via self-correction and inner transformation.

In closing, let me assure you that despite the size of the Machzor, the Rabbis put no special premium on length. They often counseled that it does not matter whether you pray a lot or a little. What counts is that you direct your heart to Heaven.

The High Holyday season is a time when we step back, stop and say with gratitude that there is a Divine force beyond ourselves that guides our steps. With a gentle mixture of awesomeness and celebration, we enter G-d's stillness and reconsider the essence of our lives. We gather with family and community of kindred spirits to encourage and support each other as we step into the New Year.

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of good health and spiritual growth.

L'shanah Tovah Tikatevu.

Romiel Daniel
President

Personalities of the Month – Abraham and Edith Samson Mhedekar



Abraham and Edith Samson Mhedekar

Mr. Abraham Samson Mhedekar was born in Karachi on March 21, 1933. His father, Mr. Samson Isaac Mhedekar, was the Chief Cashier in National Bank of India (subsequently named Grindlays Bank) in Karachi. His mother, Elizabeth, was the daughter of Shalom Eliyahoo Talkar from Pune. Mr. Mhedekar comes from a family of six brothers and seven sisters. His childhood was in Karachi. Upon the partition of India in 1948, his family had to migrate to Bombay without any belongings.

In 1950, Mr. Mhedekar found employment at the Vita Brush Company. Very soon, he became an expert in the manufacture and sale of toothbrushes. From 1952 to 1955, he was employed with manufacturers of various well-known brands of toothbrushes. In 1956, he established his own toothbrush manufacturing company and started manufacturing and marketing "Aby's Destiny Mirror Toothbrush," a toothbrush with a small mirror attached, which became a big success in Indian markets. In 1958, he started the manufacture of educational games and toys under the name of Kiddy Craft Industries. In 1967, he established Menora Industries in India for the manufacture, sale and export of toothbrushes, where toothbrushes of reputed brands such Colgate, Cibaca, Vicco, Close-up and Signal were manufactured.

On September 20, 1959 Mr. Mhedekar married Edith, daughter of Mr. David and Mrs. Ruth Isaac Talkar from Pune. Mr. David Isaac Talkar was an officer in General Motors. Abraham and Edith have one son and three daughters. Their son Gabriel is settled in Ontario, Canada and is involved in the jewelry and

house wares business under the name of Shoshana Designs. Their daughters Senorina, Illana and Yaffa are settled in Israel. Mr. and Mrs. Mhedekar have six grandsons and two granddaughters. Although their children all live outside India, Abraham and Edith, fondly referred to as Aby and Edna, have continued to remain in India, mainly because of their work in the Indian Jewish Community.

Mr. Mhedekar became a Trustee of the Magen Hassidim Synagogue in Bombay in 1975, and shortly thereafter, he became the President of the Synagogue. He has continued to be the President, Trustee and Office bearer of Magen Hassidim Synagogue for more than thirty years. Under his leadership, membership of Magen Hassidim Synagogue has grown to over 800 members, with large attendances at Sabbath and High holidays prayers. Aby Mhedekar has personally supervised every detail of the massive renovation of this Synagogue and the adjoining building and presided over their Platinum Jubilee celebrations in April 2006. He has been the President of Sir Elly Kadoori School, Mazgaon, Vice President of Council of Indian Jewry and is Founding President of the Indian Jewish Federation. He has been a member of the Tiffereth Israel Synagogue and Etz Haeem Prayer Hall and is a Trustee of the Bene Israel Conference Education Fund and several other Jewish Organizations in India.

Aby and Edna Mhedekar are well known in India and abroad for their integrity and devotion to the Indian Jewish Community, and they are a unifying force in our community. When the Beth El Synagogue in Panvel was ravaged by floods in 2005, resulting in the loss of Sefri Torah, Aby Mhedekar was in Israel. Upon learning of this catastrophe, he swung into action and motivated our Jewish brethren to come forward with help and support.

When most others retire, Aby Mhedekar continues to struggle for the good of the Indian Jewish Community and its Institutions. The Indian Jewish Congregation of USA wishes Aby and Edna strength and success in all of their endeavors.

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 4:30 p.m. onwards. Please make your reservation at the earliest convenience.

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

Sunday, November 11th, 4 p.m.: Author Sophie Judah will be giving a talk about the book that she has written, called "Dropped from Heaven." Sophie Judah is originally from Jabalpur, India, now living in Israel. Her book has been published by Random House. The talk will be followed by a discussion and book-signing. The venue will be communicated at a later time.

Tuesday, December 11th 2007 at 6 p.m.: Celebrate Hanukkah at "India House". Co-sponsored by the Indian Jewish Congregation and the Indian Consulate.

The Consul General of India Ms. Neelam Deo has confirmed the sponsoring of these celebrations with the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA to show the diversity of India and the strengthening of relations between India and Israel.

IJC will conduct the ceremonies. The event will be embellished by Indian and Israeli dancers followed by Kosher Indian buffet dinner.

Muslim Leaders from India Visit Israel



President Peres with the delegation

In response to the visit of the Chief Rabbis of Israel to India, nine Muslim leaders and Imams of Mosques from India visited Israel. This visit, which was part of "Project Interchange," took place on August 14-21, 2007.

Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni met with a delegation on August 16th. At the meeting, Livni expressed the hope that visits of a distinguished delegation such as this one will encourage Muslim communities in other countries to show tolerance for Israel. She stressed that Israel is striving to develop peaceful relations and cooperation with its neighbors as well as a dialogue with Muslim communities around the world. Livni noted that the meeting was important, constituting a significant step in removing stereotypes on both sides.

Livni explained to the delegation about Israel's three-sphere strategy. The first sphere represents the bilateral process between Israel and the Palestinians—Israel is interested in working with the moderates, headed by Abu Mazen and Fayyad's government, and to step up the delegitimization of Hamas. The second sphere includes the wider Arab and Muslim world, which has an important role in supporting the process and integrating Israel into the region through gradual normalization. Livni added that, in response to the gestures Israel has made to the Palestinian Authority (e.g. transfer of tax monies and release of prisoners), the Arab and Muslim states should take steps of their own towards Israel.

The third sphere is the international community, whose task is mainly to support the process and help establish institutions and an economic horizon for the future Palestinian state. Minister Livni stressed that the extremists must be prevented from turning the conflict into a religious one. A religious conflict is irresolvable, whereas national conflicts can be resolved through compromises by both sides.

The President of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres received the delegation at his residence.

Moulana Umair Ilyasi, General Secretary of the All India Organization of Imam of Mosques, said that Islam does not give permission to kill, to murder and to harm and we want to sit together and talk.

President Peres said that, if in the past the international effort was concentrated in separating religion and state, today everyone is united in separating religions—all religions—from all kinds of terror.

The President noted that G-d is one, who respects human beings without discrimination, and without murder and without hatred. "We are all the children of Abraham," added the President.

The President also noted India's fight against terror and against sectarianism, without harming the Indian democracy.

Chargé d' affaires, Embassy of Israel New Delhi, Eli Belotsercovsky, says this delegation is an indicator of the importance that Israel attaches to its relations with India and its various communities, amongst them the Muslim community: "We view this community as an important part of the overall relations between the people of India and the people of Israel and an essential component in the inter-faith dialogue conducted between the two nations. Israel views this visit as a significant step towards the better understanding between Israel and Muslim communities around the world. We feel that the religious leaders can play a major role in creating an atmosphere for better dialogue and strengthening the drive for peace and stability in our region."

On August 19th, a meeting was held with several dignitaries including, Noah Massil, President of the Central Organization of Indian Jews in Israel, and Eliyahu Dekel and Eliyahu Besalel, representatives of the Cochin Jews in Israel. The meeting participants exchanged their views and ideas to contribute toward their mission for peace and understanding.

Adapted from Press Release by Embassy of Israel in India

In India, a Historic Community Watches Its Numbers Dwindle



Jerusalem Gate entrance to the oldest Bene Israel cemetery at Navgaon in the Konkan district

Alibag, India - In most other Jewish communities, Magen Aboth would be considered an understated synagogue. But here in Alibag — a sleepy, dusty town on the west coast of India where one- and two-room huts with thatched roofs dominate the landscape — it's a magnificent, proud building. Two stories tall and trimmed in graceful curves and carved flowers, its concrete facade is painted in shades of blue, pillars fronting a mosaic-tiled portico.

The hazan, Jacob Elijah Dandekar, leads morning prayers at 7:30 and afternoon mincha at 5:30, but there's rarely a minyan. The group must make do with the seven or so people who come regularly. Dandekar, 72, says that he usually spends the rest of day reading the Torah. ("Or else the paper," he said with a chuckle.) On this morning, he sits on a bench in the cool shade of the portico, shooing away the neighborhood goats that wander into the courtyard.

Alibag and the surrounding villages and towns — Ravdanda, Panvel, Pen, Nandgaon, Navgaon, about 22 miles southwest across a gray-green harbor from Mumbai — were home to what was once a thriving and vibrant Jewish community known as the Bene Israel. So many Jews once

lived here, in fact, that this dirt road is called Israel Lane. The facades of many of the houses along it still bear Stars of David and Hebrew lettering. Four families now remain, totaling about 20 people. Of those, Dandekar says, it's not a question of whether they will leave, but when.

"If they get a nice price for their property, they will go," he said. "They are waiting for money, or waiting for their children to finish their courses, and then they will go."

Dandekar's English is passable, but he's more comfortable in his native Marathi, and his translator today was Ben Siyon Ghosalker, the caretaker of Kneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue in Mumbai. Ghosalker, a cheerful man of 68 with a toothless smile and seemingly endless energy, is so effusive about the sights to be seen here in Alibag that he convinced this traveler to endure three sweaty hours on a bumpy, overcrowded bus from Mumbai. Indeed, Ghosalker is deeply connected to Alibag. Two years ago, his nephew was bar mitzvahed here. It was probably Alibag's final bar mitzvah: Adeyal Wakrulkar, now 14, is the youngest Jewish person left here.

The Wakrulkar family members own the S. David Soda Water Factory, housed in a worn cement building at the crossroads of two dirt lanes. Hand-drawn lettering in crumbling, colorful paint on the walls outside its entrance informs visitors in Marathi and English that ice cream and cold drinks are available inside. Ghosalker's sister, Norin Wakrulkar, lives here with her son and daughter-in-law Levy and Sinora, and the couple's two sons. Levy Yoseph Wakrulkar, born here in Alibag, celebrated his bar mitzvah at Magen Aboth and raised his sons here — the sixth generation of the family to live both a traditionally Indian and traditionally Jewish way of life in this town.

In 1964, when Levy was born, there were some 30 Jewish families here in Alibag; teachers from Mumbai visited regularly to teach religious school to the children, a bar mitzvah was celebrated every year or two, and come prayer times it was easy to assemble a minyan. Mirroring the larger Indian migration patterns to urban population centers from rural ones, however, many Bene Israel have moved to the city from the villages and have established lives in Mumbai and in the nearby cities of Thane and Pune. But most have moved to Israel. Of the 65,000 Bene Israel, 4,000 live in greater Mumbai and 60,000 live in Israel.

"We feel sad," Sinora said of life in Alibag without the friends and relatives who have left in large numbers. "But we have e-mail and messages on the Internet. They come to visit every one or two years. And we go to Thane, and Bombay, and Pune." But the Wakrulkars, for their part, are staying put. "We like Israel," Sinora said, "but we like India more. India is our home."

Shalva Weil, an anthropologist who researches Indian Jewry at Hebrew University's Research Institute for Innovation in Education, noted that the emigration phenomenon is particularly intriguing, since Jews in India never suffered from discrimination. There were trickles of immigration in the 1940s after Israeli

independence, Weil said, but there was never much Zionist fervor among the Bene Israel, who felt too Indian. Immigration began in earnest in the 1960s, Weil said, when economic opportunities became available in Israel on a scale on which they weren't available in India.

"Friends and family wrote letters and said, 'We're happy here,'" Ghosalker recalled of the pattern by which his own family — one sister and four cousins — began to leave. "So they went, too, and wrote letters to their friends and family." The snowball effect has left families without appropriate marriage candidates for their sons and daughters, Weil said, and so the exodus continues as young people now leave to get married.

It's a circuitous and 2,000-year-long journey that may well have landed them back where their ancestors started. Legends abound about the origins of the Bene Israel, but the most romantic, and the one that seems to have stuck, claims that a boatload of oil pressers, fleeing persecution by King Antiochus of Palestine in second-century BCE, was shipwrecked here in the year 175. Seven couples survived, and they became the forbearers of the Bene Israel — living peaceably with their new neighbors, speaking the local language, observing the local customs and dress, and assimilating into their new homeland without losing touch with a few basic tenets of their religion. For example, they observed the laws of kashrut and circumcision and rested on the Sabbath (in fact, in Marathi they were known as Shanwar Teli, or Saturday oil pressers, in recognition of their day of rest).

But because the Bene Israel were cut off from the rest of the Jewish Diaspora for many hundreds of years (and, as the story goes, their holy books and religious articles went down with their ship), the specifics of Judaism — the Hebrew language, for instance, and the Torah and Talmud — were lost to them. That is, until they were "discovered" in the 1700s by a Cochini merchant who then brought them into contact with the wider Jewish world and its teachings. At their peak, in the 1940s, Bene Israel numbered some 20,000 in India; they built large synagogues in Mumbai and Pune, and small ones dotted these villages on the coast. An ancient cemetery in the village of Navgaon is said to contain the graves of the shipwrecked couples; newer headstones, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are written in English, Marathi and Hebrew.

The cemetery is in a field flanked by coconut trees, blanketed with a thick layer of grass and wild mint. Headstones cropped up from amid the brush here and there, but more common were plain stones sunken into the earth, laid in the shapes of rectangles, roughly the size of the bodies that had long ago been buried there. "Here lie buried the ancestors of the Bene Israel community of India," read the inscription on an imposing stone obelisk that the community had come together to build some years ago. The obelisk kept watch over the graves of those "who were shipwrecked on the shores of Navgaon nearly 2,000 years ago.... With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, they have emigrated in large numbers to the State of Israel, where they are happily settled."

Article by Beth Schwartzapfel from the Jewish Daily

IJF's Communication Regarding Defamatory Remarks in Dictionary

Below is the content of the letters addressed by the Indian Jewish Federation to Minerva Publications and to the Consul General of Israel in Mumbai about defamatory remarks against Jews in Little English Dictionary published by Minerva Publications, Chennai.

Letter to Minerva Publications

Dear Sirs,

Indian Jewish Federation (IJF) is the Representative Body of leading Jewish Institutions and individuals in India.

During the last 2000 years of their existence on the Indian sub-continent, Jews in India have been fortunate to receive the affection and support of all other communities in India. We the Jews of India proudly proclaim to the World that India is the only country where Jews have not been subjected to discrimination or oppression or ridicule of any kind. Jews have made and continue to make significant contributions to the progress of India.

Recently, it has come to our notice that Page 270 of the 7th Edition of Little English Dictionary published by you in 2006 contains the following:

"Jew: (n.) a Hebrew, a miser, one who charges a high rate of interest."

The meaning assigned to the word "Jew" in the Little English Dictionary published by you is not only false, but is malicious and grossly defamatory of Jews as a community and harmful to the reputation of Jews. The above entry shows total insensitivity to the feelings of the Jewish community and a regressive attitude. The exposure of primary and secondary school pupils and other users of your Dictionary to such false, malicious and defamatory propaganda concerning Jews cannot be tolerated. I J F and the Jewish community have taken serious note of the false, malicious and defamatory manner in which the word "Jew" is sought to be interpreted in the Little English Dictionary published by you.

We hereby call upon you:

(i) to tender an unconditional apology in writing to the Jewish Community for the hurt and harm to the reputation and feelings of Jews caused by you by publishing the above entry and agree not to repeat the same and to delete the words "a miser, one who charges a high rate of interest" or similar words with reference to the word "Jew" in subsequent editions of Little English Dictionary published by you; and

(ii) discontinue printing and circulation of copies of Little English Dictionary containing the above mentioned defamatory description of the word "Jew" and confirm to us in writing that you have discontinued printing and circulation of copies of Little English Dictionary containing the words "a miser, one who charges a high rate of interest" with reference to the word "Jew".

Unless we receive from you apology and confirmations in writing as above by September 10th, 2007, proceedings for defamation will be filed against you and your proprietors / partners, which please note.

Yours sincerely,
The Indian Jewish Federation

Letter to Daniel Zohar Zonshine, Consul General of Israel in India

Dear Sir,

We are grateful to the Consulate for bringing to our notice the derogatory reference to the word "Jew" in the Little English Dictionary published by Minerva Publications, Chennai.

IJF has taken serious note of this defamation and addressed a notice to Minerva Publications demanding an apology and deletion of the defamatory words. A copy of the letter dated 21st August, 2007 addressed by IJF to Minerva Publications is enclosed.

In the past, the Oxford English Dictionary described "Jew" as "applied to a grasping or extortionate usurer or a trader who drives hard bargains or deals craftily." It may be worthwhile to check if such derogatory references to Jews are continuing in the current edition of the Oxford English Dictionary and other standard dictionaries.

With best regards,
Indian Jewish Federation

Minerva Publications' Response to IJF's Communication

On September 10th, 2007 Minerva Publications sent a response to IJF's earlier communication. Below is their response, along with the subsequent reply from IJF.

Letter from Minerva Publications to the IJF

Sir,

We are in receipt of your letter dated 22.8.07 pointing out the mistake assigned to the word "Jew" in the Little English Dictionary published by us. First of all we thank you for having pointed out and brought to our notice such a mistake in our publication. We fully understand your sensitivities, feelings and above all your agony at meaning found against the word Jew in our publication.

We hold you and your entire community in high esteem for the service rendered and contributions of the highest order made not only to our country but the world at large. Being part of a completely pluralistic, secular, and tolerant society imbibing its spirit of non-injury and compassion fully, there is not even an iota of intention on our part to intentionally wound the feelings of your community. One point made by you regarding the exposure of primary and secondary school pupils to the meaning of the word reached us very deep and we apologize for such a mistake.

We sincerely state that the meaning against the word "Jew" has somehow escaped the scrutiny of our publication.

We hereby offer our heartfelt, sincere, and unconditional apology to the Jewish community for the hurt, harm to the reputation and bad feelings caused by our wholly inadvertent entry against the word "Jew" in our publication.

We also assure you that we will discontinue printing and circulation of copies of Little English Dictionary containing the above-mentioned definition. In our future editions, we will assign correct and proper meaning to the word and we will send you a copy of the new edition as and when it is published.

We once again render our apology and request you to send a reply confirming the receipt of our letter.

Yours sincerely,
Minerva Publications

IJF's Response to Minerva Publications

Dear Sirs,

We have received your letter dated 3rd September 2007.

We are grateful to you for the sentiments expressed in your letter and we accept the apology tendered therein.

With good wishes,
Indian Jewish Federation

Karachi's Forgotten Jews



As Pakistan marks its sixtieth birthday, 200 Jews still live secretly in Karachi, all that remains of a community numbering 2,500 at Independence.

In this fervently Muslim country, most pass as Parsees. As one member of a Karachi Jewish family observes of his brethren: "They like to keep quiet."

All except one. A destitute and frail woman of 88, Rachel Joseph is the sole surviving custodian of the community's synagogue, even though it was destroyed almost 20 years ago. Magain Shalome once stood at the corner of Jamila Street and Nishtar Road. It was demolished in July 1988 by order of

President Zia ul-Haq, to make way for a shopping plaza. Ms. Joseph is suing the property developers who built it, saying they promised her space for another synagogue, and a flat to live in while she tended it. Meanwhile, she looks after the community's graveyard, in the Mewa Shah neighborhood. The shul was built in 1893 by Bene Israel from Maharashtra, who came to work in the civil service, on the railroads and pressing coconut oil, joined by Baghdadi Jews from Bombay.

Quetta, Lahore and Peshawar also had communities, but Karachi's importance as a Jewish centre was such that the All-India Israelite League convened there in 1918.

But with Partition came pogroms, and Israeli independence in May 1948 saw the Karachi synagogue set on fire. Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto's father, declared: "To Jews as Zionists, intoxicated with their militarism and reeking with technological arrogance, we refuse to be hospitable."

"My grandfather went from door to door, from Jew to Jew, to tell them that they had to leave the town," recounts Rachel Khafi, an American whose grandfather Benjamin Khafi organized the departure of Jews from Peshawar.

The numbers in Karachi halved during the Suez Crisis and again with the Six-Day War, though communal life would continue throughout the 1970s. Over 630 Karachi families now live in Ramla, Lod and Beersheba. Older members still speak Urdu or Marathi. "They are not the most integrated of all communities in Israel," notes the Hebrew University's Dr. Shalva Weil, an expert on Jews of the subcontinent.

At first, they faced discrimination; before 1964 and the recognition of Bene Israel as legitimately Jewish, they also faced difficulty in marrying. Meanwhile in Pakistan, Rachel Joseph, the last openly Jewish member of an extinguishing community, awaits her day in court.

From Patrick Belton's article for the Jewish Chronicle

Recipes

Every festival brings back the memories of special dishes that were prepared by our mothers and grandmothers back home in India. Preparations for the High Holydays would always involve cooking two special sweets—halwa for Rosh Hashanah and pastries to break the Yom Kippur fast. These treats were exchanged with family and friends. Here, we offer you a delicious halwa recipe from Grandma Rosy and Puff Pastry Puris from Dr. Zimra Israel and Mrs. Noreen Daniel. The Puri recipe was suggested by Dr. Zimra's Aunt Nora of Los Angeles. It is less laborious than the one traditionally used in India, but it is still very tasty.

Indian Halwa

Ingredients:

A fistful of agar agar (china grass)
100 grams cornstarch
1 tin coconut milk (available in Indian shops)
2½ tins water (use coconut tin for measuring)
1 cup sugar
½ stick butter
1 teaspoon salt
1½ tablespoons lemon juice
Saffron, cardamom and nutmeg powder to taste
Chopped almonds, pistachios, or other nuts



Grandma Rosy's Halwa creation



Grandma Rosy

Preparation:

Soak a small fistful of china grass (cut into small pieces) in hot water till dissolved. Mix all of the above ingredients, except butter, preferably in a non-stick pot, and bring to a boil over high heat. Add butter. Reduce heat and stir the mixture constantly until it thickens and pulls to the center of the pot (about 20 to 25 minutes). Check if done by pouring a little halwa onto a glass plate—it is ready when you are able to lift the halwa off the plate. Add lemon juice, stir and pour into plates. Sprinkle with nuts and enjoy!

Coconut Puff Pastries

Ingredients:

2 packets frozen puff pastry packets (available in any supermarket)
1 pound grated fresh coconut or sweetened coconut
100 grams almonds soaked, skinned and diced
100 grams pistachios soaked, skinned and diced
10 grams cardamoms shelled and powdered
50 grams raisins washed and dried
250 grams sugar (for unsweetened coconut)

Preparation:

Put a deep non-stick pan over medium heat. When warm, add the grated coconut, sugar if required, diced nuts, raisins and cardamom powder. Mix thoroughly. Keep stirring often until the mixture is golden brown. Let it cool to room temperature.

Remove the puff pastry packet from the freezer 15 minutes before use. Cut one long sheet into three equal squares. With a table spoon, place the above mixture on each square. Close the square diagonally to make a triangle. Press the three edges to close tight, using wet fingers if needed. Place each pastry into an aluminum tray. Heat the oven to 400°C and bake for 30 minutes. The pastries are ready when they are golden brown.

Enjoy these delicious puff pastries while sharing the fond memories of those wonderful Puris of bygone days.

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

Click on the "Recipes" category.

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.

Green Fields (by Noreen Daniel)

A visit to India can never be complete unless I spend some days at our family home in Mandwa, near Alibag in Raigadh district. I have a special corner in my heart for the village where we spent every vacation when we were in India. Everyone is so affectionate! If we meet some of the old timers they stop and ask, "Tai, how are you? When did you come? How long will you be staying? As soon as we enter the gate of the estate, we feel as if we are entering the Garden of Eden. Peace just settles on us! We walk under the canopy of mango, chikoos and coconut trees to our home. I visualize my grandfather sitting on the rocking chair in the front verandah, talking to Mhatre Seth who has taken a contract for harvesting mangoes in summer. Daddy is walking in the garden with Kashinath our manager, giving him instructions. I see mummy sitting on the stool in the rear verandah, cleaning rice or cutting vegetables while talking to the maid servants.

When I see the women carrying shiny brass or copper water pots on their head, sometimes two or even three, one on top of the other, I imagine them walking on the ramp of a fashion show, draped in colorful saris displaying their perfect figure. Every morning, one of the girls working at our place, presents me with some beautiful fragrant flowers to adorn my hair. I am sure the sweet scent of jasmine as well as intoxicating scent of magnolias will outclass any synthetic perfume.

Our Manjulabai plans the menu for my trip. For breakfast we have Kande Pohe, which is spicy puffed rice with onion, garnished with freshly grated coconut and coriander leaves. All the ingredients are farm fresh, so the taste is very special. For one Friday, she will make 'Modak,' for another Friday 'Gharia.' Tai has come to her parent's home after a long time. She must be well entertained.

We lived in Ahmedabad for 25 years after our marriage. But every summer vacation and Diwali Holidays we spent with my parents and brothers and their family. We used to make pickles together, papads and dry masalas for the whole year. Children liked helping in the poultry farm and in the garden. There was no television or telephone. Even to buy a newspaper, we had to go to Alibag bus station 20 miles away. But no one missed these facilities. When fishing boats came to the shore, the fisherwomen with baskets of fish on their head used to first stop at our house. They shouted from the compound, "I have brought fish that you like. Let my first sale be through your hands!" Then, after a little bargaining, we used to buy her fish. That afternoon, a simple lunch of chapattis, vegetables, coconut kadi and rice along with fried Bombay Ducks or Mackerel or Sardines would be eaten heartily by everyone. We enjoyed the mangoes, jackfruits, love apples and wild blackberries in the summer vacation.

When I visit our home in Mandwa, our cousins from Alibag always come to meet me, one couple at a time. Then, I am given an update about the whole family. Sometimes, I have to listen to complaints, other times, I try to advise them regarding different issues in their family. Also, our Manjulabai is like a newspaper that walks and talks. She is well informed about all that is going on in other people's homes in the village. Men in our house think our food is tasty because of these spicy stories that are related in our kitchen. We have an early dinner when we are on our farm. We all took our places on the front veranda, adults on the cane chairs, and children on the steps. My granddaddy and parents would tell us

stories of their childhood or that they had heard about some family members. Everyone had to sing in chorus or solo. We had a special song for each one. My parent's special request to Romiel was to sing "Green Fields," which was originally sung by The Brothers Four. "Once there were green fields, kissed by the sun..."

When we are packing to leave, I have cartons packed with mangoes, chikoos, lemons, drumsticks, bottle gourds, coconuts and also Val and Pohe. There is a string of flowers for my hair. The servants touch our feet and with tearful eyes ask when we will come again. We answer, "G-d willing we will return soon." Kashinath says with a choked voice, "Tai, look after yourself. Don't worry about anything". On the way back, no one talks for some time. "Is it worthwhile leaving this 'Island of Peace' and going back to the hectic life? How long will we have to work for our livelihood? When will we be free from our responsibilities? As our family is growing, our attachments are growing. How can we retire from our family? I recollect what my cousin said to me, "Tai, you are like a string that can keep our whole family together. Your mother did that in the earlier generation. Now, we expect the same thing from you. Silently, I pray, "G-d, please give me the strength to fulfill this responsibility." I make a wish, "Come back to the Green fields, where we used to roam".

Notices

Request for Assistance from Anthony P. Namm

I would be most grateful for your personal assistance and for passing this request on to other possible sources of information known to you; I am the author of a major published standard reference work, circa 40 internationally published articles and various works in progress (including published and submitted to archives work on the Bene Israel of India).

I am researching and require information in the following areas:

- 1) Honors and awards granted to Indian Jews (e.g. Orders, Decorations and Medals and related certificates and documents to persons in military and civil life)
- 2) The military services of the Bene Israel of India in the Indian Army from circa 1750 to date

Please contact me at matseb@xsinet.co.za.

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 September 20th 2007.

tapluna@jewsofindia.org

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.

Happy New Year and Have an Easy Fast