

Indian Jewish Congregation of USA Newsletter

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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 question and meet new people.

Contact Us

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President's Message

The Indian Jewish Congregation of USA is embarking on something new, the starting of a newsletter in the month of Shevat, the eleventh month of the civil year on the Hebrew calendar and the fifth month of the ecclesiastical year. It is a winter month of 30 days.

It was on the first of Shevat of the year 2488 from creation, Moses convened the Jewish people and began the 37 day "review of the Torah" contained in the Book of Deuteronomy (Devarim), which he concluded on the day of his passing on Adar 7 of that year.

The later sages have, therefore, said that the first of Shevat is comparable to the day of the giving of the Torah. On that day they began to receive the Book of Deuteronomy from G-d, through Moses. These 37 days are especially suited for renewed inspiration in the study of Torah and the doing of Mitzvot.

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat, is a holiday also known as the New Year for Trees. This year it will be on February 3rd. Judaism has several different "new years". Tu B'Shevat is the New Year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. Lev19:23-25 states that fruit from trees may not be eaten during the first three years. The fourth years' fruit is for G-d, and after that, you can eat the fruit.

Tu B'Shevat is not mentioned in the Torah. Only in the Mishnah is it mentioned as a dispute between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai where Rabbi Hillel said the proper date for the holiday was the 15th of Shevat whereas Rabbi Shammai said it should be the First of Shevat. We follow Rabbi Hillel.

There are a few customs or observances related to this day. One custom is to eat a new fruit on this day. Some people plant trees on this day.

In India, the tradition was for every Bene Israel household to perform the Elijahoo Hannabi ceremony. For those who wanted to have a community Elijahoo Hannabi, a special trip was made to Khandala, near Alibag in the Konkan district to perform the Elijahoo Hannabi ceremony at the rock where supposedly the track marks of Elijahoo Hannabi's chariot can be seen. This was the time when he ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire. This day was thus called the Elijahoo Hannabi cha Oorus. Some synagogues had a communal Elijahoo Hannabi.



There is a story in the Talmud of an old person, Honi, who was observed planting a carob tree. When asked if he really expected to live long enough to consume the fruits of his labor, he replied: "I was born into a world flourishing with ready pleasures. My ancestors planted for me, and now I plant for my children..."

The act of planting is an act of faith. To bury a fertile seed and then walk away with no way of tracking progress for months or years requires deep rooted trust in G-d. Any future yield of fruit can truthfully be described as miraculous.

Growth is best accomplished in private. Underground, away from the bright lights and crass demands for instant results, one can develop and mature in a stable and enduring manner. This is a time for trees to engage in soul searching—the same way people do on Rosh Hashanah. Try this for a trees New Year check list.

Did I shelter the seedlings that live in my shade—so they will grow up to be a next generation like myself.

Did I grow towards the sun as a tree should reaching up higher and higher towards that which I can never grasp, but which nurtures me all the same the more I strive towards it?

Did I make sure my roots remain firmly planted in the soil that nurtures them, and did I drop my leaves there in the fall to give back life to that which sustains me?

Did I ensure that my fruits were sweet and nourished all that came to enjoy them? Did everyone walk away from me with a smile?

Did I bend gently in the wind, accepting what G-d sends but never breaking or giving up hope?

Did I grow in strength and wisdom with each new ring this year?

Come to think of it, not a bad check list for us humans either.

If the world did not need you and you did not need this world, you would never have come here. G-d does not cast His precious child into the pain of this journey without purpose. We may not be able to phathom the plan of our Creator. Nevertheless, eventually the fruits of our labor will blossom for all to see. Plow and sow .The fruits will come.

We of the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA have started sowing the seed of community integration and growth, spiritual, social and cultural. We need our members to be actively involved in all these activities in the coming year. An action committee is working on plans for the whole of 2007 starting with Purim which we will celebrate on March 4th, 2007. Details will be sent shortly.

We would like each and every one of you to be contributing your mite towards getting the Indian Jewish Community on the map of the United States. Our motto will be "Integration with Distinctiveness"

May this year of 2007 be a one of great achievement for our community?

Romiel Daniel

1/12/07

Indian Hanukkah Celebrations 2006

City Hall celebrated Hanukkah on December 21st 2006 showcasing the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA. Hanukkah celebrated by Jews all over the world was special for the Indian Jewish community in the USA.

The unity of USA with India and Israel came to the fore with all the three national anthems being sung by the approximately 350 people present representing the three Indian Jewish Communities viz. the Bene Israel, the Cochin Jews and the Baghdadi Jews originally settled in India.

Councilman Alan Gerson who really has been the backbone and the guiding light of this event stressed the importance of the Indian Community and its vital role in New York City. He pointed out how the melting point of New York City has helped in the integration of all communities into one large American community on the basis of which New York City will thrive and grow.



Romiel Daniel, President of the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA outline the history of the Jews of India tracing back its origins to the time they left Judea around 175 BCE, the very time the Maccabees revolted against the Greek Syrian ruler Antiochus the fourth. They took back charge of the Second Temple of Solomon in 165 BCE. The Hanukkah celebration is the rededication of the Temple of Solomon. A victory of light over darkness, the miracle of one cruse of pure untarnished olive oil lasting for 8 days. Hence this is one of the reasons why Hanukkah was and is celebrated for 8 days even 2181 years later.

It was left to the Deputy Consul General of India, Mr. A.R. Ghanashyam who beautifully brought out the link between Hanukkah, the Jewish Festivals of Lights and Deepavali, the Indian Festival of Lights.

Lively Hanukkah songs by the children belonging to the Indian Jewish community added to the evenings celebrations. All in all, a glorious celebration of Hanukkah.

There are around 350 Indian-Jews in the United States forming the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA with headquarters in New York.

It has plans to expand its activities to preserve the culture, heritage, traditions and rituals of Indian Jews as well as to bring into its fold the second and third generation Indian Jews settled in USA to know and appreciate these values. At the same time to integrate with the American Jewish communities as well as the larger American Secular community. The objective is integration with distinctiveness.

Personality of the Month—Prof. Lael Anson Best



Prof. Best was born on August 11, 1951 in Bombay India to Dr. E.M. Best (former Dean of B.J. Medical College and Civil Hospital) and Late Mrs. Ivy Best.

Prof. Best has accomplished quite an impressive career and achieved many goals. One look at his CV and you'll know what we mean.

In 1979 he immigrated to Israel and qualified as a Thoracic Surgeon in 1985. In 1987–88 he trained in the world famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, USA. In 1989 at the age of 38 he was appointed as Chief of the Department of Thoracic Surgery at Rambam Medical Center Haifa, Israel.

In 2001, Prof. Best was awarded outstanding worker at the Rambam Medical Center and later at the Ministry of Health.

Subsequently, Prof. Best came in first place and was selected as the outstanding worker by the Commissioner for Government Services. He was also chosen as the outstanding worker for the year 2001 among all the workers in Israel (government and private). In 2002, Prof. Best received a citation from the President of the State of Israel Mr. Moshe Katsav. Currently, Prof. Best gives various lectures in Israel and abroad.



We are proud of the achievements of Dr. Lael Best for bringing honor not only to his family but also to the Bene Israel Community.

The Judah Hyam Synagogue, Delhi



The synagogue was constructed and built on land purchased (in 1932) by Mr. Jacob Solomon (Station Master Delhi Railway Station). It was named in memory of Khan Sahib Sardar Bahadur Judah Hyam through generous donations made by his daughter Dr. Rachel Judah Hyam. Over the years the synagogue has been the driving force & the Beacon of Judaism in the Capital of India.

The Golden Jubilee Year Celebrations were inaugurated on Rosh Hashanah (New Years Day–2006) and the Guests of Honor were His Excellency Mr. David Danieli-The Current Ambassador of Israel to India, Mr. Ephraim Doweke the 1st Ambassador of Israel & Mr. Nissim & Mrs. Beatrice Moses. Mr. Ezekiel Malekar—The Secretary of the Synagogue Officiated.

On January 23rd 2007 the main celebration was in the presence Lt. General Jack Jacob-President of the Synagogue, Mr. Ezekiel Malekar-Secretary of the Synagogue under the patronage of Rabbi Marvin Tokayer and his Congregants who generously financed the celebrations & have taken upon themselves the establishment of the Jerusalem Pavilion at the Synagogue. Further there was the inauguration of the Bene Israel Jewish Inter-Active Heritage & Genealogy Kiosk by Mr. Nissim Moses—Honorary President of the Bene Israel Heritage & Genealogy Museum. This Kiosk will permit visitors to get a 1st hand view of the Heritage of the Bene Israel Community on screen & see their family tree, contribute their family data/info & even be photographed for incorporation into the family tree data bank.

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.

Miracle at Panvel

This incident took place about 20 years ago. My brother was driving back from our farm in Mandwa near Alibag. My mother and my two sisters in law were in the car. Very near to Panvel, they suddenly saw fumes coming out from the front of the car. My brother immediately stopped the car and asked everyone to get out of the car suspecting a short circuit. The car was on fire. Some people started throwing some water while other collected some mud and threw that too. They were not able to extinguish the fire. A few minutes went by and suddenly a young man appeared near the car dressed in plain clothes. He quietly lifted the hood of the car, disconnected a couple of wires and the fire stopped immediately. Things went back to normal and my brother wanted to thank the young man and give him a small token of appreciation. He was nowhere to be seen. He asked people who had gathered around the car if anyone knew this good Samaritan but they said that he was not from the neighborhood. He had disappeared in thin air. My brother and the family then took a taxi home. My mother prepared Malida and said Eliyahoo Hannabi prayers, thanking G-D for saving them.

One Stormy Night

Samson Nagavkar was returning home one night after his last shift working in Sassoon Mills. It was the month of July, the monsoon season when there is heavy rain accompanied by lightning and thunder. On that day it was raining heavily and the street lights had also gone off. His umbrella was not of much use. He decided to stand under a big tree opposite the Magen David Synagogue. His home was only 15 minutes away near Byculla Station. There was no one on the road at that late hour. A chill went through his body. He just said a two line prayer of "Shema Israel" which was the only prayer he knew. Just then he heard someone calling out "Samson, Samson". He looked all around but there was no one to be seen. He moved away from the tree. Hardly had he done that when a streak of lightning fell on the tree under which he was standing a few moments ago. Mr. Samson ran home in that torrential rain to his wife and children who were anxiously waiting for him. He always said" One need not be very religious but the smallest prayer with full faith in the Almighty will save you and protect you.

From Noreen's Kitchen

It is customary in many Bene Israel families to have a Malida on the occasion of TU B'SHVAT the New Year of Trees. This being a holiday to thank the Almighty for blessing us with the new fruits of spring.

Malida

Ingredients:

Thick POHA (Pressed and puffed rice) 250 gms.
White kernel of one freshly grated coconut
or 250 gms of sweetened coconut.
Fine cane sugar 200 gms.
If sweetened coconut is use then use only 150 gms sugar.
Almonds 150 gms.
Pistachios 150 gms.



Yellow raisins 150 gms.
Cardamoms 10-12.

Soak almonds and pistachios in lukewarm water for half an hour or until the skin can be peeled. Then slice them lengthwise with a sharp paring knife.

Wash the raisins a couple of times and dry them with tissue paper.

Peel the cardamoms and crush them into powder.

Wash cleaned poha under cold water in a colander. Let it stay for about 15-20 minutes until they soften.

In a big plate pour the washed poha. Add coconut with sugar and mix well. Then add sliced almonds, pistachios, raisin and cardamom powder. Mix thoroughly and leave it for about half an hour.

Cover your head and say a small personal prayer. Then fill the Malida in a special dish along with seven fruits, two of which should be new. One new HA'ETZ and one new HA'ADAMA. Scented flowers or cloves should be used for the BESAMIM blessing.

Carrot Halwa

One Sunday we were watching "Khana Khazana" on the T.V. when the chef was showing some low fat, low calorie recipes. Many of the Indian dishes taste good only when cooked using traditional ingredients. But these days we have become more health conscious. If we could improvise using substitutes especially for butter and sugar without changing the taste of a dish, we need not deny ourselves the pleasure of enjoying some of the exotic Indian dishes. I decided to start this experiment with Carrot Halwa. It turned out to be Yummy. I would like to share this recipe with everyone. You could try it too.

Ingredients:

Big Carrots	4-5
Splenda	1/4 cup. Substitute Sweet & Low
Cane sugar	1/2 cup or less as per your taste.
Low fat margarine	2 table spoons
Low fat milk	1 cup
Almonds	10 soaked in water, peeled and sliced.
Pistachios	20, soaked in lukewarm water, peeled and sliced
Yellow raisins	20, washed in lukewarm water and dried on a tissue.
Cardamoms	10-12 peeled and crushed to a powder.

Scrape 4-5 big carrots, wash and grate them. Heat a non stick wok on a medium flame. Add 2 table spoons of low fat margarine. When melted, add grated carrots and stir a few times. Then add low fat milk and mix well. Cover and let the carrots cook for about 10 minutes. When the mixture in the wok is a bit dry, add Splenda and stir. Then add sugar and stir a few times. Then add cardamom powder, sliced almonds and half of the sliced pistachios. Mix well. Halwa must become dry and must not stick to the wok. Let the halwa cool a little and stir a few times. Transfer the carrot halwa to a special flat dish. Make it even giving it the shape of the dish. Garnish with the remaining pistachios and let it cool to room temperature. Share it with your family and friends.

For more recipes please visit our online forum at:

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

Click on the "Recipes" category.

Happenings:

Congratulations to Dr. Zimra Israel who attended the Microbiology conference held at the St. Xavier's College, Mumbai India. Dr. Israel a past alumnus of the college gave a lecture at the conference.

On December 30th 2007, Jonathan ben David Galsurkar became a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations to his parents David and Irina. Jonathan read the Torah portion and the Haphtarah beautifully. His drasha was well thought out. May Jonathan





continue to be a pride to his family, the Bene Israel community and follow in his father's footsteps.

Congratulations to Leslie and Mollie Jacob who became proud grand parents. A son was born to Marc and Debra Jacob on January 5th 2007.

2007 Hoduyada

Four thousand people have attended the 2007 Hoduyada event in Eilat, Israel. Hoduyada is a yearly gathering of Indians. This three-day event is filled with cultural programs (song, dance, poetry, plays cuisine etc).

In his speech, India's Ambassador to Israel, Arun Kumar Singh (photographed on right) told the attendees "You are a very important link between India and Israel. While contributing and integrating with the Israeli society you have continued to maintain the Indian tradition". Singh also added that the Indian government has introduced academic programs for the diaspora's youth.



Hoduyada 2007 pictures were found on Yosi Aptekar's website.

Upcoming Events:

Purim celebration on March 4th 2007. Watch for flyers / e-mails for more details.

Salute to Israel 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 Samson latest by February 15th 2007.

aylon@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.